

Jesus' Controversy With the Jewish Rulers

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon explores Jesus' confrontations with Jewish rulers, emphasizing the rejection of His message and the implications of His teachings on the kingdom of heaven.

Scripture: Matthew 22:2-44

Topics: "Jesus' Authority", "God's Invitation"

Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the Parable of the Marriage Feast in Matthew 22:1-14, where Jesus uses a wedding feast to illustrate the rejection of the Jewish nation and the extension of the gospel to all. The parable highlights the gracious invitation of God, the severe consequences of rejection, and the broad invitation to all, emphasizing the few who are chosen for blessing. Jesus also engages in controversies with the Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees, showcasing His wisdom and authority in handling their traps and questions, ultimately revealing their hypocrisy and unbelief.

Transcript

Parable of the Marriage Feast, 22:1-14

As Jesus drew nearer to the cross, His message became more and more directed to the representatives of the Jewish nation. In this chapter, He dealt with the three main groups: the Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees. The Herodians were political activists who supported the rule of Herod. The Pharisees were usually against them, ardently supporting Israel as against Rome. The Sadducees were the liberal theologians, questioning the miraculous, opposed to the Pharisees. The three parties hated each other, but they hated Jesus more. Jesus included them all in the parable of the wedding feast, the third in the series of parables (cf. Lk 14:16-24).

Jesus declared that the kingdom of heaven may be compared to the incident in which a king made a marriage feast for his son. His slaves were sent out to invite the guests, but the guests were not willing to come. The king sent them out a second time, reminding them that the feast was ready, but the guests were unconcerned and went about their business as if they had not received the invitation. Some of them actually treated the servants roughly and even killed some of them. When tidings of this reached the king, he sent forth his soldiers, destroyed the murderers, and burned their city.

The wedding, however, was still without guests, so he commanded his servants to invite anyone they could, and being invited, many came. As the wedding feast was progressing, however, the king saw one

of the guests without a wedding garment. These garments were supplied by the host, and the guest not wearing the wedding garment was violating the normal custom. When confronted with his lack of a wedding garment, the guest was speechless. The king then gave orders to bind him hand and foot and cast him out. Jesus added the comment, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 22:13-14).

G. Campbell Morgan observes that there were three distinct invitations. The first was the preaching ministry of Jesus, which constituted an invitation for the hearers to come. The second referred to a further invitation, which the nation would reject and which would result in the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. The third movement referred to the gospel age when all are bidden to come regardless of race or background.¹¹³

The lessons of the parable are clear. First, the king had issued a gracious invitation. The response was rejection of the invitation by those who would normally be considered his friends; second, their rejection would result in the king's taking severe action; third, their rejection would result in the invitation being extended to all who would come. The application to the scribes and Pharisees, who, as the representatives of Israel, would normally be invited, is clear. The rejection of Christ and His crucifixion is implied, and the extension of the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike is anticipated. While the invitation is broad, those actually chosen for blessing are few. The parable inspired the Jews to make another attempt to trap Christ into giving them a ground for His condemnation.

Controversy with the Herodians, 22:15-22

The Pharisees, after taking counsel, decided they would send some of their number, accompanied by the Herodians, to attempt another encounter with Jesus (Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:20-26). The Herodians, a political party who supported the dynasty of Herod, probably cut across the religious lines of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They came to Him with the subtle strategy, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men" (Mt 22:16). All of this, of course, was double-talk, as they did not really believe in Jesus.

The Herodians, having paved the way in a manner that they regarded as disarming Christ, then said, "Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (v. 17). As political experts, the Herodians thought that they had Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He said it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar, He could be accused of siding with the Romans as opposed to the Jews. If He denied that it was right to give tribute to Caesar, then He could be accused of rebellion against Roman law.

In this encounter, as in all others, Jesus easily handled the problem. The tax they were referring to was the poll tax, a small tax levied on women aged twelve to sixty-five and men aged fourteen to sixty-five. It was a relatively small tax, as the Romans also exacted a ten-percent tax on grain and a twenty-percent tax on wine and fruit, as well as other taxes for road and bridge improvements. The Pharisees had chosen the least of the taxes, but to pay it was to recognize Roman oppression, which was most unpopular with the Jews.

Jesus easily saw through their hypocrisy and said to them, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" Jesus asked them to bring Him a piece of money suitable for tribute, and they brought Him a penny, or a Roman denarius, worth about sixteen cents. He then asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?" The answer was obvious, and they said, "Caesar's." Jesus then gave them an answer, "Render therefore unto

Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." As they heard His answer, they marveled at the adroit way in which He had solved their problem, and they had nothing more to say. If they used Roman coins, then they were subject to Roman tax. The Herodians went away defeated in their intent to compromise Jesus on this issue. In His answer, Jesus also cut the knotty problem of the relation of church and state. As Criswell expresses it, "Our Lord said that there are obligations we have and duties we ought to perform in the sphere of both secular and sacred life, and our duties in one do not exclude our duties in the other... A free church in a free state, and a free state with a free church, is to find the ideal of political and religious history as announced by the Lord Himself."¹¹⁴

Controversy with the Sadducees, 22:23-33

Following His controversy with the Herodians, the Sadducees came with a similar intent to trap Jesus (cf. Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-38). They were the liberals in the Jewish religion and opposed the Pharisees who were the conservatives. The Pharisees, however, were more liberal in their additions to tradition than the Sadducees; the Sadducees were more opposed to supernaturalism than the Pharisees. Accordingly they tried to trap Him theologically on the matter of resurrection.

Attempting to hide their true intent, the Sadducees began by quoting the law of Moses requiring a brother to marry the wife of a deceased brother and raise up children to him. They were referring to such passages as Deuteronomy 25: 5-10, a regulation which entered into the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, recorded in Ruth 4:1-12. The Sadducees brought up the extreme case of a wife who successively married seven brethren all of whom preceded her in death. The question they raised was, "Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her" (Mt 22:28). The situation, to the Sadducees, illustrated the absurdity of the doctrine of resurrection.

Jesus gave them a direct answer. He stated that their problem was not in the doctrine of resurrection but in their ignorance of the Scriptures and of the power of God. He explained, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (v. 30). In other words, their question was foolish because marriage is not a relationship realized in heaven.

Then proceeding to the real issue, the question of whether the dead are raised, Jesus said, "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 31-32). In His reply, Jesus not only affirmed resurrection but also the continuance of personal identity, in that Abraham would be Abraham, Isaac would be Isaac, and Jacob would be Jacob, an identity related to the resurrection of their bodies. The Sadducees could not attack this statement of Christ without being in the position of attacking Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. They were neatly trapped in their own hypocrisy.

By this interchange with the Sadducees, Christ placed the Sadducees in direct conflict with the Scriptures, and again His questioners had nothing to say. The multitude listening was astonished at the ease with which His teaching disposed of these difficult questions. The defeat of both the Herodians and the Sadducees left the field only to the Pharisees to renew questions.

Controversy with the Pharisees, 22:34-46

When the word reached the Pharisees that Jesus had silenced those who had tried to question Him, they sent a lawyer who attempted to trap Christ in a question of theological law (cf. Mk 12:28-34). To Jesus he

addressed the question, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Mt 22:36). As Morgan points out, there was controversy concerning which of the Ten Commandments was the greatest, some favoring the third.¹¹⁵

To this direct question, Jesus gave an immediate answer, quoting two commandments not in the ten. "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (vv. 37-40). Matthew does not report the rest of the interchange with the lawyer. In the parallel passage in Mark 12:28-34, record is made of the conversation, which Matthew omits, in which the lawyer, described as a scribe, recognized that Jesus had correctly answered the question. Mark 12:34 records Jesus' reply, "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question." Luke 10:25-28 mentions a similar incident, which had occurred earlier, where the same question and answer were given, which led to the parable of the good Samaritan to illustrate who is one's neighbor. It is not unnatural for the same question to have been raised more than once in the course of the three years of Christ's ministry.

Having silenced His questioners, Jesus then asked the Pharisees a question. In effect, as Tasker points out, Jesus asked "the all-important question 'What is your view of the Messiah?'"¹¹⁶ When the Pharisees gathered before Him, Jesus posed the question, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" They gave immediately the answer, "The son of David" (Mt 22:42). Then Jesus countered with a second question, "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then called him Lord, how is he his son?" (vv. 43-45). The theological problem of how the son of David could be greater than David was too much for their theological insights. They retired in confusion and gave up trying to trap Jesus with their questions. Their hypocrisy and unbelief led Jesus, in the next chapter, to denounce the scribes and Pharisees in unsparing language.

113 G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 263.

114 W. A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 126.

115 Morgan, pp. 269-70.

116 R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 213.

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