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The Gospel of Matthew

Who is Man to Interrogate God?

January 26, 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 22:15-46

Scripture Reading: Romans 9

Follow along now as I read the remainder of Matthew chapter 22 where we find Christ's enemies, the religious leaders of the day, arrogantly throwing questions at Jesus, confident that they can outwit and out think Him. Needless to say, it doesn't work. The creature cannot win a debate with the Creator. Listen to it, then we will see how this very thing still happens today:

Mat 22:15-46 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.

(16) And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. (17) Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

(18) But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? (19) Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. (20) And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (21) They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (22) When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

(23) The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, (24) saying, "Teacher,

Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' (25) Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. (26) So too the second and third, down to the seventh. (27) After them all, the woman died. (28) In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

(29) But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. (30) For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

(31) And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: (32) 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." (33) And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

(34) But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. (35) And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. (36) "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (37) And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (38) This is the great and first commandment. (39) And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (40) On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

(41) Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, (42) saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." (43) He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, (44) "'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'"? (45) If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" (46) And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Now, let's understand at the start that there is nothing at all wrong with us asking God a question. Think of Job or of the Psalms for instance:

Job 13:22-24 Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me. (23) How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. (24) Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?

Psa 10:1-3 Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (2) In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. (3) For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.

Neither Job nor David were rebuked by the Lord for asking these questions, and God will not rebuke us for asking either.

The issue of course is one of the heart – of motive. Why, in other words, is the “why” being asked? Is it out of a true desire to know truth, or is it an evil motive that is really a disguised attack upon the Lord? The latter of course is what we have here in Matthew 22. Questions proceeding from an evil motive. Let’s look at them:

The Motive

Mat 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.

This brief statement is a profound truth. This is the motive not only of the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, but of the enemies of the Lord in all times. Think of it. Is this not how the wicked

approach the Bible? How many of them have written volumes with the intent of proving the Bible to be myth or lies? The wicked have attacked the inspiration and inerrancy of God’s word relentlessly ever since the Scriptures were given to us.

- The Genesis account of creation is pure myth
- The resurrection of Christ is a fable
- The miracles of Christ never happened
- Supposed contradictions in the Scriptures
- Supposed historical errors
- Denial of the deity of Christ and the virgin birth

And on and on we could go. In our own day not only are these kinds of “questions” thrown at us, but the truth of God’s Word is called evil by evil people. And many times these enemies of the cross put themselves forward as intellectuals and brilliant scholastics. In fact, academia has historically been the chief center of these very kinds of “questions” which are put forward with the supposed claim that those asking them are simply out to “seek the truth.” In fact they are the enemies of the truth.

You see this in the NT era. In Jesus' day, who do we have as the leaders is asking these evil questions? The experts on the Law, the Jewish elite. What kind of people opposed Paul at Athens? The philosophers and intellectuals. Christians in our day need to be very wary of academia. The universities in our nation for instance are with very few exceptions, filled with faculty who are hardened enemies of the gospel. And one of the chief tactics of evil is the question, is it not? The planting of doubts:

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Questions are not inherently evil. In fact, questioning is one way in which we learn – if not the primary way. The study for instance of the universe begins with, "how did all of this come into being?" And more:

- How does gravity work?
- What is light?
- How does blood transport nutrients and waste?
- Why does a particular disease happen? How is it transmitted?

So without questions, there would be no knowledge. No science. No theology. In this sense we all must come to the Bible, for instance, *questioning*.

- Where did this book come from?
- How do we know it wasn't changed down through the centuries?
- How do we know that the OT history is accurate?
- What evidence do we have that the birth, life, death and resurrection accounts of Christ are true?
- Do the things I am being taught in my church square up with what the Bible says?
- Where did God come from? How can He not have a beginning?

Knowledge, in other words, is really an impossibility without questioning. And questioning can even be proper when there is no answer that we can understand – such as questions about the eternity of God.

Questions which are proper and which are blessed by God are those that proceed from an honest desire to know Him and His truth.

Therefore, each of us has to come to a starting point where, in a sense, *we don't ask questions. Rather, knowing God begins with faith,*

Heb 11:1-6 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (2) For by it the people of old received their commendation. (3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (4) By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (5) By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God **had** taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. **(6) And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

Faith. There is the starting point. Believing that he exists and that He is going to reward (answer) those who seek Him. Anyone who refuses to start here, who continues to refuse to believe that He exists, is going to spin their wheels in place and will never know Him or His truth.

Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one

comes to the Father except through me.

Joh 7:17 If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

Understand? This is all quite logical. If we are going to have our questions answered, then we must necessarily go to the source of truth. That source of course is the Lord.

Pro 1:5-7 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, (6) to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. (7) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The Pharisees and Sadducees despised wisdom and instruction. It was not the purpose of their questions to be instructed by the Lord or to gain His wisdom.

Now let's make some general observations about these questions they put to Jesus:

1. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?
2. In the resurrection of the seven, whose wife will she be?

3. Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

Now, notice first of all that *none of these questions are in themselves evil*. Right? Each is a valid question, and in fact they are pretty good questions. So the question isn't the problem. What made asking them sinful is that they were asked from an evil motive. That is to say, they proceeded from evil, unbelieving hearts, from people who hated Christ and in fact hated the Word of God. These questions were *accusatory*. They were put to Jesus with the intent of destroying Him and dissuading the people from following Him.

Let me show you a perfect example of this. In Mark, we have another Jewish leader, a scribe, *asking Jesus the very same question this wicked lawyer asked in Matthew 22* –

Mar 12:28-34 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” (29) Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (30) And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ (31) The second is this: ‘You shall

love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (32) And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. (33) And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (34) And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Same exact question, but Jesus *commended him for it!* Why? The man asked it honestly, seeking the truth. He asked out of faith.

Second, we notice from these encounters that when a person questions God out of an unbelieving heart, out of an evil motive, *that person is going to be shown to be a fool*. Consider for example the so-called elite philosophers in Athens:

Act 17:21-33 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. (22) So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way

you are very religious. (23) For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (28) for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring.'

(29) Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he

has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (32) Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." (33) So Paul went out from their midst.

Paul shows them their ignorance. How can we, humans, think that God who created us *is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man?* Such was the "brilliance" of minds blinded by sin.

Next time we will plan to make just a few more observations from chapter 22, including some practical lessons regarding how Jesus shut down these enemies and how we can or should respond when we confront them today.

For now, let's end with this challenge - *If anyone listening this morning is balking at believing the Bible to be God's Word, or if they are hesitating to believe that Christ is the Son of God, the only Way of man being put right with God, then you must realize that your doubts will never be answered until you acknowledge what God has revealed to you already – that He exists, that He is your Creator, and that you owe Him your thanks and praise. Knowing the truth, in other words, begins with confession, not with questions you demand God answer.*