
The Questioning of the Kingdom

Matthew 22:1-46

Jesus has been turning the tables...

The next to the last of the rejection parables closed chapter 21:

Rejected the King's messenger

Murdered the King's prophets and son

King rejects the city and people, giving the kingdom to others

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? ⁴³ **Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.** ⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

So, the *kingdom* symbolized by the vineyard belongs to God not to them, and he will to someone whom He has chosen. The word, "a people" indicates that the very composition of the people of God was to change. It was not, however, a simple matter of Jews being replaced by Gentiles; rather a new community of God's people was being created, in which both Jews and Gentiles would find their place. What would characterize them was not their nationality, but that they would produce fruit.¹⁷

So this brings us to this final rejection parable and the questions it raises, for the disciples and for us.

God's Kingdom is for the Chosen**(v.1-14)**

We continue with a parable of replacement where who the kingdom is for is replaced. We will see how similar this is to the parable of the vineyard in preceding chapter. The parable of the wedding feast is structured on three key scenes:

The Rejected Invitation**(v.1-7)**

¹ And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

We must remember that this is not just the reception they are invited to and are refusing to come to. This is the public celebration of the wedding union. Jesus is using and Matthew is recording the usage of the wedding theme familiar to the early church through the teaching of Paul. This is no accident. It is the king inviting guests who ought to do all they can to respect the honor that has been bestowed upon them. But much like the tenants of the vineyard, even go so far as to kill the messengers and servants of the King.

The allusion to Israel and their coming destruction should not be missed. Note even that the King in his wrath destroys their city. They have rejected the invitation and overture of the king to their own destruction.

The Filled Wedding Hall**(v.8-10)**

⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

So the king's invitation through his servants goes out to every one – any one who wishes may come. Here are the replacement guests. It is not just a select group, but a wide cast invitation. As a result, the wedding hall was filled with those who came to feast with the king.

The Missing Wedding Garment**(v.11-13)**

¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

The king arrives at the hall. It seems to us to be an odd and unjust move. He notices someone who has come at his invitation but is not properly attired. He does not have on the customary wedding garment. So, the servants basically treat him the same way those who rejected the king's invitation were treated. He is bound and cast out. Just so we don't miss the fact that this is more than just a story, the man is cast into what is recognizably hell.

The Principle of the Kingdom

(v.14)

This is intended to be shocking. So what, he is not dressed properly. What is wrong with that – after all, he came when he was invited. Ah, but Jesus wants us to understand the core principle of the kingdom. *MANY ARE CALLED (INVITED) BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN*. This simply reminds all that there is a general call to the kingdom, but only those who have been chosen will actually be given the kingdom. They will be given the proper attire. They will bear fruit. They will be given the kingdom.

Now, let's watch as several groups in Israel step forward and ask questions through which they reject the king's invitation to the marriage feast. Therefore, God's judgment in taking away the kingdom will be just. Through each of these, a different faced to the kingdom is unfolded.

God's Kingdom is the true Kingdom

(v. 15-22)

The first group comes as a result of a plot and a weird partnership.

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "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. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²² When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Their Identity

(v.15-16)

Here are the religious conservatives hiding behind their disciples and aligning with one of their most hated enemies. The Pharisees¹⁸ were the ultra-fundamentalists and legalists. The Herodians were Jews who accepted and acclaimed the evil Herod as the King of Israel. They usually hated one another. But on that day, they would work together. They are scheming to destroy Jesus but with some popular backing.

Their Question

(v.16- 17)

They approach with droll irony that sounds like flattery. They are putting him on notice that how he answers their question should really reflect what he thinks. Their experience with him has made them cautious – he has constantly turned their questions back on them and publicly exposed them.

The question that is posed is designed to alienate one if not both of the groups. The tax in question is a poll-tax or a head-tax. It was hated by patriotic Jews partially because it could only be paid in Roman coinage. Hendriksen is helpful when he writes:

The tribute to which the present passage refers was a capitation tax which, after the deposition of Archelaus (A.D. 6), was collected by the procurator from every adult male in Judea, and was paid into the imperial treasury. "Is it lawful for the Jew to pay this poll-tax?" If Jesus answers "Yes," he could well be alienating not only the Zealots and Pharisees but every devout and freedom-loving Jew. If he

answers, “No,” he exposes himself to the charge of treason. So, also for this reason it was clever to arrange for a mixed committee, consisting of young Pharisees and Herodians, to question Jesus. (NTC, William Hendriksen)

So, to support the tax was to not be loyal to Israel but to not support the tax was treasonous under Roman law.

Jesus' Response

(v.18-20)

In the face of their deep malice, the practical wisdom of Jesus is put on clear display. He asks them for a coin neither of them should have been carrying. The denarius was vile in the Jewish eyes because it had an idolatrous image of the Emperor and its blasphemous inscription titling him the “Son of God”. Holding it up as the coin of the earthly realm, “Whose image and inscription is on this?” In other words, to whose kingdom does this belong? Whose kingdom are you under now? Give the honor and pay the taxes due them.

The Principle of the Kingdom

(v.21-22)

Jesus gives us the point of this confrontation. “Render to God what is His, obedience to Christ as the image of God.” Here is the true kingdom and here is the true king. We live in the kingdoms of this world. We are under their rulers. But, Israel has rejected its true king and therefore had their kingdom taken away. They have refused to render to God the honor that is due Him by acknowledging Jesus as the Promised King, the Messiah.

Everyone is awed at His cleverness but unbowed to His heavenly and divine authority.

God's Kingdom is over the Living

(v.23-33)

Matthew now parades before us, on the same day, another group ready to try to trap Jesus.

²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.’ ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.”

Their Identity

(v.23)

Here are the religious liberals of Judaism. They are secularists who do not believe many of the core doctrines of the Old Testament. They are the religious opponents to the Pharisees. Matthew, probably for the sake of his Gentile readers, points out that they do not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Their Question

(v.24-28)

So, what is up with their question? They give this long convoluted story of a woman who has the most dreadful luck with dying husbands. Now, in the resurrection (sic.) who will be her husband? They are saying, “See, the resurrection won’t work because this poor woman is going to have seven husbands.” Will Jesus defend polyandry¹⁹ in heaven?

Jesus' Response

(v.29-33)

²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

Well Jesus is straightforward with them. They are just simply wrong. They are wrong in the assumptions that underlie the question. They are wrong because of what they do not know. This is true even of religious liberalism in all its incarnations today, including the Emergents.

They do not know the Word of God and so they do not know that there is no marriage in the resurrection. Jesus is not saying that angels are sexless; they are in fact all males. Nor is He saying that we will be resurrected in bodies that will somehow be sexless. No, He has simply asserted that there will be no marriage in heaven. The reasons for marriage here will all be finalized, fulfilled and completed in the marriage supper of the lamb. In heaven, Esther and I will be brother and sister, even as we are now but not husband and wife.

They do not know the power of God and so they actually are denying the resurrection. Not knowing the Word has led them to deny the power of God. Now this is a bit more subtle. The power of God that they do not know is the resurrection power of God. In doing so, they have essentially denied the great hope of the Bible. Without the resurrection, there will be no regeneration, no eternal life, no living with God forever and no new heavens and earth.

God is God of the living, not the dead, so the resurrection is an essential feature of the kingdom. But note who Jesus is identifying Himself with. This quote is from Exodus 3:6. Listen to the stunning claim Jesus is effectively making.

¹ Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Exodus 3:1-6 (ESV)

Do you see it? They are standing in the presence of the angel of the Lord before whose burning Presence and upon whose holy ground even Moses bowed, afraid to look at God. Here is God in the flesh – Jesus, the Messiah. He is the God of the living, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So, the kingdom is taken away from those who do not know the Word of God nor the power of God. They have denied the resurrection by which the kingdom will come into existence. They have challenged instead of bowing to the God, the King, standing before them.

God's Kingdom is about God's Love**(v.34-40)**

Like the craven cowards they were, the Pharisees now send in the lawyer.

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Their Identity**(v.34)**

Here are the religious legalists who are going to try once again to entrap Jesus into saying something blasphemous against the Law. I love it – when they saw He had silenced the religious liberals, they step up with a legal question about the Old Testament Law.

Their Question**(v.35-36)**

The question was a common one among the religious conservatives and legalists. We are used to having heard Jesus on several occasions responding to different versions of this question, so we know the answer before it was asked. *They do not.* The debate centered around whether the commandment to worship God alone was the greatest because it was the first in the list or whether keeping the Sabbath was the greatest because it was in the center and was the sign of the Mosaic Old Covenant. So, Jesus is being sucked into a "when you did you stop beating your wife kind of question?" It is in effect, an artificial either-or.

Jesus' Response**(v.37-40)**

Jesus simply dismisses the argument by going to that which stood above and was the foundation of all the commandments. Love is the greatest commandment. Love for God and love for neighbor were the source and summation of all the Ten Commandments and then all the outworking of case law from the Decalogue.

Jesus' response is not limited to what is greatest among the commandments. Love God and neighbor are the foundation of the whole revelation of God, the law and the prophets. Therefore, the Law is not the point in the Kingdom. Matthew has already gone to great lengths to show how Jesus is the new Israel and the new Moses who fulfills and thus completes the Law and the Prophets. Thus, the inescapable conclusion is that standing before is the visible incarnation of God. He is to be loved with all their mind, soul, might – but they have hated, rejected and will eventually put Him to death.

The kingdom will be taken away and given to those who will love God and love neighbor as a result of believing and bowing to Jesus Christ.

God's King is the God-Man (v.41-46)

So, time for Jesus to pose the final question and bring this to a close.

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David."
⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ " 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?' ⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The Dialog (v.41-42)

What a simple question, right? Whose son is the Messiah? For any Jew who had a working familiarity with the Old Testament, the answer is obvious. The Messiah will be the son of David. His question and their answer exposes them as looking for a certain kind of kingdom and king. The kingdom will be a national and geographical kingdom with David's physical descendent, ruling over it.

His Assertion (v.43-46)

That they are thinking purely in national, geographic and physical terms is exposed by Jesus' follow up question. In effect He asks them, "How can David then refer to the Messiah as Lord, as being divine?" He grounds His question and its assertion with a reference to Psalm 110:1. Listen to the stanza that follows what He quotes:

¹ The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." ² The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

³ Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. ⁴ The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:1-4 (ESV)

In the first stanza, He points out that they have missed the fact that the Messiah is not only to be a son or descendent of David, but he will also be divine. He is addressed by Yahweh (LORD) as Adonai (Lord). He will be sitting at the right hand of God until all enemies are defeated. So the Messiah, the son of David, will be the Sovereign Lord who will rule over the true kingdom sitting on the right hand of God.

The second stanza explains why the question is important at this point in Jesus' ministry and in Matthew's book. The true people of God will come under the extended scepter of God's kingdom when they offer themselves in the day of the Messiah's power, arrayed in holy garments. What glorious poetry and what lovely truth. How sad for Israel but how grand the grace to Jew and Gentile.

Finally, the Messiah will also be the great and final High Priest, not in the Levitical order, but rather in the heavenly order of Melchizedek. So the full and final kingdom will not be Israel and the full and final priest will not be Levitical. It will all reach its grand fulfillment in this carpenter, this teacher, this man, this son of David, this one who is both God and man, this Jesus.

End of questions. But, next, great and terrible woes will fall.

Reflect and Respond

Here is the kingdom God has given to us:

God's kingdom is for His elect.

God's kingdom requires our first loyalty.

God's kingdom brings us resurrection life.

God's kingdom is expressed in love.

God's kingdom is ruled by Jesus, Christ the Lord.

Therefore, the great song of Revelation 5:9–10 (ESV)

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Notes

¹⁷ Carson, D. A. *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.

¹⁸ In spite of a massive effort by a number of contemporary writers to rehabilitate the reputation of the Pharisees, they were not the true believers of Jesus' day. Jesus' has almost universal disdain for the Pharisees. They may have been religious conservatives, but their understanding of the Old Testament caused them reject both John the Baptist and Jesus. They were regularly and roundly confronted and condemned by Jesus. Those who are attempting to say the Pharisees were simply conservative, Bible-believing Jews practicing Old Testament Judaism as it was framed *have an agenda*. They have consistently used that as a stance from which to argue for a heretical view of justification commonly called *the new perspective on Paul*. Beware!

¹⁹ While, polygamy is generally the practice of one man having multiple wives at the same time, polyandry is the practice of one woman having multiple husbands at the same time..