"Wisdom"
Matthew 22:15-46
The Orchard Barrington – September 26/26, 2026

Introduction

Let's keep our Bibles open right there at Matthew 22.
- We've got a long passage today,
- but I trust you can see how it all fits together.

These verses record a series of questions Jesus receives from various religious leaders.

It's like Jesus has been teaching in the Temple (on this Confrontation Tuesday)
- and now microphones are placed in the aisles,
- and people line up for Q&A.

However, as we'll see,
- they are not honestly seeking to learn from Jesus,
- they are trying to take him down.

They are trying to trap him in his words,
- to make him look foolish,
- and to prove he's not worthy of the popularity and prominence he has attained.

But Jesus withstands them all.

In verse 22 we're told that people marveled at Jesus's response.
- In verse 33 we read how they were astonished at his teaching.
- And in verse 46 we read how all his opponents fell silent
- and no one dared to ask him any more questions.

This is a passage puts the wisdom of Jesus on display.

Particularly, as we see him responding to these questions,
- we see Jesus's wisdom regarding
- politics, theology, and ethics.

These are certainly areas where we can use wisdom today!

So, let's glean some practical counsel from Jesus on these important matters.

But let's not stop there.

As we behold the wisdom of Christ, I'm praying this will bolster our faith in Christ,
- strengthen our devotion to Christ,
- and fuel our worship of Christ.

Look with me at the first question that comes to Jesus, and how his answer reveals his…

1. Political Wisdom

We'll pick it up in verse 15: *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.* (v.15)

Notice the Pharisees intent:
- They are not coming to learn from Jesus;
- they are trying to entangle him in his words.

And they've come up with what they believe is a shrewd strategy.

Verse 16-17: *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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"* (vv.16-17)

First, they try to butter Jesus up with flattery…

They call him teacher—though they have no desire to learn from him.
- They claim his words are true and godly—when they actually believe the opposite.
- They commend him for his courage and his refusal to give in to people pleasing.

Then they ask their question: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?

That's a loaded question.
- With major consequences if Jesus says "yes,"
- and even more if he says "no."

Beginning in the year 6 AD,
- Rome imposed taxes on the citizens of Jerusalem,
- taxes that many zealous Israelites considered oppressive.

In fact, the tax had already incited a revolt that Rome needed to squash.

So, if Jesus said,
- "Yes, it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar,"
- he would risk alienating many of his people.

But, if Jesus said, "No,"
- then he would risk aligning with the Zealots
- and facing the wrath of Rome.

This was the Pharisees plot: However Jesus answers, they believe they will win.
- Either by crushing Jesus's popularity,
- or by getting him in trouble with Rome and potentially killed.

But Jesus sees right through their plan.

Look at verses 18-21: *But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 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."* (vv.18-21)

This is genius.

Jesus asks for a coin.
- The Pharisees bring him a denarius—
- a coin with Caesar's image stamped upon it.

But that's not all that was on this coin.
- A Roman denarius had an inscription that said,
- "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus."

You see, the Caesar of Jesus's day—Tiberius—claimed to be the son of God.

And just looking at a coin would have reminded any Israelite
- of the false worship wrapped up
- in the heart of the Roman Empire.

But think about this: Israelites still used the coins!
- One of the Pharisees just pulled one out of his pocket!
- Why?

Because human governments—
- though deeply flawed and sometimes flagrant in their rebellion against God—
- still serve an important purpose in our world.

They are a part of God's common grace,
- meant to hold back evil
- and promote human flourishing.

And Rome—as depraved as it was—
- provided currency, roads, water access, security,
- and many other good things to the people among its vast empire.

Therefore, Jesus has no problem saying, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

And the word he uses, which is translated "render,"
- is the same word translated "pay" in Romans 13:7,
- where Paul says,

Pay *to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.* (Rom. 13:7)

In Romans 13, Paul is talking about human government.

He is talking about Rome.

And he says it's right for Christians to give them taxes, respect, and even honor!

Here's a clear application for us today:

Despite the obvious flaws,
- imperfections,
- and even sins of our governing authorities…

We are to render to them what they are owed…
- including our taxes…
- our respect…
- and our honor for the good they do.

But, at the same time, don't miss the last thing Jesus says here.

Matthew 22:21: "*Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* (v.21)

Here's his point:
- governments are useful,
- but they are not ultimate!

And our greatest respect
- and our highest honor
- and our final allegiance must always be given to God and to God alone!

Which means,
- if the government says, "Pay the tax."
- God's people say, "Ok."

But, if the government commands anything
- that contradicts God's word,
- God's people say, "No way!"

Because governments are useful, but they are not ultimate.

This is political wisdom that comes from Jesus.
- And verse 22 says,
- *When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.* (v.22)

But the questions keep coming.

And the next question provides Jesus an opportunity to display his…

2. Theological Wisdom

Verses 23-24: *The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.'* (vv.23-24)

Like the Pharisees, the Sadducees were religious leaders in 1st century Israel,
- but unlike the Pharisees,
- the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection after death.

At some point, I learned to keep these groups straight in my mind by remembering,
- "Sadducees don't believe there's a resurrection,
- which is why they are so sad, you see."

Now, I don't think they were actually sad about their position.
- If anything, they come across a bit snobby about it.
- And it's their intent to make Jesus look foolish for his confidence in the resurrection.

They do this by picking up on an Old Testament Law, from Deuteronomy 25,
- that says if a man dies without children,
- his brother should ensure the family line continues by marrying the widow.

The Sadducees take this biblical principle, and apply it to the following scenario…

Verses 25-28: *Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. So too the second and third, down to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."* (vv.25-28)

They must have thought, "We've got him!
- If Jesus wants to maintain his position on the resurrection,
- he's going to have to embrace a sort of eternal polygamy!"

But Jesus isn't stumped by their question.
- He isn't even fazed.
- Look at verse 29:

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. (v.29)

This probably raised some eyebrows.
- How can Jesus tell these religious leaders
- they don't know God's power or God's word?

Well, regarding God's power… Jesus is effectively saying,

"Do you really think that God is so weak and incompetent
- that he could not resurrect people into a life
- without the sort of complication involved in your scenario?"

In fact, Jesus puts the whole issue to rest in verse 30
- when he says,
- *For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.* (v.30)

In his power, God will bring his people into a resurrection life
- that is certainly similar to the life we know now,
- but also far better.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul compares it to the difference between a seed and fully-grown plant.
- There's continuity,
- but the final form is so much greater.

And in the resurrection, our experience of human relationships
- will surpass even the greatest marital love anyone could ever know in this life.
- And marriage itself will be no more.

I confess, that is hard to comprehend.
- How could heaven be heaven if I wasn't married to Kristen?
- I don't know.

But I know this:
- God is powerful enough to make it happen.
- And if he says it will happen, I trust him.

But the Sadducees did not know the power of God.

And, Jesus says, they did not know the Scriptures!

They don't believe there's a resurrection of the dead,
- even though the Bible clearly proclaims it,
- including the Old Testament—which is the Bible the Sadducees had.

Jesus could have referenced any number of passages to prove his point.

He could have read Isaiah 26:19, which says, *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!* (Isa. 26:19)

He could have read Daniel 12:2, which says, *Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* (Dan. 12:2)

But the Sadducees had a special regard
- for the first five books of the Old Testament,
- so Jesus chooses a passage from Exodus 3.

He says, *And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: '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."* (vv.31-32)

How does that prove the resurrection?

Because God says, "I *am* the God of Abraham…"
- Not, "I *was*."
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are very much alive!

And so are all of God's people.

That's wonderful news.
- That's the reason for our hope in the face of death.
- But notice where this theology comes from…

It does not come from human reason. It comes from God's Word.

The Sadducees were wrong because they did not know the Scriptures.
- And therefore, if we want to know the truth…
- we need to know the Scriptures!

We need to open the Bible,
- and pay careful attention to everything God says,
- because even the tense of a verb may be loaded with meaning!

We need to allow the Word of God to shape all our thoughts and all our beliefs.

After all, that's theology.
- It's thoughts about God.
- And everyone has thoughts about God.

Therefore, everyone is a theologian.
- The question is,
- is your theology good or is it bad.

And in his wisdom, Jesus is showing us the way to the truth is right here in this book.

And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. (v.33)

They are astonished by his wisdom!
- His political wisdom.
- His theological wisdom.
- And next, his…

3. Ethical Wisdom

Look at verses 34-36: *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"* (vv.34-36)

You've got to hand it to these Pharisees; they're not giving up.
- He's answered the last two questions with wisdom
- that left people marveling and astonished.

But maybe third time's a charm?

So, they send a lawyer.
- Not an attorney—
- but an expert in the Law.

And he asks Jesus a seemingly impossible question:
- What is *the* great commandment in the Law?
- Of the 613 commands in the Old Testament, which one is the most important?

It's an ethical question.
- And scholars believe this was probably a source of real discussion in Jesus's day,
- but also, a debate that had never been definitively settled.

So, they bring the question to Jesus,
- to test him,
- and to prove to the astonished crowds that he can't answer every question…

But once again,
- Jesus isn't thrown off,
- and he offers a clear and confident response.

Verses 37-40: *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. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

Here's the wisdom:
- When it comes to biblical ethics…
- when it comes to God's commands…

In a sense, all you need is love.

Because, if you love God
- with all your heart, soul, and mind…
- you will honor him with all your life!

But the opposite is also true:
- if love is lacking,
- whatever you may do for God is of no real value.

Brothers and sisters, we must never forget this.
- God is after our hearts.
- Our lives only honor him if we love him.

A couple years ago,
- our pastoral team was at a conference where Pastor John Piper was speaking,
- and he brought this point home in a very fresh way…

He told us how he asked Chat GPT to craft a 30 second prayer
- "in praise to the glory of God's grace,"
- and he read it to us.

Here's what Chat GPT came up with.

Gracious Father, we bow before you, the sovereign Lord of history and redemption. From eternity past you purposed to lavish grace upon undeserving sinners through the blood of your beloved Son. We praise you for the glory of your mercy, unearned, unmeasured, made manifest in Christ crucified and risen. May our lives, redeemed and sanctified by your Spirit be vessels of praise to the riches of your grace. To you be glory forever and ever. Amen.

That's Chat GPT!

- But then Piper asked, "Is that praise?"
- And his answer was emphatic: No![1]

Because God is not honored by mere words!

- Computers can create words.
- And people can say all kinds of things.

But God is honored by people who love him, with all their heart, soul, and mind!

Friend, is that you?

If you're answer is no, not at all.

- Here's the good news:
- God can change your heart.

One of the greatest gifts of Christ is a new heart.

- He takes away our heart of stone,
- that feels no affection for God.

And replaces it with a heart of flesh.

- A heart that wells up in praise and devotion
- by the power of his own Spirit.

Ask him to give you this kind of heart!

And maybe you'd say,

- I do love God,
- but not as much as I wish I did.

Well, welcome to the Christian life.

- None of us does this perfectly.
- Which is why we need his grace every day.

And that grace,

- which changed our hearts when we first believed,
- continues to transform our hearts throughout our lives.

So, ask Jesus to enlarge your affections for God.

- And for his people too.
- Notice Jesus references a second great commandment here.

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIMZH7DEPPQ

Verses 37-40: *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. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it:* ***<u>You shall love your neighbor as yourself.</u>*** *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

This is the foundation of Jesus's ethical wisdom as it relates to human relationships.

It's not always clear what the best way is to help someone, to serve someone.

But here's what we know:
- If we love that person…
- that spouse… that child… that neighbor… that coworker… that friend… that enemy…

If we are asking God to help us love them…
- that will take us very far
- in discerning the right way to treat them.

Love God.
- Love your neighbor.
- On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

This is wisdom.

Conclusion

Now, here's the last question to answer today: Where did Jesus get this wisdom?

People were certainly asking that question in Jesus's day.

John tells us about another occasion when *The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?"* (John 7:15)

They must have been wondering the same thing here.

How is it that this man has learning?
- Wisdom?
- Well, because of who he is…

Look at verses 41-42: *Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." (vv.41-42)*

Now Jesus has a question…
- about the Christ…
- about the Messiah…

Whose son is he?
- The son of David of course!
- The Scriptures foretold that the Messiah would come from David's family.

But verses 43-45: *He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "'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 is he his son?"* (vv.43-45)

Jesus is quoting Psalm 110,
- a Psalm where David speaks about the Messiah (one of his sons).
- But Jesus points out, David (the king!) calls this Messiah his Lord!

Why does he do that? Well, no one is able to answer.

Verse 46: *And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.* (v.46)

But we can answer the question!

David… writing under the inspiration of the Spirit… calls the Messiah his Lord, because…
- While it is true that the Messiah is David's son—
- one of his descendants…

The Messiah—Jesus—is also the everlasting Lord!

He is the Son of God!

He is truly human.
- And he is truly divine.
- Possing the power and the glory and the wisdom of God.

And in this exchange… in these verses… Jesus put his divine wisdom on display.

People marveled.
- They were astonished.
- But here's the tragedy:

The religious leaders did not cease their opposition to Jesus.
- Despite everything they heard and saw (the warning, the invitation, the wisdom)
- they still rejected him.

Friend, do not make that mistake!

See the wisdom of Christ and worship Christ.

No one ever spoke like this man, because he is not merely a man!

And walk in his ways,
- learning from him how to engage politics, theology, ethics
- and every other matter with the wisdom he richly provides.

He will not lead you astray.
- He will lead you in paths of righteousness.
- And you will be blessed… Let's pray.