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"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

– MATT. 22:34-46. – JAN. 27. –

OUR LORD'S public teaching evidently ended with the Tuesday prior to his death, and with the teachings of that day our lesson has to do. The incidents of the two days preceding tended to bring matters to a climax: the leaders realized that the new Teacher was undermining their influence with the people. They considered him a false claimant to the Messiahship, yet could not deny his purity of life, the high standard of his teaching, and his wisdom. Now they saw him boldly teaching in the Temple day after day, and altho his teachings were in parabolic form their significance was undoubtedly recognized by many of the people. This very morning he had given three forceful parables, which, if received by many, would correspondingly weaken the influence of those who "sat in Moses' seat," the doctors of the Law and the Pharisees.

One of these parables represented God as a father, and two classes in Israel as sons: the one avowing his obedience to the Father's will, nevertheless was disobedient, and represented the Scribes and Pharisees; the other son, who, refusing to do the Father's will, but subsequently obeying it, got the Father's blessing and approval, represented the class of publicans and sinners who were now flocking to Jesus and becoming interested and seeking to do the divine will, and who were accepted of the Father, notwithstanding that previously they had shirked and even publicly denied their allegiance. [R2756 : page 14]

The second parable represented Israel as the Lord's vineyard, and the Pharisees and doctors of the Law as the husbandmen, whose duty it was to care for the vineyard, that it

should bring forth much fruit to the owner; but who appropriated the fruits to themselves – seeking honor one of another and not God's glory. The result the parable showed to be the complete overthrow of those husbandmen, and the giving of the vineyard into the care of others – the overthrow of the Jewish system or polity, and the establishment of a new order of things through other servants – our Lord Jesus and his apostles, who did not seek honors to themselves, but sought the glory of God and the welfare of his vineyard.

The third parable, the marriage of the king's son, pressed home the truth still more strongly, indicating that Christ was the King's Son, and that the heavenly Father had sent forth the invitation to the wedding-feast first to the officials of the Jews, as the representatives of that people, the Doctors of the Law, the Pharisees, etc., and upon their refusal he found others to take their place at the feast, which was not at all interrupted.

A consultation of the leading Jews showed that they were in accord in thinking that this Teacher must be interrupted in some manner; otherwise his influence would be too great; but the question was, who could meet him in argument? Who would confute and refute his propositions, and thus break his influence with the people? The counsellors were of different factions, quite opposed to each other, but they were drawn together by mutual interest in their opposition to Jesus. And thus it ever is with error; the most contrary theorists are ready to cooperate with each other in opposition to the truth. Nevertheless, truth is mighty and shall ultimately prevail against all its opponents; not always so quickly, however, as in the case before us, when the Truth himself, with superhuman wisdom, confounded and overthrew the machinations of error.

Apparently the religious leaders, after conferring, decided that they would attempt to confuse the Lord and confound his

teachings, and thus make a division amongst the people, getting some of them against him. First came the Herodians, who were not Jews at all, but, like Herod, Ishmaelites – sons of Abraham, through Hagar, as the Jews were his sons through Sarah. The Herodians, we may presume, were not very religious, but in considerable measure politicians; nevertheless, the desire to break the influence of Jesus was sufficient to unite with these Ishmaelites the Pharisees, who claimed to be the most strict and holy of the Jews. They had thought of a method of entrapping the Lord, which they felt sure would be a success. It was a simple method: they would ask him a question respecting taxation in which all the people were interested, high and low, rich and poor, publicans and Pharisees. They felt sure that in answering this question he would either lay himself open to the charge of teaching sedition, and therefore himself liable to arrest as an opponent of Herod and of Caesar, or by approving the taxes they esteemed that he would alienate from himself many of the Jews who were now regarding him favorably. Hence their question: "Is it lawful to pay tribute [taxes] to Caesar or not?"

It would scarcely be right to say that our Lord [R2756 : page 15] avoided their question. Rather, we would say that he gave it a much broader and more comprehensive answer than they or anyone else would have supposed possible. He said, in the hearing of the people, "Why tempt ye me?" thus in a word showing that he perceived the real animus of the question, that it was an endeavor on their part to entangle him. Then he asked for a coin of the kind generally used for taxes, and having their assent to the authority which issued it, he said, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's." What a lesson in these words! How clearly they indicate that God's people are to be subject to the powers that be, and to *wait* for God's Kingdom, rather than to attempt opposition, insurrection, conflict with the laws of earthly authorities!

In this respect our Lord's words are a lesson to his people today, to the effect that they should keep their religious affairs, which are of God and toward God, separate and distinct from worldly politics, which are of the Gentiles, during this period of the "Times of the Gentiles." "Ye are not of this world, even as I am not of this world." On the other hand, the Lord's people are to remember that, as originally created, man bore *God's image* stamped upon his very nature; and the persons addressed should have remembered also that God's superscription was upon them, that he had accepted them as his people, – Israel. The thought is that the heart, the life, the affections, belong to God, and should be rendered to him, and this being done the rendering of a little tribute-money to some earthly prince would be of comparative insignificance, and the will of God recognized in the heart would cause all things to work together for their good.

The questioners found themselves answered in a manner they had never dreamed of; they were put to silence; they could take no exceptions to such an answer. It had lifted their quibble to a plane of thought which they must confess was far higher than had ever entered into their minds, and had settled it effectually.

Next came the Sadducees, no doubt boastfully saying, We alone are competent to deal with this man, and to show up his faults, tho at the same time we will be showing up the errors and faults of you Pharisees respecting a future life through a resurrection. The Sadducees were what we might term the Agnostics or Rationalists of that time. They denied that there were any spirit beings, and denied a future life for mankind, claiming that there would be *no resurrection* of the dead, – that faith in a resurrection was not warranted by any satisfactory Scriptures, and that reason also repudiated the thought.

By their question they would endeavor to show that Jesus' teachings as a whole were built upon a false foundation; – that the present life is everything, instead of nothing, and to be sacrificed to attain a future life by a better resurrection, as Jesus taught. They put what they supposed would be an unanswerable question respecting the condition of things in the resurrection age. Our Lord's reply was that the difficulty was with them, and not with the divine plan; that they had failed to understand the Scriptures, and did not properly understand the power of God, who is abundantly able to arrange for all the exigencies which will arise in the perfecting of his own gracious plans and promises. Then, going beyond this answer to their question, our Lord demonstrated to them that the resurrection *is* taught in the Old Testament Scriptures – not in so many words, but indirectly – that God's language with reference to the patriarchs implies that they are *not annihilated*, – implies that they are *to be resurrected*, to live again, because God would not use such language as he did use respecting beings who had passed totally out of existence, and were never to be in existence again. The answer was a complete one, as the first verse of our lesson shows.

But our Lord's opponents still hoped that they might find some one capable of vanquishing in argument him who "spake as never man spake." And so we read that when the Pharisees heard that he had "muzzled the Sadducees" they were gathered together. Their disappointment at not seeing Jesus confounded by the Sadducees was off-set by their pleasure in having their Sadducee opponents thus effectually silenced. Then one of the Pharisees, who was a Doctor of the Law, a scribe, bethought him that he would test our Lord with a theological question much discussed amongst the Jewish rabbis; a question upon which they were very generally divided. He would at least get this great Teacher confused and show the people that, while the Scribes had such contentions amongst themselves respecting the Law,

this Teacher also, when treating theological subjects, would be confused. Altho it is said that he propounded the question temptingly, this does not necessarily mean that this scribe was dishonest or in affiliation with others of the rulers who were conspiring *merely* to entrap Jesus; for our Lord himself testifies of him that he was "not far from the Kingdom of God." – Mark 12:34.

His question was, Which one of the Ten Commandments is the most important, the greatest? Our Lord's answer was most direct. He divided the Law into two parts, as on the two tables of stone; the one part relating to God and man's obligations to his Creator; and the second part relating to man's responsibilities toward his fellow-men. Man's duty to God our Lord placed as supreme, yet the other as linked with it and necessary to perfect harmony with God. The force of our Lord's words is found in the fact that they are mainly a quotation from the Jewish Law. – Deut. 6:4,5.

Matthew's account does not include all the words which our Lord spoke, as recorded by Mark, beginning, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord [Jehovah] our God is one Lord [Jehovah]." This declaration the Jews were in the habit of calling, "The Shama," because the first word in the sentence in Hebrew is *Shama*, translated in English, "Hear." This *Shama* declaration was considered a sacred one amongst the Jews and was enclosed in their phylacteries, repeated in their prayers, etc. The Scribe, therefore, could have not the slightest objection to our Lord's answer: it was conclusive, and, as recorded by Mark, he acknowledged the truth saying, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but he; and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul [being] and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and

sacrifices." – Mark 12:32-34. See MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. V., Chap. 2. [R2757 : page 16]

No wonder, then, the inspired Apostle declares that "Love is the fulfilling of the Law!" We can readily see that only in proportion as love is in the heart can the divine law be fulfilled by any. This does not interfere with the Scriptural declaration that "the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." The reason why the Jews could not keep the Law was that they did not have perfect love in their hearts, and the same difficulty would stand in the way of us who are of the New Covenant, were it not that our Covenant makes for us the favorable arrangement through the precious blood of Christ, that our intentions as new creatures are accepted of God as instead of our natural hearts. Those who have entered into covenant relationship with God through Christ, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, are walking "after the spirit," following *after* love, even tho they be not able to walk *up to* the spirit – up to the full standard of love in every thought and word. Their efforts in this direction are accepted as tho they were perfect, and day by day, week by week, and year by year, under the Lord's instruction and leading by his Word, and providence, they are making progress in this good way – learning more and more what love is, as they see it exhibited in the Lord's Word and plan and character, and seeking and attaining more and more to the likeness of God's dear Son, whose perfect love was a copy of the Father's.

As shown elsewhere, it is this "mark" of perfect Love, which must be attained in the heart, so that our wills will be fully in accord with it (however imperfect our expression of those wills in words and deeds, by reason of imperfections of the flesh). And to grow in this grace of love to God necessarily implies a growth also in love toward mankind; and especially toward those who are in sympathy and harmony with

righteousness. (1 John 4:8,20,21; 5:1). Truly the divine Law is grandly beautiful to those who see it; and none can see it fully except as he has gradually come to appreciate its lengths and breadths and heights and depths. And each additional step of knowledge and appreciation must be accompanied by efforts toward obedience in the practice of love toward God and fellow-men, otherwise progress is impossible. Our Lord's declaration is that all of the teachings of the Law, as well as all the teachings of the prophets, are in harmony with, and made dependent upon this Law; – that God's promises are not intended for any others than those who are in heart-accord with his Law, and if in heart-accord they will desire and endeavor to be good and do good in every sense of the word, as far and as rapidly as possible.

Seeing the number of Pharisees in his audience, gathered by the question before mentioned, our Lord considered this a favorable opportunity to turn the tables, and to ask them a question – not that he was endeavoring to trap them as they had been endeavoring to do with him; but because there is no better method of presenting a truth strikingly to the attention of a person than through a wisely directed question. He saw that the difficulty of the Pharisees in respect to himself was, **(1)** that as a man he did not have the outward evidences of ability to establish himself as the King of Israel, the Messiah – he lacked wealth and soldiers and influence; and he lacked also that fierceness of disposition and haughty domineering manner recognized as the usual accompaniments of successful generals. **(2)** Their chief objection to him was, as they would put it, that he was bolstering up the weaknesses of his earthly conditions by claiming that he himself was of a heavenly origin, and that somehow or other the establishment of his Kingdom would be by spirit-power.

When our Lord asked the question, "What think ye of Messiah? Of what family should he be expected?" he well knew what the answer would be; – that they would acknowledge that

they were expecting Messiah to be of the tribe and family of David: and no doubt the Pharisees, while answering this question, expected that the next question would be, Do you not acknowledge that I am of the tribe and family of David, etc.? But our Lord desired to bring out another point. His earthly genealogy they knew, or could easily prove: he wished to show that the Scriptures taught that Messiah must be something more than the son of David, that he must be both the Son of David and Lord of David. Hence, when they answered that Messiah would be the Son of David, he enquired, What then is David's meaning when he makes use of the expression, "The Lord [*Jehovah*] said unto my Lord [*adon*, master], Sit thou at my right hand [associated with me in the Kingdom, highest in my favor]"? (Psa. 110:1.) The Pharisees had not studied the Scriptures sufficiently, else they would have seen this feature before, that Messiah was to be not only the son, or offspring of David, but also greater than David, the Root of David. No wonder they were unable to answer; there was nothing for them to say; the matter thoroughly upheld our Lord's claim that Messiah must have a divine origin, divine authority, and be backed by divine power in whatever he would do.

It should be noticed in this connection that both this quotation from the Psalms and the previous quotation from Deuteronomy by our Lord, are against the Trinitarian view of several persons in divine power, "*equal* in power and glory." They are in full accord, however, with the Scriptural teachings of a heart-oneness between the Father and the Son, and the high origin as well as the high exaltation of the Son, – "that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father;" yet nevertheless keep the two distinctly separate, as our Lord did in his teachings. See "*The At-one-ment Between God and Man,*" Chaps. 2 and 6.

"From that time forth no man durst ask him any question." They were afraid to question him further in the sense of endeavoring to entrap him, having learned that he always got the advantage; the answers only resulted in greater honor to Jesus and the confusion of those who sought to entrap him. And so it is sometimes with the Lord's people today when armed with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; it is so sharp that their adversaries stand in fear of it. And yet this sword should be always used as our Master used it, not in bitterness nor in wrath, nor with sarcasm; but in meekness in gentleness and patience and love, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil." – 2 Tim. 2:25.
