

A brief word of clarification regarding the man without a wedding garment in last week's parable. Was he invited? Yes; he wouldn't have been there otherwise. Yet, what had he failed to do? To suit up, to prepare properly. It appears as though he wanted to attend & take part on his own terms; he knew what was expected of the King's guests: proper attire, a wedding garment suitable for the occasion. But that's not what *he* wanted. He received & accepted God's invitation, but rather than coming under God's will & expectations, this man thought God should accept him on *his* own terms: "I did it my way." After all, that's how things always worked in his household, in his little kingdom. But, that 'kingdom of self' is exactly what he'd been invited to leave behind that he might enter God's Kingdom & enjoy God's reign forever & ever! After Israel had rejected their invitation, the wondrous King extended His invitation to the undeserving, to both the 'good & bad'. In other words, as CS Lewis put it, when we get there, *there will be surprises!* Yes, there will be folks we would consider "good people"—the "salt of the earth"—whose presents in heaven won't surprise us at all. BUT! there will also be many we would have never expected: "bad people" we'd never invite to our own feast. But they will, in fact, be there. Because God's gracious invitation goes out to those we consider 'good' & to those we consider 'bad'. And to any who respond positively to His gracious invitation, no matter how late in life they may do so, they will, indeed, be welcomed into His Kingdom. BUT! if, they do not prepare, if they do not come under the gracious King's desire & attire, if there is no conformity to His will, if no changes are made to their lives, if their sin is not repented of, if no pursuit of holiness or sanctification exist, if no preparations are made for Christ & eternal life in His Kingdom, then when the King walks in & looks on His guests, the unprepared & unfit will stand out like a sore thumb, without a wedding garment. And they will be bound, cast out, into utter darkness, where there is weeping & gnashing of teeth, to await final judgement. "For many are called, but few are chosen."

I hope you see how the wedding garment parable has application for all of us, for anyone invited to join Christ in His Kingdom. But before we move on to today's passage, let's recall who it was that Jesus shared it with that day, who made up the crowd that day: the Jews, those who received His Father's original invitation, yet had rejected it. I suspect as the religious leaders heard Jesus say as much, as the Pharisees came under Jesus' judgement... don't you know they were about to explode with animosity? And that brings us to our passage today.

15 Just a couple days ago Jesus turned things, literally, upside down for these Pharisees: He flipped temple tables & chased out their money ~~makers~~ changers. Then came His strongest

judgement against them yet: three profound parables proclaiming their hypocrisy to everyone in the crowd. Jesus exposed their unbelief as the evil vineyard tenants who killed the Master's Son to steal His inheritance, then declared them unfit for His Kingdom having rejected God's invitation to His Son's wedding feast. And now, in v15, the word "Then" makes a clear connection between Jesus' judgement of the Pharisees to their plotting to entangle & arrest Him in return. And so, they came up with a plan, one that would keep them far enough from the crowds they were afraid of, yet close enough to make their arrest should the Lion of Judah fall into their trap. So, here was their plan...

16a This is noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, do the Pharisees, the religious leaders themselves—go to Jesus to question Him? No, they send their disciples, their followers. Remember, they were afraid of the crowds. They didn't want to lose face in front of them. They wanted to keep up their standing in the polls, so to speak. But Jesus' popularity was on the rise: "Could this really be our long-awaited Messiah?" That was the question buzzing among the masses. So rather than run the risk of looking bad in front of all the people, they sent their disciples in to do their dirty work, to question the Master.

Secondly, note who accompanies their disciples: the Herodians. Under normal circumstances, these two were considered enemies of one another. Not a whole lot is known about the Herodians, but from their name we can be sure they are from the family of Herod, Israel's ancient enemies descended from the Edomites. You may recall Herod the Great's beheading of John the Baptist?

Now why would they join forces against Him? The Jews had very little power & authority to arrest anyone. That's where the Herodians come in. They'd received all kinds of favors from Rome down through the years, even—as was the case with Herod the Great—appointments to positions of rulership in various parts of Palestine. If the powerless Jews were going to have Jesus arrested, leverage from the Herodians would prove necessary. If Jesus answered their trick question in the negative—that Jews shouldn't have to pay taxes—the Herodians would be right there to witness & arrest the would-be leader of such an insurrection against Rome.

It's interesting to note Jesus' power to unite even would-be enemies.

16b-17 It was getting pretty deep in there, wasn't it? Their flattery was dang near disgusting. I wonder if any of the on-listeners actually thought they were being sincere? In 20:20, Luke calls them "spies pretending to be righteous". They call Jesus *Teacher*. That was a title reserved for rabbis of high honor who, by their teaching, had set themselves apart as the brightest of

students of God's Word & Law. Were the Pharisees right to praise Jesus? You bet. They were right on: He is true; He did teach the way of God truthfully; He wasn't swayed by public opinion or appearance. As John stated, He is, in fact, the very Word of God made flesh. So, they were telling the truth, but they were twisting the truth for the sake of wickedness. That's sick. That's sin. That's what sinful men do with Truth, following their leader, Satan, the father of lies.

And note sins effect on their lives: their completely blind to Jesus' righteousness. They assume that Jesus was just like them, was just like most anyone: that, having been so highly exalted by their praises that He would simply blurt out a thoughtless response, landing Him in deep trouble with either the crowds or with Rome, thus removing the threat to their own popularity & control of the crowds. Flattery & false praise was their best bait & I'm sure they knew it well. There's no better way to get someone's attention than by praising them. It was Jesus' ego they were really after. Having stroked His ego, surely He would be eager to show the crowds how wise & wonderful He was as He mistakenly spouted off an answer to their question, ensnaring the Messiah in their trappings.

This tax was what is called a census tax or a poll tax. It was taxed upon the people who "belonged to Rome." Get it. It was a tax that people under Roman authority had to pay. ¿Don't you know how that frustrated the Jews? They had to pay a tax to Rome—every year mind you—in order to support the occupying forces of Rome... in Israel. Needless to say, this was the most resented tax the Jews had to pay. They considered themselves "a people belonging to God", not to Caesar! It's no wonder the Pharisees would throw this hot topic at Jesus' feet.

"Is it *lawful*" [right]? This was a theological question: a God-issue. So, "*who better to ask than You, Jesus? Afterall, You're the Son of God, right?*" The wording of their question leaves no wiggle room. Note the use of "or not" at the end of v17. Their not looking for an explanation. "*Should we pay it? Yes or No? That's all we're asking.*" This is their best effort to pin Jesus: *YES* would land Him in Rome's corner against the crowds; *NO* would land Him in the crowds corner against Rome. Either way, the Pharisees win. That was their plan. If only Jesus knew...

18 "But Jesus, aware..." He knew! He knows! He knows everything. Take that in, brother & sister. Your Savior, the Son of God & Son of Man, knows all! He sees everything. He is omniscient. It is impossible to blind-side the Lord God. Recall what John said about Jesus in his account of the Gospel: "He Himself knew what was in man" (2.25). He knew what the Pharisees were up to. He knew what they were planning, stowed away in some separate area of the Temple. The Pharisees hadn't tricked Him by sending their disciples-in-disguise. He knew

who they belonged to, what they believed, the instructions they'd been given. He knew of their flattering lies. He wasn't swayed to answer by His supposed ego & pride. And, best of all, He knew just how to answer. And not just for the sake of being witty, or displaying His far-superior wisdom, but for charting the course for His people for at least the next two thousand years. He knew they weren't really looking for an answer to their question, but for an answer to what they considered to be the problem of Jesus: *How do we get rid of this Guy?*

So He replied with a question for them, one that would continue exposing their hypocrisy. But, to make sure no one missed His revelation of the Pharisees hypocrisy, He announces His judgment of them accordingly first: "Why put Me to the test, you hypocrites."

These were most likely men the Master had never seen before, at least not from His earthly perspective. And yet He knew... He knew! He knew *exactly* who they were representing, and He knew exactly why. Don't miss this, church! This is a marvelous testament to Jesus divine identity. No other man on earth would have responded this way because no other man on earth is the Son of Man & Son of God, the omniscient One who sees & knows all!

19-21a Jesus asked for a coin, and the disciples of the Pharisees were more than glad to offer Him one. At this point they were most certain they had Him in their trap, that He had fallen right into their hands. "Yes! By all means, get this man a coin. Quickly!"

They brought Him a denarius. One one side was whose "likeness", was whose image? Engraved on the coin was an image of Caesar. Jewish law forbid making graven images. Even today there are some Jews who refuse to have their picture taken for fear of violating this Law. And on the other side of the coin, perhaps worse still, was an inscription: most likely, "pontifex maximus": *high priest*. Ugh! Back in 17 BC there was an oddity in the sky, a strange star appeared. Caesar Augustus proclaimed it as a heavenly sign of his supremacy upon the earth. He called for a twelve day celebration. He gathered everyone together and proclaimed forgiveness of sin for everyone in his empire, and had coins minted that claimed him "the son of God." Can you imagine what the Jews thought of that?! Wow!

And note who brought Jesus the coin? They did. Why? Because they had one; it was common currency. They'd been using it for years. And every time they did, it was a confession that they were NOT free men; they were still bound, just as they were in Egypt, under the authority of a Gentile ruler. The whole situation was a judgement upon Israel: enslaved for their rebellion against God. Israel was not free; they were bound to Rome. It wouldn't be long before one of the highest rulers in their own religion would himself proclaim, "We have no king but Caesar."

21b-22 And just when they thought they had Him trapped, too! Amazing wisdom. His response was so simple that it's profound. Or, is it so profound because it was so simple? They had asked whether or not they should give or pay taxes. But "giving" isn't the sort of language that Jesus employs at all. He says to "render" to Caesar what belongs to him. In other, He told the Jews that they were obliged to pay such a tax to their governing authorities. This was not something to dither about. It was absolutely right & just for them to pay Caesar because, just like us, they lived in their governor's domain. Jesus makes clear that paying taxes was their moral & ethical responsibility. And the same goes for us, for Christians: as the people of God, under God's Word, this Word, these instructions from Christ, we are especially obligated to uphold the law, not just civil law, but God's instruction through Jesus Christ here spoken. Jesus didn't say, only pay taxes to Christian governments. That's not what Rome was at all! They were pagan, idolatrous & blasphemous; in fact, it was this very government that would execute the Son of God, utilizing tax money that same Son of God told His people to pay. If ever we could dream up a legit excuse not to pay, that would've been it. But that's not what He said.

By no means does Jesus' statement resolve every conflict between Church & government, between believers & unbelieving authorities. And this is why we ought to praise the Lord for God-fearing men & women in politics, and pray for more of them!

The apostle to the Gentiles was a Jew; and Paul lived under that same Roman system. Consider his words in Romans 13:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God... Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 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. – vv1,5-7

And the apostle to the Jews, the apostle Peter, he also was brought by Christ to an understanding of how Christians were to live in subjection to both government & God:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your

freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. – 1P2.13-17

Jesus' answer was not some slick way of escaping their difficult question. Rather, HE proclaimed the way forward in redemption history. Everyone thought the Messiah was coming to conquer the Gentiles, to bring an end to Roman reign, political freedom from Caesar. But, Jesus makes it clear that the Messianic community that He's building *must* render to whoever their Caesar is, and render to him whatever belongs to him. And, yet, at the same time, God's people should never stop rendering to God what belongs to Him: the entirety of their lives! Ultimately, we are made in His likeness; His inscription is upon our lives. His Word reigns over us. He is our Shepherd, and we are the sheep of His pasture!

And I love how our passage ends today: When they heard the amazing wisdom of the Word made flesh, they marveled! Their mouths dropped. Or, to use a fitting phrase from last week's parable: they were speechless; indeed, indicted by their own wicked devices. In that moment, they cast themselves out: they left Him and went away.

Just a couple quick points of application before we conclude for today. Be aware of flattery, and be on guard against it. Our pride loves to be stroked. Consider Ps55.21: "*His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.*" Don't think for a second that the only weapon in Satan's war against your soul is persecution. In Daniel 8.25 we learn that "by peace he destroys many." In other words, he's happy to rock us to sleep in self-security & self-confidence, if only he can keep our minds from considering the truth of God's righteousness, of our sinfulness, and our desperate need for the Savior. JC Ryle said that "Peace often ruins nations more than war."

Lastly, consider the marvelous wisdom of your soul's caretaker, our Lord Jesus Christ. ¿Is He not amazing?! They thought they had Him pinned. But He wouldn't go to the Cross at *their* will, in *their* time, but only in His Father's time, at His Father's perfect will. Rome had authority over the Jews just as our government rightly requires our allegiance & financial support. We may not always agree with every requirement & decision they make, but living in obedience to our national law is ultimately a matter of our obedience to God, not just to our civil authorities. And, therefore, render to Caesar that which belongs to him, and to God the things that belong to Him: everything, all our thoughts, actions, and lives.

There are going to be difficulties as we wade these waters of dual citizenship, aren't there? Yes, there will be. What are we to do? Just what God's Word commands of us: we *must* pray for

wisdom from above to know how to proceed *faithfully*... under an increasingly *faithless* government. For those who bear God's likeness and are determined to follow His Word, His inscription & instruction upon our lives, our Father has promised to always make a way. So, Church, may we daily seek for the grace & understanding we need to honor Him who loves us and gave Himself for us.

SONG: *O The Deep Deep Love of Jesus*

COMMUNION

SONG: *Isn't He Good*

**** CALL KIDS FORWARD w/"HOPE" CANDLES for Benediction**

BENEDICTION: *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good **HOPE** through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. – 2Th2.16-17*