

Week 23

Matthew series: Ministry of Jesus (The Kingdom views)

Matthew 22: The kingdom is like

In previous chapters we have Matthew telling us who will be worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. We also have parables telling us that God has called us to come to heaven. We are asked to be part of the kingdom of God. That is amazing. I suppose God made creation so that creation could fill his kingdom. Some people could say only "fill" his kingdom. I say expand his kingdom. Jesus makes reference to preparing a place for us in his kingdom in John 14. It's either those rooms do exist or will exist. Either way God is making room or has room for us all. The description in Revelation is of a very large sphere. What is your interpretation of heaven? A city, Sphere, or something else?

Matthew 22:14 **"For many are invited, but few are chosen."**

John 14:3 **"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."**

I have so many stories of Christian people saying "come to Jesus." To the Christian, they get it. To the rest of the world it's what they call christianese. Try and explain to people why they should ignore all they know. Tell people to abandon that life without a shred of physical proof. Then ask them to come to a Jesus they believed was mythical. It's just not that simple. The questions and answers in this chapter 22 depict both questions and confusion for those outside of God's kingdom. Surprisingly, that might also include many religious rulers. If you read this chapter, Jesus points out in verse 12 that some people will try and go to heaven unprepared. In verse 21 Jesus says "give to this world their things." Equally, give to God his things. The last section talks about resurrection. We get hung up on the stories. The point of this whole chapter is who belongs to God and who belongs to the world. Do we look at these things through the worlds eyes or God's eyes? Who is good enough for God?

I just think two things are going on. One is that we make our own religion. The men asking questions in this chapter are questioning Jesus about traditions. David's family line, money, marriage and more. They know the stories but don't know the point. Jesus over and over says it's a spirit of the law and stories that counts. Secondly, it's a heaven where God invites us in. We are not required to prove our worthiness. Jesus proves his worthiness as our King.

Matthew 22:12 **"He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless."**

Matthew 22: 21 **"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."**

It seems like I am splitting hairs. Am I making more of this scripture than is really there. Read it all again. The people invited to the wedding should have been willing and ready to go. It's like the King saying its time. A wife or a boss saying come here now. Usually in those moments we drop everything and go. Verse 14 is sad. *For many are called.* So many have been called since the beginning of time. Yet, it's God's house. If we are a coin, then we give to God what is his. The world keeps the rest. This is unnerving scripture. As we go into the next chapters it gets far worse.

Matthew is doing us a favor. It's not enough to wear holy clothes. It's not enough to know the Bible. Do we pray fancy? How far will we go to paint a picture of God on us. Yet, in our hearts, are we truly his? Matthew wants you to know. He wants you to be ready. It's not that hard to get into heaven. Respect the maker. Respect his children. Love the world enough to invite them to heaven. The Bible screams that we should invite the whole world.

Matthew 22:39 **"And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."**

John 3:16 **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

Read Matthew 22. We see coins, resurrection, and weddings in this chapter. Do you see who is called and who chooses to let us in? If you want, read Ruth. It's all about redeeming the faithful. Read also Deuteronomy 25:5 and exodus 3:6

1. There are a series of statements by Jesus that begin with *the Kingdom of heaven is like*. Each one really depicts who will come and who will be rejected. Far too often we get hung up on the story. Jesus could say that God choses and that's the way it will be. Yet, over and over Jesus tells us that God asked us all. He did it through the prophets. He did it through miracles. Throughout history God has called us home.

This wedding parable is scary. These people are called. I guess that means God knew who to call. Was it those in church? Was it those who run churches? Were they those who served at food banks and prisons? Who is God calling? Astoundingly, why did they make excuses. In one denomination called the Missionary Alliance, the founder felt that there are two conversions. One is head knowledge. We go to church and are explained the gospel. We accept Jesus by saying we believe. Then there is the second conversion. It's when our hearts have a spiritual moment of acceptance. We devote ourselves to being Christian whole heartedly. It's like the religious rulers were stuck in part one.

I get it. Far too often we speak with our mouth but not with the heart. They call it an ah ha moment. It's where we finally get it. I feel I have had several of these. Men have asked me when I had that second moment. To be fair, the Alliance skitters around that moment of being truly saved. Yet, I feel I have had so many deepening moments. I am driving towards Jesus slowly. This wedding parable is a warning against what road you're on. Will you recognize Jesus when the time comes?

Matthew 22: 5 "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business."

Romans 8:28 "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

2. What's with the coin? Why have this interaction which seems to have so little to do with weddings and the resurrection? This is huge. Jesus is effectively drawing a line in the sand. They want to challenge Jesus about paying what is due the authorities on this earth. If Jesus is the Christ, then take back this world. Deny Caesar. Deny tax, currency, and that kingdom. Rebel and fight for Israel.

They had inklings that this Jesus was the Messiah. The one to take back Gods land. Yet, Jesus put things into perspective. This was about taking sides. Certainly, the way we act is on a side: God's or Satan's. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus has declared sides. He told Peter "Get behind me Satan." Those are harsh words. Peter was not thinking kingdom wise. Jesus called the religious leaders Satan's children. They were looking at the coin as a loyalty to Rome. Jesus respected Rome on earth but he separated church and state then and there.

Matthew 22:18 "But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?"

Matthew 16:23 "Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

1 Samuel 16:7 "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

3. It's interesting that Satan used scripture to entice Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus uses scripture to fight back. I believe that one of the most important things to know about Jesus is the Bible. John begins his gospel with declaring Jesus as the word of God. We often say the Bible was written by men. We also say it's the word of God. I think we forget that Jesus is God sometimes. He knows that book inside out. All the Bible is: God; Jesus; and the Holy Spirit.

It's important to see through the trees in this argument Jesus is having with the religious rulers. They are using the Bible to trick Jesus. They are being depicted by Matthew as Satan's minions. They read it but they do not see it. Think about this chapter. They see a wedding but they don't see God asking. They see the coin but they are not seeing a difference between God's

kingdom and Caesars kingdom. They see resurrection and scripture, but they do not see heaven properly. They want God's kingdom to look as they make, run, and own it.

Matthew 22: 40 **“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”**

Matthew 13: 45 **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls”**

4. I used the two verses above in the last section for a reason. Read them again. All that Matthew is building in this gospel depends on the whole law and the prophets. They all told the story that the kingdom is near. They both pointed towards kingdom living. They pointed the way to heaven. It should have been easy to tell what heaven would look like. They were told. Jesus came for many reasons, but I believe the big one is that they were going the wrong way. The wedding had the people looking the wrong way. The kingdom of heaven is like seeking pearls. That's it in a nut shell. They were seeking a heaven of their own desire.

Maybe A.B. Simpson was right with the Alliance. The head wants to believe but the heart needs to believe. I wonder if I'll ever get there. Maybe we never truly do until heaven. We get caught up in theology. We get tangled in who we should follow. Possibly we miss heaven because we were looking the wrong way. Matthew wrote this chapter to prod us to look towards God rather than towards the things that distract us from the kingdom.

Matthew 22: 2 **“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.”**

Isaiah 30:1 **“The Lord said, “Look at these children. They don't obey me. They make plans, but they don't ask me to help them. They make agreements with other nations, but my Spirit does not want those agreements. These people are adding more and more sins to the ones they have already done.”**

What it means?

Work on it. Don't stop reading the Bible. Don't stop learning theology. It's not about knowing other religions. It's about knowing your own. Far too often we know the other way, but are ignorant of the Christian way. Remember this thing Jesus started was called the way. That is by no mistake. They knew the way. They spoke the way. They acted in a certain way. I don't think early Christians were conflicted with the world. They worked, lived, and communicated with the world. How else could the world call them the way?

What has hurt the church more is segregation. We tend to believe that there is the world and Christianity. Keep church and state separated. The talk of the coin seems to lean that way. I just don't think that is what this chapter is saying. Yes, we should separate God from Caesar. Yet, it makes us hold God close and not share him. Why not work with Caesar? The Christians did such a good job in the first century that Ceasar Constantine became a Christian. The kingdom of God was helped greatly by changing hearts rather than fighting over theology. What it means is that we need to be Christian. Yet, we need to be in the world. Our minds can be on heaven while were here. I believe there is room for both.

Matthew 22:29 **“But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not [m]understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God”**

Deuteronomy 6:5 **“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**