

Matthew 22B

- We continue in our study of Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple in Jerusalem a few days before He dies
 - Today is Palm Sunday, the day Jesus entered the city, and we studied that day a few weeks ago
 - And now in our study, we're in the middle of that week, on Tuesday
 - So our calendar is catching up with the calendar of Jesus' passion story
 - Last week we studied the parable of the wedding banquet, where Jesus compared His offer of the Kingdom to a wedding banquet invitation
 - In the parable a king held a feast in honor of his son who was to marry, and the king selected whom he wished to invite
 - The king sent his slaves to inform his invited guests, expecting his guests to respond in joy and eager anticipation
 - But when his guests turned their collective backs on the opportunity, the king chose to invite others instead
 - And as we studied last week, the parable depicted Israel's response to Jesus' offer of the Kingdom
 - As the parable explained, Israel was indifferent and its religious leaders were hostile to the Kingdom offer
 - So the Lord withdrew the offer from that generation of Israel and in their place, the Lord extended the offer to other guests
 - Those "others" who were invited instead are the Gentiles of the Church, you and me, who the Lord chose
 - We are blessed to be included in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 - And our opportunity was made possible by Israel's decision to reject her Messiah in the day He came for her
 - Nevertheless, Israel remains God's chosen people, whom He has promised to bless with the Kingdom

- Therefore, God's choice to favor the Gentile Church now, in place of Israel, is not a permanent substitution
 - There is a day coming when the Lord will again return to Israel with the Kingdom
 - Paul tells us in Romans 11 that Israel is again going to be called and chosen again in a future day

[Rom. 11:28](#) From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

[Rom. 11:29](#) for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

[Rom. 11:30](#) For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,

[Rom. 11:31](#) so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.

- Since the day Israel rejected their Messiah, generations of Jews have become God's enemy for our benefit
- Because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, the Gentile world has been included in the plan of salvation
- But then Paul reminds us that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, which means the Lord isn't done with Israel
 - God gifted Abraham with His covenant and so one day He will call Abraham's descendants into the Kingdom
 - And those promises are irrevocable because they were unconditional promises
 - They depend entirely on God's faithfulness, not on Israel's faithfulness, and God is faithful even when Israel is not
- Therefore, since we know that the generation that saw Jesus first did not receive the promise (not all of them at least)...
 - Then we should also know that a future generation of Israel will receive those promises
 - In a time to come, the Lord will again return to His people Israel and show them mercy just as He showed Gentiles mercy

- Now if you're wondering why I've opened our study this morning with this discussion, it's because of how we ended last week's lesson
 - Last week I read through v.14 but I never offered an explanation of that final verse
 - In v.14, the Lord said that many are called but few are chosen
 - To understand the verse properly, it's important that we don't forget the context
 - Jesus just taught a parable about Israel being called to receive the Kingdom
 - That call went out to the entire nation of Israel, but only a few received that call and placed their faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - Men like the apostles and women like the Samaritan woman received the good news gladly, but they were in the minority
 - So in v.14 Jesus says that these few within Israel were chosen to be included in the wedding feast, but the rest were set aside
 - So in that sense, many in Israel were called, but few were chosen to attend in the end
- Jesus was explaining why His earthly ministry will appear to have failed, and yet it wasn't failing at all...it was going according to God's plan
 - This was the result God expected and intended as He foretold through the prophets
 - Paul explains this to us in Romans 11

Rom. 11:7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Rom. 11:8 just as it is written,

**“GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,
EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.”**

- Israel was seeking a Messiah, but they did not obtain what they were seeking because they rejected Jesus' offer

- Instead, only those in Israel on whom God had mercy, like the apostles and the Samaritan woman, were invited to the wedding
- The rest of Israel was hardened, Paul says, meaning the Lord left them in their sin and withdrew His offer of the Kingdom
 - This had the effect of hardening their hearts to the point that the Jewish nation became embittered against Jesus and Christianity
 - As Paul says, Israel became enemies for our sake
- After this day of testing, Matthew's narrative will pivot into the dark circumstances surrounding Jesus' painful death
 - But as we consider what happened to Jesus, we have to understand many were called but few were chosen in that day
 - And that was for a good purpose, for the purpose of bringing many sons and daughters to glory

Heb. 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

- Jesus was perfected by His suffering; His sinlessness was proven in His willingness to obey the Father in suffering for our sake
 - And by His sufferings He became the author of our salvation
 - And that's Matthew's point here...the hostility Jesus endured from the Jewish nation was a means God was using for our good
- And we need to see the circumstances on that day in the Temple and in the days that followed as God's work for good
 - Now think about that for a moment...the Lord turned hostility and violence against His Son into a blessing for us and the world
 - We can't name a more tragic moment in all human history than the one taking place here
 - Our Creator is being unjustifiably subjected to mocking, hatred, torture and death at the hands of His creation

- Never has a greater injustice been done, and yet never has a greater good been achieved as a result
 - As the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus tasted death for everyone leading to glory for those who receive that payment
 - Because in the end, the Lord raised up Jesus to glory to demonstrate His victory over death
- Understanding where the story is going changes our perspective on what's happening and why
 - Jesus is being killed, He's laying His life down for us
 - These men aren't getting the better of Jesus by their conspiracy, He's using their sin to accomplish His plan
 - So knowing that God intended for Jesus to die for a good purpose in the end lets us see the story from God's point of view
- But it also changes our perspective of our own circumstances, especially those the world is facing today
 - As bad as things may be or may become, we need to be mindful of what good things the Lord is working to achieve through them
 - We need to be asking ourselves what good is God working to produce through this trial?
 - How much spiritual growth is the Lord at work to produce in His body of believers as we endure this trial?
 - What new ministries are being formed or strengthened?
 - And what unhelpful trends within the church or wrong attitudes or teaching are being extinguished?
 - How many new opportunities has the Lord created to share the Gospel from the fear and turmoil of our days?
 - Only time will tell, and until that time passes, we can't evaluate our present circumstances
 - We must rest upon our faith knowing God is good and He is at work around us for His glory to accomplish what He promised
 - But even as we embrace this truth intellectually, we must understand that the circumstances of our lives will not always seem good to us

- Far from it, many of us will know real tragedies in our lives
- If not in these present circumstances, certainly we will experience tragedies in one form or another sooner or later
- No one gets out of this life unscathed...we all get our share of trials and tragedy
- Difficulties are the unavoidable consequences of living in a sinful fallen world
- But Jesus told us to have courage in the midst of these things knowing that in Jesus we have peace

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

- We know Jesus overcame the world, meaning He lived in it, took the worst it could offer, and came back from the dead
 - And now Jesus will never again be subjected to the evil and hurt of the world...He has overcome it all
 - And that's the same future we have if we've placed our faith in Jesus
 - We have overcome the world because we will one day be resurrected also
 - And when that day comes, nothing in this world will ever harm us or disappoint us again, the Bible assures us
- The key here is resurrection...our peace comes from knowing that our God is a God of resurrection
 - He is in the business of bringing dead things back to life
 - He gives life to our dead spirit as we place our faith in Jesus
 - He will turn the death of this body into an opportunity to receive a new, imperishable one
- And in the meantime, He can turn our suffering into opportunity for glory, but always in that order: suffering comes before glory
 - Which is why Paul says in Romans 8:28 that the Lord causes all things to *work for good*...meaning things don't start "good"

- But in the providence of God, He puts all circumstances to work for a future, eternal good outcome
- Only in time can we see how the Lord used bad things in our life to accomplish good outcomes for us in eternity
- But if you try to judge the outcome of a bad situation too soon, you may think God had failed or forgotten you
 - In the midst of your circumstances we cannot see the good that He is working because first comes suffering then later glory
 - Just remember, there is no Plan “B” with God...everything that happens on earth is part of Plan “A”
 - Everything that happens in your life, especially the trials and hardships, are God’s plan for your life to achieve eternal good
- So we endure trials and difficulties knowing that when the trial is over it will have accomplished its eternal purpose in God’s providence
 - Then and only then will He bring it to an end
 - In the meantime endure it with a hopeful attitude knowing our God is a God of resurrection
 - As James says, consider it all joy when you face trials knowing it is a test of faith intended to bring a perfect result in time
 - And in time we will see why it was necessary for our good, and we will be thankful for it
- So let’s return to this Tuesday before Jesus’ death and study the next moment of Jesus’ testing

Matt. 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.

Matt. 22:16 And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.

Matt. 22:17 “Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?”

- Following the first encounter, Matthew now moves to a second encounter and Jesus’ opponents have changed slightly

- After Jesus embarrassed the first group of Pharisees and Sadducees, they retreated to plot a new way how to trap Jesus
 - And soon, a new group of Pharisees approach Jesus but this time they bring with them a group of Herodians
 - Remember the Herodians were the third group of religious leaders in Israel after the Pharisees and Sadducees
- Herodians were similar to the Pharisees in taking a conservative approach to interpreting Scripture
 - But they differed from Pharisees by their support for Roman rule and their allegiance to King Herod
 - Pharisees hated Roman rule and opposed Herod personally
 - So the only thing that Pharisees and Herodians probably agreed upon was opposing Jesus
- So these two groups bring Jesus a question specifically designed to trap Him
 - And of all the ways the religious leaders tried to trick Jesus, this question may be the most devious
 - The question is simple and ingenious...it's almost a perfect trap, almost
- The trap worked liked this: they ask Jesus a yes/no question in which either answer will get Him in trouble with someone
 - And they selected an issue that was a long-standing debate in Jewish society with passionate views on both sides
 - One answer will get Jesus in trouble with Jewish authorities and His followers, while the other will run afoul of the Romans
 - No matter which way Jesus answers, the religious authorities will have opportunity to accuse Jesus before one or the other group
 - And to make sure Jesus didn't sidestep the question as He did with the one about authority, they open with strategic flattery
 - In v.16 they start by saying they know Jesus was truthful in teaching the word deferring to no one nor partial to anyone

- These things were all true, of course, but these religious leaders didn't actually believe what they were saying
- They were trying to ensure Jesus would be forced to answer their question one way or another
- After an introduction like that, had Jesus refused to answer, He would have appeared to be the opposite of what they claimed
- Now looking at the question they bring Jesus, they ask should a Jew pay the poll-tax to Caesar
 - This question was a point of contention between the Pharisees and the Herodians and it was hotly debated among all Jews
 - A poll-tax, also called a head tax, was required by Rome of everyone living under Roman rule
 - The payment of this tax was considered a personal tribute to the Caesar, and Mark's Gospel specifically calls it a tribute tax
 - Rome imposed it in AD 6, and though it was a small amount, the Jews universally opposed it and even revolted over it at one point
 - That earlier revolt gave rise to the Zealot movement and the Zealots were the ones who later led the Jewish revolt in AD 66
 - So the Jewish people fiercely opposed the tribute tax as an affront to their sovereignty as a nation
 - And Pharisees opposed Jews making any tribute to Caesar on the grounds that the Roman emperor had declared Himself to be God
 - So in their view, any Jew who advocated for paying the tax was recognizing Caesar's claim to be god and guilty of idolatry
 - But the Herodians supported paying the tax since they preferred Roman rule and were not concerned about the Pharisee's claims of idolatry
 - And of course, the Roman authorities expected it to be paid and took a very dim view of anyone who encouraged disobedience
 - So had Jesus opposed paying the tribute tax, it would have offended the Herodians and drawn the ire of the Romans
 - And the Herodians would have taken the case against Jesus to Pilate

- In fact, later, the religious leaders lie to Pilate accusing Jesus of telling the people not to pay the tax
- On the other hand, if Jesus advocated paying the tax, He would have upset the Pharisees and been accused of idolatry
 - Furthermore, supporting the tribute tax could be seen as an endorsement of Herod as the rightful king of Israel
 - That would have resulted in Jesus losing credibility with the crowds around him
 - And the Pharisees could make a case for the crowds to stone Jesus
- So one way or the other, this question seemed destined to get Jesus in trouble, a perfect trap it seems, so how does Jesus escape the trap?

Matt. 22:18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?”

Matt. 22:19 “Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius.

Matt. 22:20 And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”

Matt. 22:21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

Matt. 22:22 And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

- Jesus begins His response by calling this moment what it was: a farce
 - Flattery is just a socially acceptable way of lying, and Jesus was having none of it
 - They have no sincere interest in this question, nor did they intend to follow whatever advice Jesus gave them
 - Their flattery was a ploy to trap Jesus, and so Jesus rightly calls them hypocrites
- So Jesus turns the tables on these men asking for a denarius, the Roman coin of that day
 - Now notice...someone had to go find a coin because there would not have been one readily available

- Remember, the Roman coin was not accepted in the Temple, which is why money changers operated in the temple grounds
- So someone probably went to a money changer's table and retrieved a coin for Jesus
- And after they bring the coin to Jesus, he asks His well-known question: who's picture is on the coin?
 - The obvious answer was Caesar's image is on the coin, because his profile was embossed on one side
 - It was stamped with Caesar because it was a reflection of Caesar's rule and power
 - But Pharisees viewed anything stamped with a person's image to be an idol and even just holding a denarius was consider idolatry
 - So a Pharisee refused to use the Roman currency
 - And at the same time, Rome refused to accept Jewish shekels as payment for the poll tax, so Pharisees refused to pay the tax
- Jesus knew that Pharisees behaved this way, and He uses it against them
 - He says render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and the Greek word translated render literally means to give back
 - Jesus was calling for the Pharisees to simply act in keeping with their convictions
 - The denarius was a Roman coin, not a Jewish coin, and the Pharisees had no interest in holding onto Roman money they say
 - So a denarius was worthless to the Pharisees...it only had value to Caesar
 - So Jesus says just give Caesar back what is his and you need not worry that you are showing Caesar honor
 - Because when you give away something that is worthless to you, then there's no sacrifice involved
 - And unless your tribute involves personal sacrifice, it's meaningless
 - In this case, they were just returning something to Caesar that already belonged to him and meant nothing to them

- In other words, when we give worthless things, it's not a form of worship
 - And that's true for us too...we give tribute or honor to that which we make sacrifices
 - If you were to put Monopoly money in the offering plate at church, would you be honoring God with that gift?
 - No, because that gift cost you nothing and so it is not a tribute
- So Jesus sidesteps the trap by eliminating the conflict between paying the tax and honoring God
 - Paying that tax with money that meant nothing to Pharisees wasn't a tribute and therefore it wasn't dishonoring to God
 - Therefore, Pharisees and all Jews could make the payment without compromising their standing under the Law
 - That answer satisfied the Herodians and Romans who wanted to see the tax paid
 - And it addressed the concerns of the Pharisees by eliminating any violation of the Law
 - Moreover, Matthew says it amazed the crowds but Jesus wasn't finished with these men
 - Jesus adds that they should render to God the things that are God's
 - What thing do we render or return to God? We give Him our worship, praise and obedience, or as Paul puts it:

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- The religious leaders had been worried about extending Caesar too much honor but meanwhile they weren't honoring God at all
- Their lives were supposed to be like that coin, a representation of God, as if God's face was embossed on their bodies like a coin
- Instead, they were living a life of self-righteousness, selfishness and greed
 - They were enemies of God who actively opposed the Son of God and led the people of Israel astray

- Which is why the Lord looks at them in this moment and says render to God what is His
- Stop being concerned with obeying your own rules, Jesus is saying, and instead start obeying the word of God
- How hypocritical was it for these men to worry about handling a Roman coin even as they tried to kill the Messiah
- They were engaged in an ungodly conspiracy against God while arguing over how to please God with worthless currency
- This is what self-righteousness looks like...it's judging ourselves by meaningless standards instead of being subject to God's standards
 - The Pharisees made self-righteousness into an art form
 - And they were completely oblivious to the need to serve God through a life of obedience to His word
- And as a result, the Pharisees had presented the poll-tax situation as an either-or choice, but in reality it was an and-both situation
 - The Lord wants His people to set the example as good citizens in whatever society and culture He places us
 - And part of that example is to live in obedience to the government God places over us

Rom. 13:1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Rom. 13:2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

- Only when a governments' demands comes into direct conflict with God's word are we placed in a position to disobey the government
 - And almost always there are ways to work around that conflict as Jesus found in this case
 - But when we resist government at every opportunity as if we're serving God, we fool ourselves and disobey God
- We will face many tests during these days of hardship and crisis, including how to balance our obedience to government with our obedience with the word of God

- But if we are patient in the trial, looking for the good that God is accomplishing, then we will meet its intended purpose
 - Just so long as we do not take the easy way out, the way of self-righteousness
 - Our responsibility in these days is to wear the image of Christ, His imprint on our very bodies
 - Make your lives a living sacrifice, and next week we will celebrate Easter, the day when Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us