

What Do You Think About the Messiah?

Matthew 22:15-46

Key Verse: 22:42

by Steve Stasinos

“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” ‘The son of David,’ they replied.”

Chapters 21-22 can be seen as a whole, depicting King Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, establishing his authority, dealing with enemies and serving his people. From the moment he sent his disciples to get the donkey the religious and political leaders of the city came out in force to oppose him. But Jesus answers all their challenges, leaving the people amazed by his teaching. Then Jesus poses a question. **“What do you think about the Messiah?”** This question is the most important question for anyone to answer. How we answer this question determines our eternal destiny. It impacts our view and attitude toward God, toward ourselves, toward others. It determines our joy, peace, life, and spiritual influence. Of all the things to think about today, all the debates, issues, controversies, this question rises above: **“What do you think about the Messiah?”** I pray this question may be in our minds and hearts.

Part I. Jesus Answers the Religious Leaders' Questions

These three challenges come from the enemies of God. They lie, flatter, manipulate and deceive. But we learn something about the Messiah: He answers each powerfully. Isaiah said, **“The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him -- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD (Isa 11:2).”** We will come across similar questions and situations. We can trust Jesus to give clear direction, clear answers, and help us root out the deep issue in our hearts. As we look at these three, may God encourage each of us to think about Jesus, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:2-3). Jesus has all the answers.

First, giving to Caesar and to God (15-22). The Pharisees and Herodians plotted to take Jesus’ life (Mk 3:6). Typically such righteous men wouldn’t associate with the Herodians, but they sent some of the disciples with them to trap Jesus in his words. They needed the Herodians, who were representatives of King Herod, who was the puppet of Rome, in order to bring charges against Jesus and arrest him. Direct confrontation had left them embarrassed. So now they tried a more indirect approach. These young disciples and their hedonistic hipsters began in verse 16: **“Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way**

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of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are." These statements are absolutely true about Jesus. This flattery made them sound as if they were on Jesus' side. Watch out when it comes to flattery. Content isn't as important as motive, and we can't always know motive. Proverbs tells us: **"Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet (Prov 29:5)."** They were certainly doing so to Jesus. Their question: **"Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"** Either answer would alienate Jesus followers or peg him as a rebel against Rome. Yet Jesus isn't concerned with their traps. He is concerned over their hypocrisy: **"You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?"** Although they said the right words, "I will sir! (21:30)" they did not really want to give God fruit or to obey and please him. Although they saw sinners changed by believing in Jesus, the way of righteousness, they refused to repent and believe. This was hypocrisy at the core, to pretend to care about God's plan, but reject his Savior when he comes.

Jesus helps them to come practically under God's sovereignty through a giving life. **"Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'"** The denarius is a small silver coin about the size of a dime. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard we learned this coin was a day's wages, the foundation of the economy. It had Caesar's image on it, and propaganda about Caesar as head of church and state were inscribed on it. This tax was imposed on colonial peoples to continue to participate in Roman economy. Rather than taking advantage, Jesus says to give back what belongs to Caesar, which are material things only.

Greater than governments, Caesars, kings and dictators, there is God. Jesus teaches us to give to God what is God's. We bear his image, and we belong to him. The reason we submit to earthly rulers is because they are all established by God (Ro 13:1). God sees everything in our hearts, not only our actions. What do you think about the Messiah? He fulfilled this submission to God in every way, and was never a hypocrite. As our Messiah he leads us. As we all bear God's image but are radically different from one another, so Jesus has a calling just for each of us. At times, in obedience to Jesus, we may have to bend or break the dictates of Caesar. At times God's people rebel against governing authorities. God raised up Jeroboam against Rehoboam, dividing the kingdom of Israel because of Solomon's sin (1Ki 11:31). Dietrich Bonhoeffer plotted "Caesar's" assassination. A missionary couple we know is operating outside the law in a Muslim country.

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What we think about Jesus needs to have more weight about my calling and actions than my situation. Anything else is a greater hypocrisy. What do you think about the Messiah? In view of Jesus' words, let's repent our hypocrisy, whatever form it takes. I want to live by faith in God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. I want to offer all the parts of my body to him as instruments of righteousness (Ro 6:13). In view of his great mercy revealed in the cross, I willingly offer myself to him as a living sacrifice (Ro 12:1). We need a Savior to help us, to guide and convict us. Thinking about Jesus includes these areas.

Second, the God of the living (23-33). Sadducees were aristocratic noblemen who held the priesthood. Although they had a mystical job, their concerns were worldly. They considered spiritual things as nonsense, and focused attention on living the best life here on earth. In this passage they especially oppose the resurrection. They read the Law of Moses, never saw the word, "Resurrection," and therefore concluded it was a fanciful story. To them, any kind of life after death was at best irrelevant, and at worst just plain silly. To illustrate their point to Jesus, they tell a horrible story that reeks of contrivance. Look at the story again, verses 24-27. To summarize their story, it was about seven weddings followed by barren marriages, and eight funerals, no children. What a tragic story! The Sadducees were successful, but dead inwardly.

Their story was rooted in the Bible, quoting Deuteronomy 25:5-6. They understood the practical implications of this rule of Moses, but certainly it proved the ridiculous nature of hope in the resurrection. There are people like that today. They will read the Bible, consent to doctrine and teachings that will make them happy, good, and prosperous, but spiritual things are dismissed. One seminarian was quoted as saying, "I don't pray; I meditate." Their problem: Jesus says they don't know the Scriptures or the power of God.

Jesus' solution: He teaches them first from his personal knowledge about life at the resurrection. This is only based on Jesus' testimony; but he is reliable because he has been there, and he knows (Jn 3:13). We learn of the Spiritual world from Jesus, our Messiah, our King. Jesus knows all. Secondly he teaches them from Scriptures, the testimony of God to them, about the resurrection. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all dead over 400 years when God introduced himself as their God to Moses at the incident of the burning bush. If they had ceased to exist, how could God be "their God?" Those who are dead, or non-existent cannot possess a God. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not dead, but are in God, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies when Jesus comes again. This was their hope, and why they lived in tents. In Jesus we

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have a living hope in God's kingdom through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1Pe 1:3). While we live on this world, we live with a living God, who helps us to believe and trust in his promises. The living God is pleased to call himself the God of the living, those who believe in the gospel. The Sadducees were dead, but the disciples are living, and the living God, their God, worked mightily with them in their generation to spread the gospel. That is the meaning that God is the God of the living.

This is a problem of people today, who don't know the Scriptures or the power of God. In our day, 60% of Americans cannot quote 5 of the Ten Commandments. 12% think Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. 50% of high school graduates think Sodom and Gomorrah were married. Many people think the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. One US Pastor believes this the fulfillment of Amos 8:11, a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Bible teachers are needed. The Scriptures are to point us to Jesus Christ for salvation (Jn 5:39-40). This salvation is accomplished through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ro 1:16). Unspiritual people will despise and want us to be ashamed for our convictions and our faith. Our Bible students and children live in a world where physical and emotional realities are stressed, and gospel faith will be criticized. We need not be ashamed, when we think about Jesus.

Third, love God and love your neighbor (34-40). The Pharisees return a second time, seeing that the Herodians and Sadducees were silenced. This time they offer an expert in the law to test Jesus' mastery of the commandments. Thinking about the Bible, and being led to Jesus is good. Studying the Bible simply to know commands are not good. The Pharisees divided the laws into 365 commandments, one for each day, and 248 prohibitions, beginning with "You shall not..." That is a lot of laws! When there are so many, they had to debate which ones were the most important. Perhaps they hoped to catch Jesus saying something heretical. Their problem: they focused on self-righteousness obtained through obedience to the law, but didn't understand the law that points them to Jesus. This legalistic way of looking at the law is repeated again even today, where people want to talk about laws that are ritual, civil, or moral. The trouble is, the Bible isn't divided that way, and this relies on human criteria to determine which bucket they go in. This makes inconsistencies from ministry to ministry.

Jesus' solution: two beautiful and clear instructions in verses 37-40. **"Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the**

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Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Jesus' point: the law is first and foremost about loving God, and secondly about loving mankind. The story of Scriptures is not ultimately a guidebook for living, but a love story between God and his lost creation. Jesus says these two are what all the Law and Prophets hang on. It brings to mind towels hanging on hooks on the back of a door. All the others support and are given clear purpose and direction to support one of these two goals: loving God, and loving our neighbor.

Yet loving God has to be done with our whole being. As any law, sinful human beings cannot keep these two laws. We all give our hearts to other things at times. Our minds wander. Our souls become contaminated with pride, lust and laziness. What is more, we tend to be very subjective in relationships with others. We care for those we like, and are indifferent to those we don't. On our own we cannot love God or our neighbor. This leads us to Jesus. What do you think about the Messiah? We love God because he first loved us, and sent his Son as a sacrifice for us (1Jn 4:19). God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners; Christ died for us (Ro 5:8). In response to God's love for us, we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We have an intimate love relationship with God through Jesus, our Messiah. This produces in us a spring of life and love, welling up each day. We draw on this love and are joyful, happy, satisfied.

How can we love our neighbor? Jesus told his disciples: **“As I have loved you, so you must love one another (Jn 13:34b).” “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters (1Jn 3:16).”** The peak of all commands, and their foundation is love for God and love for one another. This begins in loving those in our home, in our ministry, in the world. How will we know how to love, what to do? How will our hearts, souls, and minds be devoted to God? That depends on what you think about Jesus. What do you think about the Messiah?

Part II. Jesus' Question for Every Generation

Finally Jesus is able to bring up a subject of his own. **“What do you think about the Messiah?”** Then and now this was the most important question, and how we answer it determines our eternal destiny. Those who had come up under John the Baptist had naturally found the way to think and accept Jesus as the Messiah. But these religious leaders were very stubborn. To help them, Jesus first had to reveal the gaping flaw in their Christology. Verse 42 again reads, **“‘What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ ‘The Son of David,’ they replied.”** Since they viewed the Messiah as only the son of David, they were

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unable to accept Jesus as their Messiah. They were looking for some outward characteristics of a descendent of King David, like power, prestige, wealth, gloriously good looks. Jesus had none of these things on the surface. They were looking for a great warrior, who would lead them in their rebellion against Rome, restoring the past glorious nation.

Jesus helps them to understand their Christological error through David's example: Verses 42-45 reads, **"He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"? For he says, "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" If then David calls him "Lord," how can he be his son?"**" Jesus' point is clear: David himself had a hope in a Lord greater than himself, a man to whom God would give all victory. David needed such a Messiah. David, speaking by the Spirit, was a prophet. Thousands of years ago he was thinking about the Messiah, one who would defeat the enemies of his sins and guilt. One whose body would not see decay. Jesus is David's Lord, David's Messiah. God accomplished victory over our enemies of sin and death by sending his one and only Son to this world to die on the cross and shed his blood to forgive sins. God raised him from the dead, and declared him with power to be his Son. Jesus is absolutely David's Son. But Jesus is more. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Messiah.

What do you think about Jesus? People tend to avoid this question to talk about many other things, like sports, theology, family, ministry, the Bible, and other things. After exhausting all their questions and tangents, Jesus' question still stands: What do you think about the Messiah? At times, their Christology and ours may have flaws. Some see him mainly as a guide and teacher, a moral leader to follow. But isn't he more? Some see him as Creator, who brought everything that is into being. Jesus is our Savior, our Healer, our Shepherd. This is absolutely basic and necessary for us to think about and come to a conviction of. Is Jesus my Savior? Do I need saving? From what? How does Jesus save me? I lived a wicked, immoral life. What is more, I sin every day. I need a Savior. But Jesus is also our Lord, King, and Master. Relationship with him should grow and develop in obedience and daily submission to him, to his calling and direction for my life, and by the power and anointing of his Spirit.

What do I think about the Messiah? I spend a lot of time reading and studying his word personally and teaching it to others. I counsel and advise. On the outside, I'm doing my best to love God and love my neighbor. I know he died to save me, and that I'm totally unworthy. But I'm convicted about my inner thought world, and lack of fixation on Jesus personally and relationally. You can see it in

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people who have it. There is a passion, a drive, a love, that isn't in this world, that comes from an intimacy with our loving Savior. We saw this at the last world mission night, through the testimonies. The joy we saw in Joanne Kim's face as she shared about serving in the middle east. The hope Dr. Paul Koh has for North Korea. My grandfather had such a relationship with his Savior. He was no scholar, no miracle-worker or missionary. His works weren't fantastic. But he loved Jesus genuinely. He would say, "Praise the Lord!" as some people say, "Whatever." That is why I named my son Judah. My grandfather was comfortable just beginning a conversation with the words: "What a wonderful Savior we have." This was as natural to him as we might ask about the weather, or talk about a movie we have seen. He thought about the Messiah. He lived with Christ daily. Jesus wasn't an intellectual theory, a doctrinal statement, a set of principles to follow or some commands to obey. Those are just things that surround him. First and foremost, Jesus is God, and Jesus is living.

In this message I mainly shared about Jesus' question: **"What do you think about the Messiah?"** What we think about Jesus determines our eternal destiny, our present purpose, and our lasting joy. I pray we may think about Jesus more and more, teach about Jesus more and more, love God through Jesus more and more. We may know Jesus more each day, in each experience, every challenge.