

CHRIST VERSUS RELIGION, POLITICS, DOCTRINES, AND LAW

Scripture Reading: Matt. 22:1-14, 15-22, 23-32, 34-40, 41-46

Matthew 22 continues the Lord's answer to the chief priests and elders who asked Him about His source and authority. He had already used two parables in answering them. In the first parable He exposed their unwillingness to repent that they might enter into the kingdom of God. In the second He revealed to them that He was the Son of God and that, after being rejected by them, in resurrection He would become the chief cornerstone for God's building, the stumbling stone to all the unbelieving Jews, and the smiting stone to all the Gentile nations at the time of His second coming.

In chapter 22 He spoke another parable in answer to the chief priests and the elders. This time He covered the ultimate point of what He is. This is the parable of the wedding feast. In the parable of the vineyard, the Lord Jesus did not use the term the kingdom of the heavens has become like, because strictly speaking, at the time of the parable of the vineyard, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. He said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing its fruit" (21:43). Even in the parable of the two sons, which described the refusal of the priests and elders to repent, the Lord did not mention the kingdom of the heavens but the kingdom of God. "The tax collectors and the harlots are going into the kingdom of God before you" (v. 31). **In those two parables the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. The kingdom of the heavens begins with the parable of the wedding feast in chapter 22.**

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

The parable begins in this way: "The kingdom of the heavens has become like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son" (v. 2). It is quite evident that **the son here is Jesus Christ**. As the Bridegroom, He is the center of the wedding feast. **God has prepared a marriage feast, and Christ is its center**. According to the parable, God sent forth slaves to invite people to the wedding feast, meaning to invite them into the enjoyment of the kingdom. **The first group of servants were those sent by the Lord Jesus—the twelve and the seventy** (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1). **After this, He was killed, and as the ox and the fatted calf, He was cooked and prepared for the wedding feast. After this killing and preparation, that is, after the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and after Pentecost, another group of servants were sent to proclaim the kingdom and to invite people to come into the enjoyment of the kingdom.** Peter and John were among this group of servants. Some of those who heard were preoccupied with fields and business and made light of the invitation, while others abused and killed His slaves. God was angered and sent His troops to destroy the city. According to history, this occurred around A.D. 70, when the Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, thus fulfilling the prophecy that "there shall by no means be left here a stone upon a stone, which shall not be thrown down" (24:2). The whole city of Jerusalem was destroyed. God then sent more servants to the crossroads. **This means that God sent many servants to the Gentile world, to all the earth,** inviting people to come into the enjoyment of the kingdom.

The center of this parable is Christ Himself. The elders and the priests had asked Him, "Who gave You this authority?" (21:23). Through the parable the Lord Jesus was saying that **He is the center of the universe. He is the Bridegroom who has been designated by God the Father as the center of the universal wedding feast.** He is not only the Son of God, the cornerstone, the stumbling stone,

and the smiting stone, but He is also the Bridegroom at the universal wedding feast. He is the very center of God's economy. This is the central point of this parable and part of the answer to the question regarding His authority and source. The Lord is the Bridegroom. No one is more important at a wedding feast than the bridegroom. Even the father who prepared the wedding feast is not as important as the bridegroom. Christ as the Bridegroom is the center, the focus, of all God's economy. Thus, He has everything, including authority and position. We all must realize that Christ is the focus and center of God's economy for our enjoyment.

THE WEDDING GARMENT

We have been invited to the wedding feast. We have been called, and we did not reject that calling. **However, although we have accepted the invitation and have come, this does not in itself mean that we are qualified to participate in the wedding feast.** After being called, we need a wedding garment. What is this wedding garment? **In the Bible garments and clothing signify our righteousness.** In some verses, such as Luke 15:22, garments signify Christ as our righteousness. However, in Matthew 22:11-12 and in Revelation 19:8, **the wedding garment signifies the practical righteousnesses of the saints.** According to Psalm 45, the queen who typifies the church has two garments. One signifies Christ Himself as our righteousness, and the other signifies our practical daily walk as our covering garment. We were clothed with Christ when we were saved. **Christ as our righteousness qualifies us to be justified for salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). But after being saved and justified, we need to live out Christ as our practical righteousness. This is the overcoming life.** When we were saved and justified, we **put on Christ** as our righteousness. Because we are covered by Christ as our righteousness, we are justified. Once we are justified, however, we need to **live out Christ**. We need to live by Christ in order that Christ can be lived out of us. Christ lived out of us will become our practical righteousness to cover us. This is the second aspect of righteousness, which is not necessary for salvation but which qualifies us to attend and participate in the wedding feast. **The wedding feast refers to the millennium, the one-thousand-year reign with Christ** (Rev. 20:4-6). Christ's wedding feast will not last twenty-four hours; it will last one thousand years. Only those who have a wedding garment will participate in that wedding feast.

To be saved we only need to have Christ as our righteousness covering us in the presence of God. Concerning this point we must be very clear. Christ is our righteousness by which we are justified. However, we should not think that all the problems are now solved. **To be saved is one thing, but to be matured and saturated with Christ is another. We must go on to live by Christ, and not only to live by Him but to live Him out, to manifest Him. We need to express Christ by continually living by Christ. The very Christ whom we live out in this way will be our wedding garment, our practical righteousness.** When we come to God for justification, we simply take Christ as our righteousness. However, at that point we have only received Christ; we have not yet experienced Him. In order to attend the wedding feast we need to experience the Christ whom we have received. Christ must become our experience. When Christ has become our experience, He will be the subjective, experiential righteousness that qualifies us to attend the wedding feast.

Matthew 22:14 says, "Many are called but few are chosen." Here we see again the two steps. To be called is one thing; to be chosen or selected is another. To be called means to be saved. Whether or not we are chosen, that is, qualified for the wedding feast, is something pending. Christianity mostly preaches to people about being called but hardly mentions anything about the Lord's selection. But both Matthew 22:14 and Revelation 17:14 mention the matter of being called and of being chosen. I have no doubt that all of us are called. However, I have a real concern as to how

many of the called ones will be selected. We have been called for salvation, but we must be selected for the wedding feast. For example, all the students in a school may graduate, but not everyone will receive a prize. This does not mean that if you do not receive a prize you do not graduate. You may graduate and yet not have a prize. **Whether or not we participate in the one-thousand-year wedding feast on that wonderful, universal wedding day depends upon one thing: whether or not we live out Christ today.**

Once again we see that Christ is the center. Many people claim to be Christ-centered, but I am afraid they may be Christ-centered in a very shallow way. We need to be Christ-centered in such a way that Christ will be not only our righteousness for us to be saved, but He will also be lived out in us as our subjective righteousness to qualify us for His wedding feast. We all need to realize Christ, and we all need to experience Christ. We should experience Christ to such an extent that He will become our wedding garment. Christ will then be our qualification, and the Father will recognize us as qualified for the wedding feast.

The parable of the wedding feast completes the answer to the question: “Who gave You this authority?” (Matt. 21:23). The Lord Jesus revealed much through these parables. In effect, He was saying, **“I am the Son of God. I will be the resurrected cornerstone for God’s building. I will also be the stumbling block to you unbelieving Jews and the smiting stone to the entire Gentile world. You must realize that I am the universal Bridegroom, the center of God’s economy. You should not only receive Me but also live Me out. You need to experience Me to such an extent that I will become your subjective righteousness, which will qualify you to participate in the wedding feast.”**

THE PHARISEES AND THE HERODIANS

Although the Lord Jesus spoke in such a clear way, those foolish ones did not understand at all, and the Pharisees and the Herodians still tried to trap Him. The Pharisees were a **religious party**, and the Herodians were a **political party**. These two parties customarily fought against one another, but on this occasion they cooperated in an attempt to entangle Christ (22:15-21). The answers of the Lord Jesus in the parables were centered and focused on Himself. However, the Pharisees and Herodians did not hear a word concerning Christ because they were preoccupied by their concepts and by their evil thoughts of persecution. They considered themselves very clever, so they conceived a plot to trap the Lord Jesus. They asked Him, “Tell us therefore, What do You think? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” (v. 17). This was their strategy: if the Lord said yes, then the Pharisees would catch Him, but if He said no, the Herodians would catch Him. Either way, they thought, He would be caught. However, the Lord Jesus was wiser than these evil men and defeated their plan. The Pharisees and Herodians thought they were wiser than the Lord, but they did not know that He was their Creator and that they were simply His little creatures. The Lord Jesus said, “Show Me the coin for the tribute” (v. 19). They gave Him a coin, and as they did so, they lost their case. The Lord Jesus was very wise. He did not have the money; they did. Regardless of whether or not it is lawful to pay the tribute, as long as they had the money, it means they were the ones who had been caught. We are all familiar with the Lord’s answer: “Render then the things that are Caesar’s to Caesar and the things that are God’s to God” (v. 21). Although they had worked so hard to trap Him, it was easy for the Lord Jesus to escape.

We must see that it is not a matter of religion or politics; it is altogether a matter of Christ. We must take care of Christ and not be preoccupied with our own concepts. If we are preoccupied with our

concepts, we will not be able to receive Christ when He is presented to us. We need to be empty; Christ can then come into us.

THE SADDUCEES

Next to confront the Lord Jesus were the Sadducees, the ancient modernists, who raised a question concerning resurrection. They said that a man married a wife and died without having any children. According to Jewish custom and the law of Moses, the woman then married the man's brother (Deut. 25:5-6). He also died without having any children. The same thing happened to a total of seven brothers. So the Sadducees asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection. The Sadducees felt that they were smart, and they were confident that they had trapped Him. However, the Lord rebuked them by saying, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:29-30). In that day there will be no husbands and no wives. "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, **'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'**? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 31-32). Since He is the God of the living, surely Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected. If not, God would be the God of the dead. This answer fully shut their mouths. Who can defeat the Lord Jesus?

A LAWYER

Following this, a lawyer who was an expert in the law of Moses, assured that he could defeat the Lord Jesus, asked Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (v. 36). To this the Lord Jesus answered clearly and simply, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'...And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"** (vv. 37, 39). At this answer the lawyer's mouth also was shut.

The Lord Jesus answered every question. He silenced the priests, the elders, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the lawyer. Then the Lord Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think concerning the Christ?" (v. 42). The Lord seemed to be saying, **"You have questioned Me about religion, politics, fundamental beliefs, and the law. You have missed the mark. These are not the central point. The mark is Christ. What do you think about Christ? Tell Me, whose descendant is Christ?"** They had some knowledge of the Scriptures and answered promptly that Christ is the son of David. The Lord acknowledged their answer as correct but then asked them, "How then does David in spirit call Him Lord?" (v. 43). In other words, how could the grandfather call the grandson "Lord"? Once again, every mouth was shut.

THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

Let us consider the same question. How could the grandfather call the grandson "Lord"? **It is because Christ has two natures.** On the one hand, Christ is the son of David, and on the other hand, He is the Lord of David. He is a human being, a man, and according to His human nature, He is the descendant of David, the son of David. However, the Lord Jesus is not so simple. He is wonderful! He is not only a human being; He is also a divine being. He has the human nature, and He has the divine nature. He is a man, and He is God. As a man, He is the son of David. As God, He is the Lord of David. The poor Pharisees and Sadducees did not see that **the Lord Jesus was such a wonderful person—both man and God. He is such a wonderful person, having humanity as well as divinity.**

But even more of Christ is revealed in this portion of the Word. Christ is also presented as the resurrected, ascended, and coming One. Matthew 22:44, a quotation from Psalm 110, says, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand.” For the Lord Jesus to sit at the right hand of God means that He has been resurrected and has ascended into the heavens. Then Psalm 110 continues by saying, “Until I put Your enemies underneath Your feet” (Matt. 22:44). This refers to His second coming. At the second coming of Christ, God will put all His enemies under His feet and make them His footstool. **Here we see a wonderful Christ: He has humanity and divinity; He is the resurrected One, the ascended One, and the coming One. This Christ is the center of God’s purpose and economy.** However, many Christians are like those poor Jews who were discussing religion, politics, and the interpretation of the Bible. They take care of the secondary items and miss the central item, which is Christ. They miss the Christ who is man and God, the crucified One, the resurrected One, the One raised to the third heaven, the One sitting at the right hand of God, and the One who will return to subdue all His enemies. This Christ is the central item.

The Lord Jesus revealed Himself to His opposers, but none of them saw the vision because they were filled with their indignation against Him. They were entirely preoccupied with other things. They simply could not hear a word about Christ as the center. Today the situation is the same. I have met a good number of dear Christians who had become fully preoccupied with their own things and were quite disturbed concerning the Lord’s recovery. When they talked with us, they could not receive even one word. They were absolutely confident that they were right and we were wrong. They did not offer the smallest space or the slightest opening to receive our word. **We must see that in the kingdom of God there is no ground for religion, politics, or doctrine. In the kingdom every inch of the ground is for Christ. In the church, in the Lord’s recovery, and in the reality of the kingdom, every inch is for Christ.**

If we summarize all the points from the last chapter and from this chapter, we will see **Christ with God’s building.** We also will see **the vain and wasted words of those who opposed the Lord Jesus.** Christ is the Son of God, the chief cornerstone for the building of the church, the stumbling stone, and the smiting stone. To the church Christ is the cornerstone, to the unbelieving Jews He is the stumbling stone, and to the Gentile world He will be the smiting stone. He is also the Bridegroom, the center of the wedding feast. In addition, He is the very element of the wedding garment, which qualifies us to share in the wedding feast. We must experience such a Christ. He is both God and man. He has been crucified, has been resurrected, and has ascended to the right hand of God, where He is waiting until all His enemies are subdued. In all the local churches we simply need this Christ. In the local church Christ is the center, the hub, and the church is the rim. The Lord’s recovery is Christ and the church. This is the kingdom. We do not want to hear anything about religion, politics, doctrines, or the interpretation of the Scriptures. We simply care for Christ.

(The Kingdom, Chapter 30)