

Every teacher knows there's a time to stop talking and start listening. One of the best ways of doing this is by holding a time of question and answer. It's in those "Q & A" times, a teacher learns what's going on in the minds of those who listen and if people are getting it. But sometimes we discover people come with their own agenda. They've come not so much to listen and learn, but to fit us into their own box, to get us to endorse their cause, or just to get us in trouble. This a time-honored strategy in political campaigns. Ask questions that force a candidate to take a stand on an issue that alienates him or her from a certain group. Keep doing that until he's got no supporters left at all. These people aren't there to learn but to expose.

Sometimes we come to Jesus with our own agenda; our own set of assumptions. None of us comes as a blank slate. We come with our own opinions and causes formed by our experiences. We want Jesus to line up with our cause, and we'll even stretch the meaning of his words to do just that.

That's what's happening in Matthew 22. Jesus was engaged in a kind of Q & A time, but the ones raising their hand had their own agenda. They were not open to the truth. They did not want to learn. They wanted to destroy him. So, they came with questions designed to bring him down. This passage forces us to ask: Have I come to Christ with my own agenda? What box am I trying to get him to fit into? More importantly, how does Jesus respond to us when we do that? What does he reveal about himself and his mission with which we must decide what to do?

We come to Jesus with a political agenda

In the first encounter, Jesus was approached by an unlikely alliance of Pharisees and Herodians. This is like a delegation of liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans coming together. They despised each other. The Pharisees seethed under Rome's occupation of Palestine. They dreamed of revolution, but the Herodians supported the status quo. They had compromised with Rome to attain power and wealth. But, because of their common hatred of Jesus, these two groups united. Look what happened.

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't 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?" vv. 15-17

This was the perfect set up. If there was ever a question to put a man between a rock and a hard place, it's this. If he said pay the tax, the Jewish people would brand him a traitor to Rome. They hated this tax. It had to be paid in Roman coinage stamped with the idolatrous image of Caesar, calling him "the son of a god." It was a constant reminder of their own subjection to idolaters. And no one likes taxes, right? Even if you love your government, you don't want to pay taxes. That's why eighteen percent of Americans admit they cheat on their taxes. But, if he said not to pay the tax, he'd be branded as a revolutionary. They'd tattle on him to the authorities and Rome did not tolerate such people. How did Jesus get out of this? Before he spoke, Matthew said,

"Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?'" (v. 18).

He saw through the whole thing. Then he asked them something.

Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. vv. 19-21a

He asks them to produce a coin and tell him whose image it bears. After they brought the coin and told him it bore Caesar's image, Jesus said:

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. vv. 21b-22

This is one of the most well-known things Jesus ever said; it reveals his absolute brilliance. Think about it: "Give back (like paying back a debt) to Caesar what is Caesar's." The coin has Caesar's name and image on it, so give it back to him; it's obviously his. Since you're enjoying some of the benefits of Caesar's government, give him his due. As God's people, you still have an obligation to the government, even if it's evil. Jesus didn't have a political agenda when it came to overthrowing Rome.

What about us? We may not always agree with the government, but we do have an obligation to it. We enjoy some of the benefits of the state, so we should support it through our tax dollars. We should obey the laws of the state insofar as they don't force us to disobey a command of God. Of course, we're also blessed to live in a democracy where we can participate in the political process. So, we should vote, stay informed, and pray for those God has placed over us.

But Jesus didn't leave it at that. It was not enough to give back to Caesar what was his; he also said to give back "...to God what is God's." This was a subtle yet powerful protest against the idolatrous claims of Caesar. Caesar wasn't God; his rule was limited. He could regulate their conduct to a degree, but he could not control their spirit. The government has domain over certain aspects of our lives, but its domain is limited. Give God his due. What is that? Think of it this way, Caesar's image is on the coin, but whose image is stamped on us? We're created in the image of God. We belong to him. He deserves our deepest affections and ultimate loyalty. We worship only him. We put our hopes in him alone.

Here's what to remember: It doesn't matter what your political agenda is, Jesus doesn't buy into it. You can't come to him on your own terms. If you think we need a political revolution, he doesn't buy-in. If you think we need to put our hope in maintaining the status quo, he doesn't buy-in. Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36). Jesus will establish a kingdom, not through politics but through the cross. When you come to Jesus with your own agenda, he never cooperates, he never signs your petition; instead, he invites you to follow him to the cross and die to yourself.

We come to Jesus with a rationalist agenda

In the second encounter, Jesus was approached by a different group called the Sadducees. This was a group made up of priestly families. They tended to be worldly and wealthy. They rejected many of the teachings of the Pharisees; their main concern was to maintain their own privileges. They came to Jesus with their own agenda.

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" vv. 23-28

Matthew said right away they didn't believe in the resurrection. In essence, they denied the afterlife, specifically the resurrection of the body. Remember, Jesus already predicted his own resurrection from the dead, so if they're right, he was a crock. They based this on their belief that only the first five books of the Old Testament are inspired, and as far as they could see, those books said nothing about the afterlife. In a sense, the Sadducees were the rationalists of their day. Acts 23:8 said they didn't believe in the resurrection, angels, and spirits. They were the guys who

said, "Don't put your hope in pie in the sky; live in the here and now."

They come with a hypothetical case designed to make anyone who believed in the resurrection look ridiculous. They built their case around a law in the book of Deuteronomy 25:5-6, which said if a man died without a son, his brother had an obligation to marry his widow and raise up a son for him so his name wouldn't be snuffed out forever. This was the Sadducees' version of the resurrection. You only continue on through your descendants. So they paint a wild scenario where a woman has seven husbands who die one after another, none of whom are able to raise up a son for their dead brothers. It's kinda like Snow White and the Seven Dwarves! But finally the woman dies, probably from exhaustion, and the Sadducees want to know whose wife she'll be in the resurrection. I'll bet they snickered after they asked this. How would he answer this one? Given the ridiculous nature of the question, it's amazing Jesus took it seriously. Look what he said,

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. vv. 29-30

He went right for the jugular. He said they were "in error" because they didn't understand the Scriptures or the power of God. Usually, our false assumptions about life boil down to one of these two things. Maybe we read the Scripture, as the Sadducees did, but we do so with our own set of glasses on and we miss this truth. Or maybe we fail to know the power of God — that he's more powerful than death and can raise us up.

Notice, Jesus said at the resurrection people "neither marry nor are given in marriage, they'll be like angels in heaven." The Sadducees projected their narrow categories of this life into the next, but Jesus said it's all different in heaven. There's no marriage; we're like angels. This doesn't mean we won't have bodies, we know from other Scripture we will, but we'll be like angels in that angels don't marry or reproduce. There's no death in heaven, so there's no need for procreation.

If you're married, it may be hard to imagine your spouse won't be as such in heaven, but it might help to remember that together we'll be the bride of Christ. Look at it this way: there's something greater, deeper and better than our own marriage and sexuality. Hollywood makes us think sexuality is the greatest thing in life. Movies about heaven always include some sort of ongoing sexuality or romance. But Jesus says that's not a big enough vision for the resurrection. Your sexuality is a dim mirror of something more glorious in heaven; something which will bring you far more joy, pleasure, and security. Whatever joy you've found in your marriage, it'll be transcended by your relationship as the bride of Christ.

If you're not married, this may be good news for you. Perhaps you feel like second-class citizens. Maybe you wonder if you'll feel that way in heaven as well. Everybody will be running around up there with their spouses while you're left out again. But Jesus said you won't be left out of anything. There's no being single in heaven because we're all married to Him. And in a sense, you can now to live out that devotion to Christ as his bride that we'll all experience later on.

But Jesus wasn't finished. He turned to Scripture to defend the idea of resurrection. Look at what he said.

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." vv. 31-32.

Jesus went back to when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush. Notice he didn't doubt the veracity of the Old Testament but takes it for granted. His logic is simple: God's statement to Moses was in the present tense: "I AM the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." That doesn't make any sense if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob aren't alive. If someone says to you, "I was your mother's best friend" it may be because your mother is dead or somehow the relationship has changed. But if they say, "I am your mother's best friend," the assumption is she's still alive. That's why Jesus said, "He's not the God of the dead but of the living."

Once again Jesus' answer was brilliant and wise, Matthew said the crowds "were astonished at his teaching." But here's what to remember: You may come to him as a rationalist with your own agenda. You might think you know better than to believe lies about the afterlife. You might try to make Jesus into nothing more than a great teacher — forget all the supernatural stuff. But Jesus doesn't buy into it. In fact, in just a few short days Jesus would prove that. After being crucified, he'd be raised from the dead and appear to his disciples. He said, "Look, it's me. See my hands. Touch my side." When you come to Jesus with your own agenda, he never cooperates, he never signs your petition; instead, he invites you to believe in the Scripture and the power of God.

We come to Jesus with a religious agenda

In the third encounter, the Pharisees send an expert in Jewish law with a question often discussed among rabbis. Look what he asked.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" vv. 34-36.

This guy has a religious agenda. The Pharisees counted no less than 613 commands in the law. They believed they all needed to

be kept. No doubt they felt Jesus was a lightweight when it came to the law. He didn't keep all their Sabbath rules. He didn't observe their rules about washings and food. So, again, he was setting Jesus up. In his answer, we again see Jesus' biblical wisdom.

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." vv. 37-40

Jesus combined two Old Testament Scriptures. The first from Deuteronomy: love the Lord your God with your whole being. The second from Leviticus: love your neighbor as yourself. These have one thing in common: love. Jesus said, "If you boil everything down, you're left with love. If you want to know the one thing to do, which will allow everything else to fall into place, it's love — love God and love your neighbor."

Think about that. The essence, the core, the bottom line is love. It doesn't mean the other commandments can be disregarded, but they all boil down to this. It starts with love for God. This tells us something about God. God is personal. He's not a "force" or some kind of cosmic consciousness. You don't love a force; you love a person. This person we call God, desires to be in relationship with us. He wants our love, affection, and devotion. We can go to church, read the Bible, pray, tithe, share our faith (all good things to do), but God wants our heart more than tasks. Notice he doesn't just want a part of us. He wants all of us — heart, soul, and mind. You can't just give a part of yourself to God. You can't tithe your love for him. He wants the totality of your being.

The enemy of this kind of love is fragmentation. Ask yourself: What are the pieces of my life that don't reflect a wholehearted love for God? How about my career? My thought life? My leisure time? My relationships? My speech? The point isn't to become more religious but to welcome God into every area and learn to love him in all those places.

Notice love for God and love for neighbor go hand in hand. You can't love God and ignore the needs of people because they're made in the image of God. If you want to know how much you love God, look at your relationships. Love for God must proceed love for neighbor, but it never negates it or isolates us from our neighbors. By the way, loving your neighbor as you love yourself isn't promoting self-love, it's just an acknowledgment it's normal to look out for ourselves. Jesus said, "Look out for others the way you naturally look out for yourself."

We might wonder how we can keep these commands? Boiling the law down doesn't make it easier. Loving God and neighbor do not come naturally to us. In fact, we're all bent in the other direction — in towards ourselves! It's really only possible when we see the bigger picture of why Jesus came. The cross is the way Jesus kept these two commandments, and the cross is the

way we can learn to keep them as well. Through the cross, we see God's immense, unconditional, and costly love for us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). And through the cross, we're given new life as the Spirit of God comes to make his home within us.

Some of us come to Jesus with a religious agenda. We know how a real believer should act. Anyone who falls short, we judge. But Jesus doesn't buy in. You can't follow him on your own terms. If you think we need 613 rules, he doesn't buy in. But if you think you get to make your own rules, he doesn't buy into that either. Jesus will not establish his kingdom through religion or morality but through love demonstrated on the cross. When you come to Jesus with your own agenda, he never cooperates, he never signs your petition; but he invites you to follow him to the cross.

Three times Jesus is asked a loaded question. It's like in a tennis match. His opponents have smashed three stunning serves, but each serve was met with an even better return that won the point. But, now it's Jesus' turn to serve, and as we'll see it is a clean ace.

Jesus comes to us with his own agenda — his Lordship

He asked a question of his own directed to the Pharisees.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. vv. 41-42

It's a question about who the Messiah is. They believed he'd be the son (descendant) of David. This was true. God made a promise to David that one of his descendants would always be on the throne. But then, Jesus asked another question.

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?" vv. 43-45

He quoted Psalm 110 and asked, "If David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" Fathers don't normally address their sons as Lord. But David saw something —one of his descendants enthroned to a place of such high honor it'd only be appropriate to call him Lord.

Jesus was challenging their inadequate view of Messiah. They saw him as the "Son of David," which he was. But to them it meant he'd be a mighty warrior and rule over a political kingdom like David. But Jesus said the Messiah would be much more than that; he wouldn't just restore David's kingdom, he'd

establish a universal kingdom and rule from that throne at God's right hand. His triumph wouldn't just be over Rome, but over sin, death, and the devil. It wouldn't come through political revolution but through the cross and resurrection.

Verse 46 said they silently walked away, not daring to ask another question. After the first question, they were amazed. After the second, they were astonished. He'd shown the ability to think deeply and creatively about politics, theology, and philosophy. Now they were just silenced.

"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Romans 8:34)

Not these guys. They dropped their agenda, and so should we. We're left with this: If David called Him Lord, why don't you? If David could see the future and bow to the authority of his own descendant son, why can't you see what is right in front of your face and bow before the authority of the transcendent Son of God? That's the real question for us. That's his agenda. Will you call Him your Lord? Will you give in to His power and authority in your life? It's fashionable these days to be cool with a human Jesus, to see Him as a good man or a wise prophet. But Jesus presses in and asks each of us: Will you surrender to Him as Lord of your life? Will you live by his agenda?

When we brought our first child home from the hospital, we put her in the car seat in the back of our brown Honda Civic, and I got in the front seat to drive. She looked like a peanut in that car seat. I think I drove home going 15 miles per hour! That first day with your child in the car with you is a scary day. Do you know what the next really scary day is with your kid in the car? It's when they turn 16 and go from the passenger seat to the driver's seat. That's scary. It is a big moment when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, you've been driving. You choose the destination, the route, and the speed. But if you're going to change seats and let someone else drive, you have to trust them. It's all about control. Whoever is in the driver seat is the person in control.

A lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as he's in the passenger seat, because something may come up where they require his services. "Jesus, I have a problem, and I need some help. I want you in the car, but I'm not so sure I want you driving." If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge anymore. If he's driving, I'm not in charge of my money, my career, or my tongue anymore. I don't get to gossip, flatter, deceive, rage, manipulate, or exaggerate. I have to get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys to him. It's scary. Will you hand over the keys to him? Will you surrender to Him as Lord of your life? Will you live by his agenda?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1434-43FC