

Who is the Messiah?

Matthew 22:15-46

Key Verse 44

“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’”

Why do you study the Bible? I asked this question to some CBF kids who had not written their testimony. As we got into it, they thought they should study the Bible to learn what to do or not to do, because otherwise God would punish us and send us to hell. There’s the problem, with such a view I wouldn’t want to study the Bible or write my testimony either. You know our purpose in studying the Bible and perspective about the Bible are really important. It shapes everything we do or don’t do. Why do you study the Bible? Three types of religious experts try to test Jesus in this passage but each one studied the Bible for the wrong reasons. They were Bible experts with probably more basic Bible knowledge than any of us; yet, they had completely missed the point of Bible study: they did not know God. Let’s be careful that we don’t make the same mistake.

First, the Bible teaches us to give (15-22).

We begin in the middle of the second day of Jesus’ passion week. Immediately before this Jesus had told the Pharisees that God had rejected them and would take the kingdom from them. So the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words (15). So, **“they sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians”** (16). Fiercely nationalistic, religious Pharisees and pro-Roman, aristocratic, hedonistic Herodians would normally be bitter enemies—perhaps that’s why the Pharisees sent their disciples. But in their hypocrisy they became good coworkers. **“‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You are not swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?’”** Paying taxes to an oppressive, pagan government was a hot-button issue of the day and put Jesus in an untenable position of having to displease the people or risk being arrested by the Romans. But Jesus cut right through their trap. **“You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.”** When they brought him a denarius 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”** (19-21).

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This is one of the most profound words that Jesus spoke, shaping many of the principles for Christian living we see throughout the early church, let's think about a few of them. Firstly, religious leaders should not be getting mixed up in divisive political issues, they should be teaching people to seek God (2 Ti 2:4). Trying to use the Bible to find a loophole to paying taxes, trying to use the Bible to get around basic civil duty, trying to use the Bible to justify rebellion and selfish desires is wicked. It should not have been a question in the minds of the Pharisees, those entrusted with teaching the Bible to Israel. He's saying, don't worry about giving to Caesar, worry more about giving to God.

Secondly, we must accept the sovereignty of God. For the Jews, paying taxes to Rome was not like us paying taxes to America. They were financially supporting an evil government that oppressed them and dedicated their money to idols, so they rightly wondered if this was sin. Sometimes our taxes are used for evil things we don't agree with also. So, should we withhold our taxes and find ways to subvert the government?

Giving back to Caesar is not an easy pill to swallow when governments are evil. But the clear teaching of Scripture is that every government has been established by God *for HIS purpose* not our comfort or prosperity, and we must therefore submit to government out of submission to God. In fact, the Roman government had been prophesied by Daniel, and God clearly told Nebuchadnezzar that God raises all the kings and kingdoms of the earth and gives them to whom he pleases (Dan 2:21;4:17; see also 2 Ki 8:11-12; Jer 27:1-8 and 37:1-10). Paul correctly understood Jesus' teaching and said to oppressed Christians in Rome, **"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"** (Rom 12:18) **"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."** (Rom 13:1).

So, does that mean that we ignore injustices—like Roman taxation—and allow it in the name of submission? No, but we work against injustice with respect and in accordance with the will of God because we recognize God as the supreme authority. This year we remembered the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was one of the worst victims of injustice but he chose to respond in a way that was peaceful and honored God. He could have violently rebelled against the government like so many violently did to him. But he chose to respect the government and love his enemies. He said, **"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do**

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that.” “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.” “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”¹

Thirdly, we must acknowledge that we have a civil duty and a heavenly duty. God reminded me of this, this week. I wanted to focus on the message but God kept sending snow every day and so every day I had to go out before Daily Bread at 5am and do my civic duty and I said to myself, “right, we have a civic duty too and by doing this people can walk on our sidewalks and they may have a good feeling about our church, that we are responsible.” Our responsibility to God doesn’t excuse us from our responsibility as citizens. Peter learned Jesus’ point here and said, **“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him... For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.”** (1 Peter 2:13-17).

Jesus said we must also **“give to God what is God’s.”** So what is God’s? Like the coin, what is stamped with the image of God? It is us. Psalm 100:3 says, **“Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”** What is more, not only did God make us but he bought us with his own blood (Gal 3:13; Rev 5:9; 1 Co 7:23; 1 Pe 1:18-19; Ac 20:28; 1 Co 6:19b-20). Therefore, to give to God is our spiritual act of worship and our greatest joy (Ro 12:1). Pastor John Piper, wrote the book “Desiring God” to persuade readers that the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. He wrote, “God is most glorified when you are most satisfied in Him. But to enjoy him we must know him. Seeing is savoring. If he remains a blurry, vague fog, we may be intrigued for a season. But we will not be stunned with joy, as when the fog clears and you find yourself on the brink of some vast precipice.” “Knowledge about Him will not do. Work for Him will not do. We must have personal, vital fellowship with Him; otherwise, Christianity becomes a joyless burden.”²

Verse 22 says, When they heard Jesus’ answer, **“they were amazed”** (22). We see three times in this passage, that people come to Jesus with some complicated, theoretical question and Jesus answers simply and then takes it one step further so they could repent. It shows us that the point of Bible study is not to gain knowledge, rules or principles of living. Repentance must be our goal each time we sit down to study the Bible—that is to turn from myself and my way to God and his way. It was for this reason, that I made a new decision to dedicate myself to

¹ Brainyquotes.com/quotes/martin_luther_king_jr_110082

² John Piper, *Desiring God: Reflections of a Christian Hedonist* (Multnomah Books, 2003)

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sharing honest, repentant testimonies each week—this is my way of giving to God. I thank God, that we have a regular practice of writing repentant testimonies each week. Jesus says that all of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents—so we are creating a lot of joy in heaven each week, I believe (Lk 15:7).

Second, the Bible teaches us to believe in God’s power to raise the dead (23-33).

“That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question” (23). The Sadducees only believed in the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) and only a very literal reading. Since the Bible didn’t literally say there is a resurrection of the dead they didn’t believe it. That means they believed that in the beginning God gave all people eternal life and after one mistake condemned all people to death and erasure from existence. What a cruel view of God and what a totally shallow reading of scripture—that’s why they are called “Sad-you-sees”. Their story reflected their dark, twisted, world-view full of death. In it, an imaginary woman—they pretended was real—married seven brothers all of whom died, and then she died—everyone dies. And asked **“at the resurrection whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”** (28) In this way they wanted to show that resurrection was paradoxical and absurd. Actually, according to the Scriptures she wouldn’t be married to any of the men because a marriage covenant ends at death.³

“Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’” Really, this is the summary for each of the three groups that question him. They had studied the Scriptures but they had learned nothing—they did not know the Scriptures. It was because they did not study the Scriptures to know God. If they had, they would know the almighty power of God and there would be no question that God’s purpose for mankind was not defeated by Satan and that God is more powerful than death. They would know also, that God loves us and uses his power to save us from sin and death. However, they only studied the Bible to learn facts, rules and history, they studied it as a human book. But the Bible is a spiritual book. **“The word of God is living and active”** (Heb 4:12), **“All Scripture is God-breathed”** (1 Ti 2:15). Therefore, when we read the Bible we must ask God to reveal to us what he is saying to us by his Spirit. We cannot study the Bible like any other book, to learn facts but when we study the Bible we must learn God,

³ For a woman to be married to one man and then marry and sleep with another is normally called adultery. However, after the death of her husband she was free to remarry as she pleased, it is because the covenant of marriage ends in death—Paul used this illustration twice (Rom 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Each of her seven husbands died, therefore the obvious answer, if they actually reasoned through it based on Scripture, was she was no longer married to any of them period.

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God's will, God's character, God's heart. Especially, we must learn of Jesus who is the exact image of God and reveals God to us (Heb 1:3, Col 1:15). Therefore, anyone who does not know God, or have the Spirit of God cannot understand the Bible or interpret the Scriptures.

Jesus says, **“At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.”** At the resurrection, all will be married to Jesus (Rev 19:7). What is more we will be like the angels and will have no need of procreation one of the major purposes of marriage (Genesis 1:28; also Mal 2:15). We shouldn't take this out of context. Some people take this verse and despair that there is no marriage in heaven, “Oh no! I have to get married quickly before I go to heaven!” Does any young unmarried person here think that Mother Barry will have a sense of loss, because she didn't marry, when she gets to heaven? God promises to satisfy every need, longing and desire of our heart you won't miss anything but will gain everything (Isa 65:24; Rev 9:16-17; Mt 19:29; Mk 10:30; 1 Co 13:4-12).

The NIV subtitle for this section is “Marriage at the Resurrection” but really marriage is not the thrust of this section, it is resurrection. The ESV and most others, subtitle it better, I believe, “The Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection.” Jesus therefore moves quickly past their question about marriage simply and gets to the real heart of the matter about which they needed to repent. **“But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”** “Have you not read...” means “You should have read in the Pentateuch...” the very words God spoke to Moses. He spoke in the present tense **“I am the God of...”** not **“I WAS the God of...”** to show that in the present sense he is their God for they are alive with him. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had definitely died centuries before he spoke these words and so it implies that God had raised them from the dead. God has the power to raise not only them but all people to eternal life. If we believe in the power of God to raise the dead, it changes everything. John 1:4 says that the eternal life found in Jesus has become like a beacon in the dark so that all people know what to live for. To accept the resurrection is to accept that God is bigger than I ever imagined. God loves me. God does not want me to perish but wants to save me and restore me to paradise with him. Knowing this gives us clear life direction. When we accept the resurrection, we don't need to live for the empty things of this world, the pleasures that we keep drinking from again and again that never satisfy (Jn 4:13). If the Sadducees could accept this, then they could change from being hedonists controlled by the power of

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death to hopeful and joyful Bible teachers seeking God—they could become “happy-you-sees”.

“When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.” No one had ever been able to convince the Sadducees but they just argued endlessly (Ac 23:6-10). However, through Jesus’ one word they were silenced (34). This takes us back to the religious leaders original question, **“By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?”** (21:23). Here we can clearly see Jesus’ authority from God as the Messiah who alone can fully understand and reveal scripture to us.

Third, the Bible teaches us to love God and love our neighbor (34-40).

The Pharisees couldn’t believe it, they had never been able to silence those annoying Sadducees. So, they got together “What are we going to do? What are the big questions we are always debating these days?” “One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: **‘Teacher which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’**” Again, because they only studied the Bible to derive rules and principles it seemed like a very difficult question to them to choose the greatest from 600+ laws of Moses. But to Jesus it was obvious, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** Obviously, it’s pointless to try and please God by keeping rules unless you first love him.

Again, Jesus didn’t stop there he went one step further. **“And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”** (39-40). By connecting these two commands Jesus taught that you cannot separate loving God from loving your neighbor. Well, you know Jesus was their neighbor. You really shouldn’t try to trap and arrest and kill your neighbor, because I’m pretty sure you don’t want that done to you! The Apostle John correctly interpreted Jesus’ answer and said, **“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love...Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen”** (1 John 4:8,20). Verse 40 says, that all the laws hang on these two commandments. If you cannot love God and love your neighbor you are not keeping any of the rest of the law. The point of Bible study should be to love God with all our being and learn how to love others, then and ONLY then should we move on to how to keep many other rules. Don’t try to cover up a lack of love with a highly moral life, all the law comes down to love.

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Fourth, the point of the Bible is to accept Jesus as Lord (41-46).

Jesus had amazed their disciples and Mark 12 tells us he won over the expert in the law (Mk 12:32-34), so perhaps the Pharisees decided to stop asking questions at this point before Jesus converted them all. So, Jesus asked them, **“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” ‘The son of David,’ they replied.** (42). Jesus addressed their concept of the Messiah because it was what blocked them from repenting. They viewed the Messiah as the son of David—which wasn’t wrong, the Messiah would be a descendant of David as God promised to him in 2 Samuel 7:11b-16. However, he would not ONLY be the son of David. Jesus reasoned with them on their level, based on Scripture. 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?”** David called the Messiah his Lord even though he was his son. The Bible clearly taught that the Messiah would be both fully human as David’s descendant and yet also fully God. If they could accept this, then they could change their wrong view of the Messiah. They should not be waiting for a human savior but for God himself to come and give them true freedom.

It’s easy to think that a human savior or government change can bring us what we need. Under the rule of David the nation of Israel enjoyed the longest period of peace and the largest borders in their history. More than that, they were ruled by a good and just king who was like a shepherd for them. We have to know that the one thing that really defines the Pharisees is that they were fiercely nationalistic. They wanted a Messiah who would be like King David: a warrior king, who would crush the Romans and give them peace from all the enemies who had been conquering them one after another. Their problem was that they believed that Rome was their greatest enemy and to be liberated their greatest salvation. They put their hope in the government. That if they could just change the government all their problems would be solved.

Because they held so tightly to their fixed idea about what they expected God to do for them, they could not accept Jesus when he came to them clearly revealing that he is the Messiah through doing the work of God. When we are fixed on what WE think that God should be doing in the world, we cannot see what he IS doing in the world. The greatest enemy of Israel was not Rome, or racism, or hunger, or injustice. These things are so important and as Christians we are very guilty of not doing enough to address these, of only talking and not going out and being salt and light in the world. But we can get so blinded believing that these are the most

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pressing matters in the world, that we cannot see the more pressing matter. We don't need a human messiah but a spiritual one. We need a horn of salvation (Lk 1:75) that will rescue us from the hands of our true enemy Satan and the power of sin that truly oppresses all mankind. Even if we could create a perfect utopian society, still the fundamental problem of mankind would not be solved. The greatest good we can do in this world is to help people to accept Jesus as Lord.

Verse 46 says, **“No one could say a word in reply and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.”** Praise Jesus who is Lord and who silences every tongue of opposition by his authority with God's clear truth from the Bible. May we learn to come to the word of God with an open heart and mind to learn what God really wants to teach us through his word.

Jesus is the Lord. He is the point of the Bible, and every Bible study. He calls us to come to a deeper understanding of his word and to believe in him. All three groups of people in this passage revealed that though they had studied the Bible intensely they did not know God, his power, his character or his work. Jesus is the culmination of the Bible, he's what it is all about. In the life and teaching of Jesus we can understand all of Scripture. I pray our Bible study may always lead us to him as our Lord.