

Two weeks ago my wife and I were in La Grande... visiting our youngest daughter (Katie)... and her husband (Shawn.) ... On Sunday morning we had the opportunity to visit her church and to attend their adult Bible Class before the worship service. They were studying the book of Genesis.

It was kinda' nice to sit in the back of the room and be a stranger... and just observe. No one knew that I am a pastor... which is what I had hoped for. The teacher did a good job in teaching God's Word and the class had thoughtful interaction with Jeff (who led the class.)

The section of Genesis that they studied... was the creation event... and a brief moment or two about the fall. Jeff talked about the tree that God planted in the middle of the Garden of Eden from which they were told they must not eat... and then he asked the class, "*Do you think God knew that the tree would end up being too much of a temptation for Adam and Eve?*"

Near the end of the discussion that Jeff's question generated... a gruff looking man with a long beard and weathered facial features... who looked to be about 70 years old... asked Jeff (what I thought was a very sincere question.) ... He started by saying that he has been studying the Book of James... and that James 1:13 says...

**James 1:13 (ESV)**

*... God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*

"*But what I don't get...*" Jeff's questioner continued... "*is that we say God doesn't tempt... but that He does test us... - so what is the difference? Isn't God's testing the same thing as a tempting...?" And because he was only an arm's length away from me... I heard him say quietly... "*I really want to know...*"*

Just then... another class member chimed-in about an entirely different matter... and Jeff never did get back to the man's question... The man politely continued to listen... without any more participation in discussions.

When the class had finished... I tapped the man on his shoulder and said...

*"I know that you have no idea who I am... but would you mind my giving you my answer to the question you asked earlier..."* Gruffly he said...

*"Wait... Tell me... who are you?"* ... I said... *"My name is Jim..."* and he said that his was Duane... *"OK... what's your take...?"* Duane asked.

My father-in-law was an engineer for CalTrans down in California. He designed bridges for the freeway systems. Every bridge took hundreds of hours of mathematical calculations that he would pour over... in order to prove that his bridge would not collapse or fall apart with heavy traffic driving over it.. or severe weather. He tested... and he tested ...and then he tested some more. ... Once the bridge was built... before any vehicle was allowed to drive over it... other CalTrans people tested the structure in many other ways. ... Why? ...Because they wanted the bridge to collapse and become a catastrophe...? Of course not! They tested in order for it to be a success.

God tests us... so that we will succeed. He already knows the result... before the test... but He wants to show us. ... He wants you and I to know where we are weak... so we can add strength. Satan tempts us in order to get us to fail. ... There is a world of difference between "testing" and "temptation." God's testing is for our success. But others will tempt us... to get us to fail.

This morning... as we resume our study in Matthew... we come to a passage that is just before the Crucifixion... Jesus was going to die as the Lamb of God... and it was necessary for Him to be tested. He was critically examined just before Passover.

**Exodus 12:3-6 (ESV)**

*Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.*

If any blemish whatsoever was found on the lamb... it could not be sacrificed. ... Jewish Passover pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ. So... in our passage this morning... we find Jesus being examined publicly by His enemies. God used it as a test for yours and my benefit. The enemies of Jesus could find no fault in Him... and we have great certainty that He is a lamb without blemish... the perfect sacrifice. ... The religious leaders... on the other hand... examined Jesus... more along the lines of a temptation. ... they were trying to get Jesus to fail. (What they meant for evil – God used for good.)

**Matthew 22:15**

On Tuesday of Passover week... our Lord's enemies tried to trap Him... by using a series of "loaded" questions. ... These men were still stinging from the treatment they had received in the series of parables Jesus had just told. ... Jesus had exposed their evil intentions... and He also warned them

that they were only asking for judgment. ... The religious leaders did not enjoy being humiliated before the crowds. ... Far from being repentant... they were intent on plotting Jesus' death. ... They were behaving exactly like the man in the Lord's parable (at the beginning of this same chapter)... who decided he could get along without the king's furnished wedding garment. The Jewish authorities decided they could get along - without a Messiah like Jesus... and without a kingdom like the one He represented.

### **Matthew 22:16**

Notice who comes to Jesus with the test. It is a very odd team... comprised of two extremely different groups... that didn't get along. (They ***hated*** each other.) One group was comprised of young men who were ***disciples*** of the Pharisees... (just like the Apostle Paul had been... when he trained in the rabbinical school of Gamaliel.) These were zealous students of the Pharisees... who must have been eager to prove themselves. The Pharisees sent them... to represent them... and do their dirty work.

Now the other group... making up this team... were Herodians. The Herodians accepted Roman rule and profited from it. They generally ***supported*** and ***worked for*** their Roman rulers. They were called Herodians because they endorsed the local puppet king... Herod Antipas... who was placed in his position of governmental authority by the Rome.

The Pharisees... on the other hand... generally adopted a philosophy of separatism from Roman rule. They believed in the supremacy of the Jewish mind and the Jewish faith over their Gentile rulers. They believed in the coming Messiah who would be God's anointed King. He would throw off the

yoke of Roman bondage and restore the glory of Israel as it was in the days of King David. They hated those who endorsed the rule of the Romans and betrayed their loyalty to Israel.

What an unlikely union. The Pharisees were ardent nationalists... (Kick the Romans out as soon as Messiah arrives)... and the Herodians supported and made their living from the Roman rule. It is like the Middle-eastern proverb... "The enemy of my enemy... .. is my friend..." ... It is common enough for enemies to become allies... when they have a common enemy. Such was the case here. Jesus was that common enemy.

Now notice the way they initiate their trap. They begin by trying to lure Jesus with flattery. *"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..."*

In other words... *"Jesus, you are a straight shooter. And we really admire that about you. So shoot straight with us now..."*

What is so interesting here is that their buttering Him up is both irrational... **and** ironic. It's *irrational* because if they really believed that Jesus couldn't be moved by the opinions of others (like... by being buttered up)... why then butter Him up? Their sweet talk makes no sense. It's irrational.

It's also *ironic*. ...His questioners will soon learn (to their discomfort)... that their praise is all *too true*. Jesus *will* shoot straight with them. And the gun won't backfire. (He is about to silence them with one shot.)

Furthermore... what is also ironic is that their flattery is true. What they said... they probably did not really believe. ... But they're right about Jesus! He is a "teacher" – a wise teacher. ... As our ultimate sacrifice is examined by them... you and I get to see that Jesus is He is the greatest teacher of all time. ... We can confidently know that He is "the way, and *the truth*, and the life" (John 14:6). ... You see, the irony is that their hypocrisy unmasks both their true identity... and Jesus'.

### **Matthew 22:17**

If Jesus answers "yes" to their question ("Yes, pay taxes to Caesar")... then the rumor proves true — Jesus of Nazareth is a friend not only of Gentile sinners... but also of oppressive Rome. The Messiah... everyone thought... would never agree to pay tribute to a Gentile power - especially one so ruthless and greedy as Rome. ... No! The Messiah was to be a deliverer... not the friend of such an oppressor. He was to set up the glorious global empire that was the theme of so many Old Testament prophets. Jesus had been heralded in those very temple courts... as the Son of David... but if He said "yes"... He would immediately be discredited as the Messiah.

The average Jew hated the Romans... and they hated the tax that these testers of Jesus were asking about. This "head tax" had to be paid by every male Jew... so it reminded the listening crowd... that the Jews were a subject people.

You see this Roman poll tax was a hot-button issue during that time. It was more of a contentious dispute than the gun debate is in our current society.

Not long before this... in ad 6 or 7 the Roman poll tax (the tax in question here) was introduced and enforced. Not surprisingly... in Judea... it was met with opposition... some of which was violent. A man by the name of Judas of Galilee (a popular name back then and a perfect name for a political zealot—named after Judas Maccabeus) led a revolt against Rome. He wanted his people to have their land back. He acknowledged only Yahweh as God and king. Thus he refused to pay the tax. And how did he and his insurrection friends fare? They were mercilessly massacred. As a warning to all the Jews, Rome crucified these men. They lined the countryside with crosses. The sign was clear: “Pay this small tax or you will pay a big price.”

It is easy to see why the Pharisees and Herodians chose the poll tax as the bait for their trap. It appeared that no matter which side Jesus took, He would create problems for Himself and His ministry.

Is it just me... or does anyone else get the same feel from this... as when you watch a typical news broadcast today? It seems that news reporting is far more about asking “***gotcha!***” questions... than it is about getting the “who”... “what”... “where”... “when”... and “why.” It seems to be about trapping and proving the questioner’s own pre-conceived ideas... that they bring to the interview.

### **Matthew 22:18-21a**

Notice that Jesus apparently has no money on him. Or at least the pagan coin in question was not in His possession. ... So *in the temple*... to the *super-spiritual*... Jesus says... “How about you? ... Any Roman coinage on you?”

The point that Jesus will make with His words... does not need this coin. Jesus is doing something here... in addition to what He is about to say. Now here is where it actually gets kind of funny. (Watch this...) They unwittingly say, *"Oh, sure. Here you go."* And they readily produce one. ...Ah ha! The first part of *Jesus'* trap has sprung.

Here comes the second. Jesus then questions His questioners. *"Okay, boys, tell me, whose image and inscription is on it?"* ... Still not seeing the irony... they answer... *"That's easy - Caesar's!"*

*"Yes... this graven image... exactly what Exodus 20:4 says you are to have nothing to do with... and yet you stand here in the Temple holding... indeed that is Caesar."*

We know from archeology that the portrait on the denarius (which was the coin used for the Roman poll tax)... had the graven image of the head of Tiberius... with a crown of bay leaves. And we know what the inscription was: *"Tiberius Caesar Augustus son of the divine Augustus."* ... It was the graven image of a false god... right there in the temple... Needless to say this coin's images and inscriptions didn't fare well with the first and second commandments.

The coin itself is quite a visual aid to their hypocrisy. In this silver coin Jesus wants them to see their hypocritical reflection. *"Most pious of pious Jews... what are you... (the most separate of the separatists)... doing with pagan money in God's holy temple? How is it that you hold in your holy hands idolatrous images with blasphemous inscriptions?"*



It is ironic that one of these inquisitors had a Roman coin in his possession within the walls of the temple. That was sacrilege in itself.

### **Matthew 22:21**

The people were not to give to God what is God's - **in isolation from** responsibility to human government. ... Allegiance to God involves full allegiance to act responsibly towards the society of which we are a part.

Part of Jesus' answer was that they did owe something to Caesar. They were using his coins... they walked down Roman roads... and Rome did provide them with a measure of peace... So they did owe something to Rome.

The fact that a government may legislate laws that are un-Christian or even anti-Christian... (for example... making us pay taxes... some of which goes to fund abortions)... does not invalidate our responsibility to that government. ... Christians have a double citizenship.

They are citizens of the country in which they live... and they are citizens of heaven... but to be a citizen of heaven... does not negate obligations as citizens on earth. ... To fail in their responsibilities to one... is to fail in their responsibilities to the other. ... We have obligations to Caesar... and we are to meet them. We have obligations to God... and we are to meet them.

This is an amazing answer at several different levels. ... Demonstrating their hypocrisy was just one level. ... Wisely answering their question was another.

### **Matthew 22:22**

When the Pharisees and the Herodians heard Jesus' reply, "*they marveled,*" but then "*they left him and went away.*" Isn't that what we often do... when we come to church...? ... We sometimes merely marvel ("wow, nice answer, Jesus!") but don't really follow through with worshipful allegiance. ("Wow, what a Savior, High Priest, and divine Lord!").

We are not to leave and go away from our Lord... but to cling to Him and follow Him. We are to give our adoration and allegiance... our hearts and heads and bodies and souls.

Let's examine God's Lamb further in His next test... with this in mind...

### **Matthew 22:23-28**

The Sadducees... who next try to trip Jesus up... were the wealthy... aristocratic... governing class in Israel. Theologically... they were liberal. They only accepted the first five books of the Bible (which Moses wrote.) ... It would not do any good for Jesus to quote any passage of Scripture to them... unless it came from one of the first five books. The Sadducees did not believe in heaven... hell... angels... or the afterlife. They believed that the soul perished when the body died.

They came to Jesus... confident in their intellectual superiority. They were sure that they would be able to silence this troublemaker. They would be able to embarrass Him in the presence of the whole crowd. If they could damage Jesus' reputation in public... He would look foolish... and they would achieve intellectual mastery over Jesus.

The Sadducees' hypothetical illustration... was based on the Jewish law of "levirate marriage" from Deuteronomy 25:5-10. (The word *levirate* comes from the **Latin** word *levir* which means "*a husband's brother.*" It has nothing to do with the tribe of Levi.) ... The purpose of this law was to preserve a man's name if he died without a male heir. (In a nation like Israel... where family inheritance was a major thing... it was important that each home have an heir. It was considered a disgrace for a man to refuse to raise up a family for his dead brother.)

The Sadducees based their disbelief of the resurrection... on the fact that no woman could have seven husbands in the future life. ... Like many people today... they relied on their own understanding... (their own intellectual capacity to reason)... over everything else... including the plain meaning of Scripture. They reasoned that a future life... **HAD TO BE** a mere extension of their present life... and there was no possibility that Creator God would have something different. ... But Jesus told them that they were ignorant on two levels. They did not know the Scriptures... nor did they know the power of Creative God.

### **Matthew 22:29-30**

*"The resurrected life"*... Jesus tells them... *"is not an exact counterpart or continuation of earthly life..."* The surprise to them (and perhaps to many of us)... is the fact that marriage is a temporary institution. Your marriage might be made in Heaven, but it's not made for Heaven.

Now... of course... the purpose of Jesus' statement on marriage here was not intended to provide a theology about marriage. He only mentions

marriage because He is working with their illustration... (their story and question.) He addresses the topic of marriage... in other words... only as a defense of the concept of resurrection... because these unbelievers of any afterlife THOUGHT they had just disproven it. ... Yet when we meditate on Jesus' unexpected revelation on the relationships of eternal life... many of our own perceptions of Heaven and marriage are turned upside down. ... So let me just say a little more about this can of worms that has been opened here.

In the resurrection we will certainly know our spouses and love each other... but the marriage relationship and all that it implies will be no more. Because... (stop and think)... what is the purpose of marriage?

You know... I'm glad our passage did open this can of worms... because every married couple here needs to know how to answer this question. What is the purpose of marriage? ... Here is the most helpful answer I can give to this question: "The purpose of marriage is to make us holy." I never knew what kind of a sinner I am... and how selfishly bad I am... until I married Patti. ... I thought that I knew myself before I met her. Boy was I wrong! No... I would never know the extent of my need for holiness apart from my wife. God has gifted me with her... and me to her... so that we can... through an intimate and committed relationship... work out our unholy natures. You all (my good friends) will let me get by with stuff in my life that shouldn't be there... but Patti never will! Much of it... I can hide from you. But not from Patti. ... Hey... listen... marriage is hard. But I am convinced that it is God's best tool for making a person holy – if we use it that way.

But when I get to heaven... I am going to have a greater holiness than Patti can help me develop... and she'll be more holy than I could ever help her achieve. ... Marriage will no longer be needed in heaven. ... There will be no marriages in heaven. ... The Sadducees' silly story falls apart! It was based on ignorance... and rooted in their willful unbelief. The resurrected life is **not** an exact continuation of earthly life.

And by the way... Jesus did **not** say that we would **be** angels when we are glorified in heaven. He said we would be "as the angels" in that we would not be married. ... The foolish stories we hear... and the cartoons we see... about people dying and becoming angels... are certainly unbiblical.

### **Matthew 22:31-32**

Our Lord was not content to refute the Sadducees' foolish views about the future life. He also wanted to answer their claim that there was no resurrection; and He did it by referring to Moses! He knew that Moses was the only authority they would accept. He reminded them of Exodus 3:6 where God said to Moses, "*I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" He did not say, "*I **was** the God of Abraham,*" for that would mean that Abraham was no more. By saying "*I am,*" the Lord made it clear that these three men of faith were at that time - **alive**. And by repeating "the God of," the Lord was saying that He knew them and loved them personally and individually.

The Sadducees' ignorant understanding of death as extinction... (that we are without any hope of a resurrection)... implies that God is a "God of the dead." ... Jesus reminded them that it would be foolish for God to

undertake the task of protecting His people from calamity during their lives... but fail in delivering them... from the supreme calamity of **death**. What kind of protection is that? ... If death has the final word... then God's covenant has been breached or broken.

### **Matthew 22:33**

We have seen two tests... and Jesus has passed them both. Jesus will be tested one more time... and He will astoundingly pass that one too. (We will get to it next week.) By the end of Matthew 22... Jesus astonished His examiners three times with His answers. The Lamb of God is without blemish. He answered those who questioned Him... and then Jesus asked them ONE question... and we will see (next week) that they were unable to answer Him... a single time.

Verse 33 here said: "...when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching." ... How about you? ... Matthew records their response to Jesus... but what's your response to Him? ... I would guess that you wouldn't be listening to this sermon right now if Jesus had little or no appeal to you. But I wonder how often you are astonished by Him. ... Have you examined Him carefully through the pages of the Gospels? He is the Lamb of God without blemish. ... He fits every prophesy... and Old Testament picture of what the Messiah should be. His death for you and I is effective enough to take away our sin. It is enough to secure a place in heaven for us for all eternity.

If you have examined Him... and found Him to be all that He claimed to be... if you have been astonished... or if you have (as verse 22 said)...

“marveled,” have you given Him your full allegiance...? ... Are you serving Him with your total being... your entire heart soul and mind...?

Don't simply marvel or be astonished... and then walk away! He calls for you to love Him and serve Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. ... We talk more about that specifically... as we continue next week... because it deals with it. ... Cling to the Lamb of God (your Savior) today!