

LIFEPOINT CHURCH // WORD TO LIFE

THE WAY



MATTHEW 22:1-40

WEEKS 17-20



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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WORD TO LIFE

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Week 17: Matthew 22:1-14

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 22:1-14

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 22:1-14 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: In what other ways can the kingdom of heaven be compared to a wedding feast?

Questions: What would motivate a person not to come to a wedding feast? What does that tell you about those who were first invited?

Question: Who is Jesus really referring to when He talks about the king's servants?

Question: What made those who were first invited unworthy?

Question: What is the significance of the servants inviting both those who are bad as well as good?

Question: Why do you believe the king reacted the way he did to the person who did not wear a wedding garment?

Question: According to the passage, what makes someone chosen versus merely called?

Activity: Write down all the places where Jesus' parables are spoken directly to the Pharisees. Then explain why you believe He spoke in parables to them so often.

Week 17: Matthew 22:1-14

Day 2: An Undying Marriage

READ: Jeremiah 2:1-3; Isaiah 54:5-6; Hosea 2:19-20

EXPLORE:

Marriage is one of the most unique relationships that human beings can have. It is the first relationship ever between two individuals. Marriage is intimate, holy, sacrificial, difficult at times, messy, pure, frustrating, amazing, and loving. Marriage has a function instituted by God that no one can live up to, but ultimately the entire concept of marriage is intended to point back to Him. If you are a Christian and are not married, you actually are in a spiritual sense. All of God's people are married to Him. A strange analogy, but an entirely scriptural one that is worth exploring throughout this WTL.

In our passage, we have a king who wants to have a wedding feast for his son. Now, if we draw the analogy out fully, we can assume that the king is God the Father and Jesus is the king's son. Who then is the bride? Well, Paul would identify the bride of Christ as the Church in Ephesians 5. Paul's interpretation of Genesis (inspired by the Holy Spirit) is that the two becoming one flesh ultimately refers to Christ and His Church. What a wild idea and one that even Paul identifies as a profound mystery. But this is not a New Testament concept only, but one found throughout the Old Testament. Yahweh calls the Jewish people His bride whom He loves but who constantly rejects Him. Israel continually chooses to worship other gods and thus behaves like an unfaithful spouse. In a very patriarchal culture, it is easy to imagine that men would look most disparagingly on a wife who is unfaithful to her husband. Because a husband often worked all day doing hard labor so that his whole family could even survive. And so the wife's betrayal of the husband who sought to give all he had to her, would be unimaginable to the average Jew. What an ungrateful, good-for-nothing woman they would think! And yet,

that's what God calls Israel. And this condemnation would fall primarily on the male leadership of Israel. They are the ungrateful, good for nothing spouse. How does this relate to us today?

The marriage analogy might be stretched for this parable because metaphors are being mixed between Christ and the Church in other scriptures versus a wedding feast with guests being invited. But there is something to be learned from the parallel. The original invitees of the wedding feast were the Jews who did not want to go. The invitees in the analogy rejected the king's wedding feast, which corresponds ultimately to the Jews rejecting Jesus' coronation as Messiah. Jesus was going to be God with the people, but they rejected Him. They rejected not just the wedding feast, but they rejected their husband. The one who would provide for them and love them eternally. Let us who are Gentiles never do the same.

The Gentiles are later invited to the feast and can stay as long as they put on the proper wedding garments. Putting on the garments represents faith, and the garments themselves (most likely) the righteousness of Christ. We as the bride of Christ must seek to fully be devoted to Him and we must recognize how much we need Him. A grateful wife will be fully appreciative and devoted to her husband, while a dutiful husband will love his wife sacrificially. Christ will fulfill the husband's role perfectly, but will we be appreciative and devoted?

BIG IDEA: Marriage provides insight into our relationship with God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways does marriage help us know Christ more?

Week 17: Matthew 22:1-14

Day 3: The Great King's Mercy

READ: Matthew 22:1-14

EXPLORE:

In this passage, we see another example of what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is like a wedding feast. However, the guests seem to have some mixed reactions to this feast. There are those who are explicitly invited, but who mistreat and disregard the king and his servants. However, there are also the random guests found on the main road that accepted the king's invitation. These two types of guests display that it is not by their own merit, but by the king's mercy they are able to approach his table.

I (Cohen) have been to a few weddings in my life, but I have never once seen a guest try to kill the people serving the food. This behavior may seem a bit extreme, but when we understand who these guests are it falls into place. The response of the first set of guests is meant to describe the people of Israel. All throughout the Old Testament, God invited the people into covenants and invited them into His kingdom, but the Israelite people were stubborn and broke their covenants and killed the prophets and judges whom God sent to remind them of their sin. While it may seem a bit extreme to have someone disregard the wedding invitation and quite literally kill the messenger, this is exactly the pattern we see in the Old Testament. The king is not without retribution, because he does send his troops and burn the cities of the invited guests. This act of just retribution again points to these invited guests being the nation of Israel, and reflects the pattern we see in the Old Testament.

This leads us to the next type of guest. The ones that seem almost randomly picked. However, this next type of guest represents what God is actively doing. Through Jesus, God is expanding the invitation to His wedding feast. This expansion to the people on

the main road is possible because of Jesus coming and dying on the cross. The servants went and found guests, and the hall was filled. There was no requirement that the king had to fill his hall with guests, but by his mercy and grace he chose to fill it with those he found on the road.

Whenever we think about God's mercy, it can be quite easy to take it for granted. After all, we are the new type of guest, aren't we? We didn't shame the king's servants or have our cities leveled and our nations overrun. However, it is so important to remember it is by God's grace we are given a seat at the table. Just because we do not physically attack God's servants does not mean we don't disregard His invitation in other ways. We have been invited to a luxurious wedding with oxen and fat calves all slaughtered, but it is only because of the mercy of the great king.

BIG IDEA: The first type of guest represents the nation of Israel and the Old Testament Covenant. The second type of guest represents us, the believers under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** We might not be physically killing prophets and judges, but what are some ways you disregard God's invitation?
- **Question:** How does the mercy of God point us to humility? In what ways do we take God's mercy for granted?

Week 17: Matthew 22:1-14

Day 4: That'll Preach

READ: Matthew 22:1-14; Zechariah 3:3-5

EXPLORE:

As a pastor, I (Brayden) must seek the truth about the meaning of God's Word above all else. Sadly, it is all too common for many to preach what sounds good over what is true. Pastors will often preach what they believe sounds good rather than what is exegetically most likely. In other words, as my professor puts it: some go with the interpretation "that'll preach," while others will go with the most likely interpretation or, better yet, provide the congregation with multiple likely interpretations. I'll provide a brief example. There's a common misconception that Saul became Paul after his miraculous conversion. Rather, it seems that the Apostle just went by different names likely due to the languages of his audience. Now, the likely truth does not "preach" as well as saying that Jesus gave Saul the new name Paul to signify some great new identity. Many pastors are more concerned with a point that people can shout amen to rather than the truth that the Holy Spirit intended to convey. Let me make it clear that this can and does happen to virtually all pastors at some point no matter what tradition they come from. It comes from the bias of primarily *preaching* God's Word rather than *commentating* on it, *teaching* it in a classroom, or even seeking to understand it in a small group community as a collective. Preaching alters one's interpretative lens, so to speak so we must be careful to judge carefully what God is saying and not what we would like Him to be saying.

This background is important in understanding the meaning in our passage of the "wedding garment."

The wedding garment in this passage is very important to identify correctly because its usage determines the fate of all of the king's

guests. The garment was required in order not to be cast into outer darkness. From the context, it can be deduced that the king expects his guests to know they need the wedding garment. It isn't based on a technicality, but rather something that was needed to even get into the feast at all. One common option is that the garment is the righteousness of Christ (which will definitely preach!). Another option is that the garment represents repentance and/or faith. Other options include baptism, obedience/works, or grace. It's difficult to know exactly what the garment represents, but all of these options should be true of a Christian. As Christians we are called to live according to the Word of God and that includes not just reading it but seeking to understand it. What do you believe the wedding garment means? Seek to take into account what Matthew has spoken about thus far in his Gospel and what Jesus spoke most about in His other parables.

Whichever view you take, realize that God provides what we need to get into heaven. There will be no mystery on why anyone gets into heaven. It is not by our doing but by the grace of God. The prophet Zechariah has a similar passage in his book, where Joshua needs his filthy garments cleaned. We all are filthy sinners without the purification from God. We all need to be washed by the blood of the Lamb!

BIG IDEA: Interpretation requires work, and what sounds the best isn't always the correct interpretation though it might be!

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways can uncertainty on parts of Scripture help you in your walk with the Lord?

Week 17: Matthew 22:1-14

Day 5: Called or Chosen?

READ: Matthew 22:1-14

EXPLORE:

The Bible is a book made up of numerous genres. You have poetry, wisdom literature, epistles (personal letters), law, prophecy, narrative (storytelling), history, etc. While it is true that there is one underlying author of Scripture (the Holy Spirit), it can be difficult to know whether, when multiple books use the same words if they mean the same thing. Many times it appears that they do not. The word “children,” for instance can mean humble believers in God in one book and humans who are below a certain age in another. If you used the first definition in a context where the second definition was intended, you would misinterpret the text. This can be a huge issue in what’s called *systematic theology*. Systematic theology attempts to understand what the Bible collectively has to say on specific topics. For example, a systematic theologian might set out to articulate what the Bible says about love. Generally, they would look up every passage about love in the Bible and give a broad overview of what it means. This can be done well, but it may also lead to merging contexts together and blurring the lines on key terms. Also, how do you decide which verses are primary for understanding a biblical concept and which are secondary? A theologian might pick one passage to define a term, then read that definition into all other passages, but then it turns out they misinterpreted their main passage! This backdrop is necessary for interpreting our last verse for the week: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” What does it mean to be called and what does it mean to be chosen?

The people who read WTL, come from a range of theological backgrounds and have been taught different ideas on what it means to be called and/or chosen. The inevitable debate on the terms will come down to versions of two options: Unconditional

Election or Conditional Election. Unconditional Election would assert that God chooses individuals for salvation based on absolutely nothing within themselves. Conditional Election would assert that God chooses individuals for salvation based on some amount of faith within the person. Both sides of the debate would say that faith within the individual is necessary for salvation, but the question comes down to whose responsibility it is to provide the faith. Does the individual have any ability to have faith or is it entirely brought about by God's unilateral decision? What's our passage saying in Matthew?

According to Jesus' parable "the called" would be those that heard about the wedding feast and were invited. "The chosen" would be those that not only came to the wedding feast but put on the necessary garments. This specific parable appears to support a Conditional Election view, because the decision is up to the called (some come, others don't). Unconditional Election advocates would assert that parables by their nature are limited in the parallels they can tell us about God. Since God existed before time and can create everything by a mere spoken word, human comparisons can only go so far.

Whichever side of the debate you fall down on, it is important to see the graciousness of God and the limitation of human understanding. As Paul says in Romans 11:33 "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!"

BIG IDEA: Be humble in what you can understand and know that God is good and righteous.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways do you become prideful in disagreements and how can you humble yourself today?

Week 18: Matthew 22:15-22

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 22:15-22

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 22:15-22 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: In what ways might this situation be heightened in the temple of Jerusalem rather than in other parts of Israel?

Question: What do you think the motivations of the Herodians would have been for approaching Jesus and asking these questions?

Question: What can this passage tell you about flattery and deceptive motives?

Question: How do you think this passage should weigh in on how we as believers in our contexts relate to our government and taxes?

Activity: Read Romans 13 and write down how you think it relates to this passage.

Question: How was the question that was asked by the Pharisees a trap question?

Question: What does it mean to render to God the things that are His?

Week 18: Matthew 22:15-22

Day 2: Don't Avoid Truth

READ: Matthew 22:15-22

EXPLORE:

Jesus said in John 18:37 "Everyone who is of truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" That question has really marked our time and place. It encapsulates the idea of agnosticism. Agnosticism is the assertion that humans cannot know anything beyond their own experiences and scope of their existence. Colloquially, an agnostic is someone who does not claim to know anything beyond themselves and their experiences. There are three main types of agnostics in the world:

1. The one who is a genuine truth seeker that doesn't know very much but wants to.
2. The one who doesn't know but doesn't care enough to look into any matters of truth.
3. The one who says I don't know, you don't know, and no one can ever know.

The last type of agnostic is really how the Pharisees and Herodians were functioning. There are legitimate issues to work through on how a person who fears the Lord is to deal with government and submit to them properly, but they did not care about this question. They wanted to split the crowd and get people upset at Jesus over anything. They did not take the truth seriously at all and figured that if God existed, He wouldn't care about their actions. King David would call them fools in light of Psalm 14, which reads, "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God.'" This is not to say that there were those in the ancient world who would state definitively that a supernatural being or beings did not exist but rather that there were those who would do evil and not think that God would ever enact justice on them. This was the mentality

of the Pharisees and Herodians. This is also the mentality of many in our world today.

Many in our culture do not believe in any cosmic justice of their actions. They don't have an issue with stirring up strife or controversy if it serves their own self-seeking goals. Should we really worry about giving the government what they are due? Should we worry about giving God His due? Most don't worry about such profound questions because what really is truth at the end of the day? What really matters?

Jesus says He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is our standard for right and wrong. He is what everything is measured against. He answers every question perfectly. He doesn't just answer a fool according to His folly. He gives all of us truth to live up to.

There are those around us who will not care about truth. They won't care about right or wrong, good or evil. They will only care about serving their own purposes. Our job is to be like Jesus and not get angry but call them to greater things. Our job is to get them to the gospel. We have the truth, we just have to have the boldness to share it. And we have to have the boldness to share it with those who really won't want to hear it.

BIG IDEA: People try to avoid truth, but like Christ, we have the responsibility to share it with them anyway.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways today can you seek to promote truth?
- **Challenge:** Tell someone today that Jesus is the truth.

Week 18: Matthew 22:15-22

Day 3: Render Yourself to God

READ: Matthew 22:15-22

EXPLORE:

In verse 20, Jesus asks, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” and upon their answer, He states, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus shifts the focus away from taxes and political allegiance to a deeper question: whose image do we bear and under whose authority do we live? Jesus is showing that our actions should reflect the One whose image we bear. Just like we ought to give to Caesar what has his image on it, showing that it is his and he has authority over it, so, too, must we, who are made in the image of God, give ourselves to God since we bear His image! Genesis 1:27 states, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Even after the fall, humans are still made in the image of God as James 3:9 indicates, saying, “With it [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

This fact that man is made in the image of God means that man, both physically and spiritually, is in some way like his Creator. We may not know the full extent of how we are like Him, but we do know that we bear His image even after sin entered the world, and we are still called to have dominion over all the earth. We also know from Colossians 3:10, “and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” that salvation brings a new self, a new image. While we are made in the image of God, salvation brings the ability to be shaped further into the likeness of God. This is a great responsibility. Images are created to image! When we live in ways that do not reflect the character of God, we dishonor the image

He created us in. When we live in holiness and righteousness, we shine a bright reflection to the world of who our God is.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 states, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

When we meet our Creator face to face, will He say we used the life He gave us to reflect His glory clearly? Or will we see that we treated our own image as more valuable than His? We are all daily, moment by moment reflecting something. What image are you reflecting?

BIG IDEA: Branded in the image of God, we do not owe Jesus mere coins — we owe Him everything, our very lives devoted to reflecting His glory.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What insecurities, fears, doubts, or self-deprecating thoughts do you experience that tempt you to diminish your God-given purpose, role, and identity? Share these with Jesus and ask Him to heal these lies and replace them with who God says you are.
- **Question:** In what areas of your life do you most clearly reflect God’s character? Where is that hardest?

Week 18: Matthew 22:15-22

Day 4: Give to Caesar what is Caesar's

**READ: Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26;
Romans 13**

EXPLORE:

What is a Christian's Duty to their Government?

On November 13, 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to Jean-Baptiste Le Roy discussing the recently established United States Constitution. He said, "Our new Constitution is now established, everything seems to promise it will be durable, but, in this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

Comedian Will Rogers later famously commented that "The only difference between death and taxes is that death doesn't get any worse every time Congress meets!" I don't 'like' paying taxes – at all. I'm not sure that anybody does. But as a municipal employee, taxes ultimately pay my salary. When I look at all of the things that our taxes go towards (streets, drinking water, wastewater treatment, sanitary sewer, drainage, police, fire, emergency services, and on and on)...I can understand the need a little better. When I think about the armed forces and where those federal tax dollars go, I can sleep a little better at night, knowing that we are very well protected from foreign enemies. But, I still don't 'like' paying taxes.

As we know, Franklin certainly wasn't the first person to comment on paying taxes. In fact, nearly 1,800 years before his letter...very early in the morning on the first Good Friday, the chief priests, scribes, and elders brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate. They began to state their case: "This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king." In Luke 23:2, Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Not surprisingly, what they told Pilate was untruthful. In fact, it was a lie. Just a few days earlier that same week (on Tuesday), the Pharisees tried to trip up Jesus by asking Him, "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?" 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." When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away. So, on Tuesday, Jesus told them to give Caesar what is Caesar's. By Friday, that message had been contorted into a false accusation that was delivered as Jesus told them to NOT pay their taxes. It was quite the contrary. Going back another 700 years or so, the prophet Isaiah recorded, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6-7). God's divine plan was (and is) for the government to be upon the shoulders of His Son. To do good works FOR the people of God, not in conflict.

BIG IDEA: As Christians, it is our duty to abide by the laws of our government and to advocate for a society that reflects the values of Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What responsibilities do you have to the government?
- **Question:** What can you do to be a better citizen of God's Kingdom?

Week 18: Matthew 22:15-22

Day 5: Rightfully Rendering

READ: Matthew 22:15-22

EXPLORE:

We see in this passage a discussion about giving. The Pharisees come and try to trap Jesus with a question. When responding to this question about taxes, Jesus gives us a command to render rightfully. Render is a word that means to provide or give, and we are called to give to the government what belongs to them and to God what belongs to Him. However, what does that look like and what belongs to God?

As Christians, we are called to give all our heart, soul, strength, and mind to God. When we render things to God, these are what we are called to give. We so often try to divide what we provide God, and we try to split our service. However, just as the coin the Pharisees presented to Jesus bears the face of Caesar, we are made in the image of God. Our gifts and our talents are not our own and are given by the grace of God. There is no division when it comes to providing our lives before God.

So, how do we rightfully render our lives before God? At LifePoint, we often say “Wherever you live, work, rest, play, or learn share the gospel.” Whatever gifts you have, all of those areas and more are places to give your service to God. Maybe you can show grace to a difficult coworker or support a friend going through a difficult time. Whatever the situation is, we should be faithful and render our service to God. While paying taxes is almost never fun, the Bible actually paints rendering our services to God as a joyful thing. As Christians, we get to enjoy providing our gifts to God. It is not simply an obligation, but a labor we can take joy in.

Jesus took the Pharisees’ trap and showed them how to honor God’s commandments. It is the requirements of God that should

ultimately be our priority. God has called us to honor Him through the faithful rendering of our lives, and to also respect and honor the authorities above us. Jesus shows that what the Pharisees are presenting Him with is not an “either or,” instead it is a “both and” scenario. We should render to our government what is rightfully theirs, and we should diligently render our entire lives for God and His kingdom. Our lives should not be divided and focused on ourselves, but instead focused on God alone.

BIG IDEA: Rendering is the act of giving and providing service, and we are called to render our entire lives and being for God. Serving God is our ultimate priority, and it should be done with joy.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what areas do you struggle to render to God?
- **Question:** How often does service with God include joy in your life? Pray that God would give you increased joy as you serve Him!

Week 19: Matthew 22:23-33

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 22:23-33

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 22:23-33 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: Based on the Sadducees' question to Jesus, what could you compare their ideology to today?

Question: What do you think the Sadducees primarily focused on as Jews if they did not believe in the afterlife?

Question: Why do you think that the Sadducees assumed that marriage would continue given a resurrection of the dead?

Question: Why do you think that Jesus said that the Sadducees did not know the power of God?

Question: Why do you think that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage?

Question: What do you think it means to be like the angels in heaven?

Question: Do you think there is any significance to the names that Jesus listed?

Activity: Find out and write down how many people in the Bible of whom God said that He was their God.

Week 19: Matthew 22:23-33

Day 2: The Sadducees

READ: Matthew 22:23-33

EXPLORE:

Jesus, a Pharisee, and a Sadducee all walk into a temple...

From the way the Pharisees and Sadducees are referenced in the Gospel of Matthew up to this point, it wouldn't be surprising if you have mentally combined them into a collective foil to Jesus. Our passage this week is the first and only time that there is a recorded interaction between Jesus and the Sadducees. If we are going to understand this interaction and get the most out of this passage, then we first need to understand who the Sadducees were and what made them distinct.

The Sadducees were one of the Jewish groups that emerged during the period between the Old and New Testaments as the Jewish people adjusted to their post-exile existence surrounded and subjugated by new empires. While the Pharisees focused on religious laws and living, the Sadducees were made up of wealthy Jews who assumed positions of political power by aligning themselves with the prevailing governments. In exchange for helping the Roman government control the historically rebellious Israelites with their religious authority, the Sadducees were allowed to represent the Jewish people in their dealings with Rome and maintain some semblance of power. During Jesus's ministry, it was likely that Caiaphas, the high priest, and the Sanhedrin were mostly made up of and most certainly controlled by the Sadducees.

Another distinct difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees was their concept of what was God's Word. The Pharisees believed the prophets and Scriptures that foretold of a Messiah, and even went so far as to create their own interpretations and

oral laws as well. In contrast, the Sadducees believed that only the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) held God's Word and authority and held to a very literal application of the law. This led them to reject the writings of the prophets and other spiritual concepts like the resurrection of the dead.

These two distinct characteristics of the Sadducees help us to understand why they rejected Jesus as the Messiah in their own distinct way. They had spent generations establishing their wealth and political positions and were not keen on the Jewish people rallying around some religious rebel the people thought was going to be the long promised military messiah. If Jesus somehow succeeded in overthrowing the Roman Empire, then that meant the Sadducees would be removed from their positions of power by Jesus and His followers. Even if He failed, then there was a good chance that the Roman Empire would be upset with the disruption to order, and likely threaten the status quo power structure that the Sadducees had built in order to restore order to the region.

As followers of Christ, we need to be careful not to fall into the same traps as the Sadducees. We need to constantly be aligning our hearts with God's—serving and leading with humility rather than trying to establish and maintain our status or protect the traditional things we idolize in the church.

BIG IDEA: Align your heart to God's will versus trying to align the church to your own will and desires.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Pray to God to reveal any "status quos" from which you might need to let go of and repent.

Week 19: Matthew 22:23-33

Day 3: The Resurrection

READ: Matthew 22:23-33

EXPLORE:

The death and resurrection of Jesus is what makes Christianity unique. Without the resurrection, we would not have the hope of one day seeing Jesus face-to-face or seeing our loved ones in heaven. This is a fundamental part of our faith today, but during the time of Jesus, the idea of the resurrection of the dead was a debated topic. Some believed in life after death; however, there were many who did not believe in any type of resurrection from the dead. These two belief systems were reflected in the religious leaders. The Pharisees believed in a resurrection of the dead, whereas the Sadducees denied any type of resurrection of the dead. These two religious sects operated at the time of Jesus and often tried to trap Him with difficult religious questions, as seen in Matthew 22:23–33. At the beginning of the passage, Matthew draws attention to how the Sadducees have taken over questioning Jesus. In verses 15–22, it was the Pharisees who were questioning Jesus about taxes and whether or not they should pay taxes to Caesar, but now in verse 23 the Sadducees are asking about the resurrection and its connection to marriage. This is an ironic question considering the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and shows their desire to trap Jesus using an idea they themselves did not believe in. In verse 24, they insincerely address Him as “teacher” as they ask about one of the Mosaic laws found in Deuteronomy 25 that stated a father’s lineage would continue through his brother if he married the widow after the father died. In this example, the Sadducees pose a hypothetical question of seven brothers who each marry the first brother’s wife after each brother ends up dying. The Sadducees attempt to trap Jesus by asking Him who the woman would be married to in the resurrection. The implication was that if the woman were to be found guilty of incest and having more

than one husband in the resurrection, then there would be no point in the dead being resurrected if they faced the same consequences as they did in life on earth. Jesus immediately exposed the religious leaders by pointing out their lack of understanding the Scriptures, which point to resurrection of the dead and the display of the power of God. In the resurrection, Jesus explains, there will be no marriage in heaven, but that all will become like angels. Jesus concludes by reminding the Sadducees and the crowds listening that in addition to being the God of the patriarchs, he is a God, not of the dead, but of the living. In this passage, the Sadducees' attempt to incriminate Jesus is rooted in the question of the resurrection and whether it will be identical to life on earth. By using the example of a woman who was married at different times to seven brothers, the Sadducees attempted to trick Jesus into denying the resurrection by revealing there was no distinguishable difference in the afterlife to life on earth. Instead, Jesus points them to the truth of the resurrection found in Scripture and that God would remain faithful to the covenant He made with His people—even after death when they would reach heaven and glorify Him forever. As Christians, when we reach heaven, we too will be resurrected and reunited with our loved ones where together we will join with the angels praising our living God for His covenant faithfulness throughout history.

BIG IDEA: When teaching about the resurrection, Jesus points to the hope of heaven where His people will praise Him forever.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does this passage shape (or reshape) your understanding of heaven?
- **Challenge:** Praise God for His faithfulness to His people throughout history.

Week 19: Matthew 22:23-33

Day 4: What Happens When We Die?

READ: Matthew 22:23-33

EXPLORE:

What happens when we die? A question that has intrigued humanity for as long as we have existed. Ever since death came into the world, humans have speculated about it. Even in the Old Testament Scriptures, there was never a clear picture. There were hints of being with God like in Job where he says, "And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God," but not much beyond that. In the New Testament, though, we start to get a better picture thanks to Jesus.

First, Jesus lets us know that the saints of the Old Testament are alive with God. On the cross, He also says that the thief on the cross would be with Him in paradise that very day. What else besides that can we know about the afterlife according to the New Testament?

In heaven, we can know that God's will is being done perfectly, as Jesus tells us to pray, "thy will be done on earth as it is in *heaven*." We know that Paul considers God in a place called the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). The typical understanding would be that the sky is the first heaven, space is the second heaven, and God's dwelling place is the third heaven. We can also know that God the Father has a great throne with Jesus Christ at His right hand. In Revelation, the Apostle John would tell us that the throne is surrounded by worshiping elders and mysterious creatures. What an amazing sight to behold! And yet heaven is a temporary place.

According to Jesus, heaven will eventually pass away, and a new heaven will come. This new heaven will come when Jesus reconciles all things to Himself and fixes our broken world. When

that happens all the dead will actually be raised both the wicked and the righteous. Then everyone will be judged by God and sent to their eternal dwelling—either with God or into the lake of fire. This is what we know about the afterlife according to the Scriptures. Which leaves more than a few mysteries left unsolved.

We won't know what we will be doing in the afterlife other than worshiping God. We won't know what we look like or how we will be in relation to others. We won't know how much knowledge we will retain from this life. We don't even really know what we will be like once we are fully cleansed of sin. Imagine yourself without any desire to sin in thought, word, or deed. We don't know any of these things and that should be okay with us. We don't need to dwell on what God has not chosen to reveal to us. We need to seek to be content with what He has revealed to us and seek to do His revealed will with all of our hearts. We do know that our future state with God will be amazing and we want as many people around us as possible!

BIG IDEA: We don't know that much about heaven, but we should be okay with that and seek to serve God according to what He has revealed to us.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What is one thing about our future state that you would most like to know?
- **Question:** What would you say to someone who has a very different understanding of the afterlife as laid out in Scripture?

Week 19: Matthew 22:23-33

Day 5: Meeting People Where They Are

READ: Hebrews 11

EXPLORE:

This week we have been discussing the Sadducees approaching Jesus and challenging Him with a question regarding resurrection and marriage. When challenged by the Sadducees Jesus uses the text that they accept to challenge them, that is the Pentateuch (The five books of Moses). While He could have answered in many ways, He answers their challenge where they are at, with the information that they accept as true.

Jesus says, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. ... 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 a God of the dead, but of the living.” Hebrews 11:8-16 gives a good commentary of this for Abraham. God makes a covenant with Abraham, and from a man, “as good as dead, were born the descendants as many as the stars of heaven.” It also talks about how they seek a heavenly land, “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared them a city.”

1 Peter 3:15 tells us to “always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” One reason for our hope is that we have seen the promises of the Old Testament fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. The Old Testament tells us the history of Israel, constantly wandering away from God, and God being patient and faithful to them. Luke 24:27 tells us that Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” If we are not familiar with the Old Testament, how can

we provide this defense? The very defense that Jesus gave when he appeared to two of his disciples.

Romans 10:14 says, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” We are all tasked with being prepared to make a defense of the faith, and as we see with Jesus and the Sadducees the most effective way to defend the faith is using the things that people believe. This means we should seek to understand Scripture to the best of our ability. Sometimes arguments from the New Testament may be what people need, sometimes evidence from the Old Testament, and still others perhaps the Moral Argument, or the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God. The more tools we have in the toolbox the better equipped we are to do the work of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

BIG IDEA: Meet people where they are at.

APPLY:

- **Questions:** What areas do you feel well equipped to defend the faith? What areas do you feel you need additional work in?
- **Questions:** What are some examples of people you would like to share the gospel with? What areas do you think would be most helpful in defending the faith with them?

Week 20: Matthew 22:34-40

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 22:34-40 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: What are the parallels between the Pharisees and the common view of lawyers that we have today?

Question: The Pharisees and Sadducees normally hated each other but came together against Jesus. What does that tell you about the way in which the enemy (Satan) works?

Activity: Write down all of the 10 commandments and underline which ones apply to God and circle which ones apply to being a loving neighbor.

Question: How would you differentiate between heart, soul, and mind if at all?

Question: Why does Jesus list loving God as the greatest and first commandment?

Question: Why does Jesus only list two commandments?

Question: What does Jesus mean when He says that on the two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets?

Questions: What does it really mean for you personally to love God? Is it possible to keep this commandment as a believer led by the Holy Spirit?

Week 20: Matthew 22:34-40

Day 2: Lawyer vs Lord

READ: Matthew 22:34-40

EXPLORE:

In this passage we have another showdown between Jesus and the Pharisees, and this time they are especially fired up because Jesus just took down their rivals, the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the experts in the Mosaic law, which is why this particular Pharisee is referred to as a lawyer in many translations. As the experts, they held a position of both religious and political influence. There were no checks and balances in the Jewish system, the Pharisees functioned in legislative, executive, and judicial roles all at once. And like today, many of these men had become corrupt, prideful, and overbearing.

The Pharisees took it upon themselves to study and work through every detail of the Mosaic Law. They took keeping the law so seriously that they often created and imposed laws going one step further than God's original law. In their sinful nature, they put themselves in God's place creating, interpreting, and enforcing the law when and where they wanted to. We don't know for sure their original intentions. Maybe they started with genuine concern for obedience and the glory of God. As they studied the law meticulously, they may have started with good motives, but perhaps spending too much time looking down at the law, rather than up at the creator of the law led to the "woes" that will soon be pronounced over them in Matthew 23.

With their eyes focused downward at the law day in and day out, it was all they could see when they looked out at the people of God. They could do nothing but call out sin and impose heavy burdens of additional laws on their fellow Israelites. Had they turned their gaze upward toward the creator of the law they perhaps would have seen His heart behind the law. Perhaps they

would have recognized the contrast of their harsh enacting of the law and God's just but gentle use of the law to remind us of our desperate need for Him. Perhaps they would have understood what God meant in Hosea 6:6 when, in the midst of Israel's repeated rebellion, the Lord says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, an acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings." God is not after empty, law-keeping rituals. He is after the heart of His people. Two thousand years ago and still now.

The dangers and temptations that faced the Pharisees are still present and active today in the church as the enemy prowls around. We are tempted to keep our eyes focused downward at the law, and this can lead to two "successful" outcomes for the enemy. It can lead us to look at our failures and despair, or it can lead us to focus on the areas of the law we have kept successfully and kindle pride in our heart. While it is important to know His law and love His law (Psalm 119:97), it is the disproportionate focus on keeping it that can get us into trouble. We are called to fight this temptation by consistently turning our gaze upward to the God who created the law for our good and for His glory.

BIG IDEA: Our heart for God must exceed our heart for His law.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you tend to struggle with despair by focusing on your areas of failure or pride in focusing on areas you excel at in your walk with the Lord?
- **Question:** Has a disproportionate focus on the law affected your perception and treatment of others around you? If so, how?

Week 20: Matthew 22:34-40

Day 3: Which of the 10?

READ: Matthew 22:34-40; Exodus 20

EXPLORE:

Which laws are the most famous of Christianity? Which ones might even non-Christians know? I think it is pretty safe to say the Ten Commandments. There have even been debates on if the United States government buildings should have them outside. So, which of the Ten Commandments do you think Jesus said was the most important? The answer is actually none of them, believe it or not. Why not?

Jesus did not mention a single one of the Ten Commandments instead He listed what is stated in the Shema. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says this, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." While Jesus technically did not choose any of the Ten Commandments, many have pointed out that the Ten Commandments can be broken down into only two. The two that Jesus suggested. They actually are more practical commandments for what love is supposed to look like.

The first way we love God is by having no other gods. In the same way that a spouse should only have a special love for their partner so our longing desires for fulfillment should be brought to God. That is one way in which we are called to love Him. The second way in which we love God is by not making an idol. Idolatry is not just bowing down to a statue, but Paul would equate it to concepts like greed (Colossians 3:5). This harmonizes well with Jesus' teaching that "you can't serve both God and money." He would describe money as not something you own but something that owns you. We then are called to love God by serving Him rather than idols like money. The next way we are called to love God is by not taking His name in vain but keeping it holy. There is

actually much debate in what this means. Some interpret the commandment to be saying that you should not swear by God when you are lying. Some say it's claiming to be of God but living wickedly in the world. Still others might say misusing God's authority, just saying His proper name (the Jews held to this view), worshiping insincerely, or falsely attributing something to Him that would go against His character. The most common understanding is that it is treating God's name lightly in any sense and not as the one, true, and holy God of all creation. All of these views of taking the LORD's name in vain have merit because all of them are serious sins against a holy and righteous God. This commandment shows us that we love God by not taking His name lightly but understanding what it means to fear the LORD even as His children. Not that we cower before Him but that we respect His power and righteousness. The last one of the Ten Commandments that has to do with loving the Lord is keeping the Sabbath day. Christians since the beginning of the Church have argued on how we keep this commandment in the New Covenant. Personally I (Brayden) believe that remembering the Sabbath today is remembering that Christ became our Sabbath rest through the work of His life, death, and resurrection. We remember that because of His sacrifice for us we can have eternal rest with God the Father because our sins are no more. In that way, I believe we show our love for Him.

Meditating on these first four commandments of the ten help us better understand what it means to love God with our heart, soul, and mind. May we long for Him only, turn away from idolatry, keep His name holy, and find our rest in Him and thus love Him.

BIG IDEA: The first 4 commandments tell us how to love God.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Learn the first 4 commandments by heart.

Week 20: Matthew 22:34-40

Day 4: Love Like You Love You

READ: Matthew 22:34-40

EXPLORE:

You don't have to teach a toddler to care about themselves. We've got a one-and-a-half-year-old little girl, River, and she is basically perfect. Sweet, joyful, full of life... and also a tiny, determined, emotionally expressive human alarm system. If she's tired, she makes it very clear it's time for her to go to sleep. If something gets taken from her, she's not quietly processing that internally. Justice must be restored. And here's the thing. We never had to teach her any of that. I've never had to pull her aside and remind her to take care of herself. No coaching on how to prioritize her needs. She came out of the womb with that software fully installed. She loves herself naturally. And if we're honest, so do we.

Which is exactly why Jesus' words in Matthew 22:39 hit a little differently: "Love your neighbor as yourself." He's not giving you something brand new to figure out. He's pointing at something you already do all the time. You already think about yourself constantly. You already make sure your needs are met. You already justify your actions and give yourself grace when you fall short. You don't need help loving you. Jesus says, take that same instinct, that same attention, that same urgency and aim it at someone else. That's where it gets a little tricky. Because, I don't know about you, but I don't naturally treat people the way I treat myself. I treat myself with understanding. I treat others with expectations. I explain my mistakes. I analyze theirs. And Jesus steps in and says, flip that. Care about them the way you care about you. But He's not trying to make you a slightly nicer version of your old self. He's calling you to something far more radical. The same Jesus who says "love your neighbor as yourself" also says deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. So which is

it? Love yourself or die to yourself? Yes. Because the “self” you’re called to die to is the one that lives for comfort, control, pride, and being first. That version of you doesn’t need coaching. It needs crucifixion. But the “self” you now live from is completely different. You have a new identity. You are not defined by your worst moment, your current struggle, or your ability to hold everything together. You are defined by Christ. Forgiven, made new, fully known, and fully loved. So when Jesus tells you to love your neighbor as yourself, He’s not pointing you inward. He’s telling you to take the care you already give yourself and redirect it outward, while being rooted in who you now are in Him. You move toward people with compassion, not because they earned it, but because you didn’t either.

One day, we pray that River will learn what it means to lay herself down, to follow Jesus, and to love others the way she’s been loved. And we’ll spend the years ahead pointing her there. Teaching her to love the Lord with all her heart, and to love the people around her with that same kind of care. But that lesson isn’t just hers to learn. It’s ours. Because Jesus isn’t asking you to love yourself more. He’s asking you to take the love you already have, the same instinct you were born with, and redirect it.

BIG IDEA: You already love yourself well. Jesus calls you to redirect that same care and urgency toward others, rooted in your new identity in Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Who in your life is hardest for you to love right now? What would it look like to treat them with the same grace you give yourself? What’s a small way you can deny your own comfort so someone else can experience Christ’s love through you?

Week 20: Matthew 22:34-40

Day 5: The Law, the Prophets, and Jesus

READ: Matthew 22:34-40; Deut. 6:5; Lev 19:18; Micah 6:8

EXPLORE:

At first glance, the phrase 'all the Law and the Prophets' indicates that Jesus is summarizing the content of the entire Tanakh, the Jewish Scriptures. This phrase occurs 5 times in the New Testament: twice in Matthew, once each in Luke, Acts and Romans. But there is more. We notice the phrase that, in the ESV, is translated 'depend on'. The NIV has 'hangs on'. The phrase is literally 'suspended from'. So, at the very least, all of the Hebrew Scriptures are anchored on these two commandments: love God with your entire being and in the same way you love and take care of your own self, we are to love our neighbor. Of course the best exposition of the attitude toward our neighbor is found in the parable of the Good Samaritan which was given in the context of an answer (and question) by another lawyer (Luke 10:25-36).

Jesus brings together two Old Testament texts, Deut. 6:5 and Levit. 19:18, and in so doing focuses on 'love' rather than on more tangible regulations to be obeyed. In so doing, He lifts the discussion above merely adjudicating between competing rules, He gives priority to a principle which has potential application to every aspect of religious and communal life. Secondly, Jesus asserts that the one principle of love applies equally to the two main aspects of religious duty: one's attitude toward God and one's attitude with respect to other people. It is these two foci of human responsibility toward God that provide the framework for the two 'tables' of the Decalogue (the 10 Commandments), which is, in and of itself, a summary of the Law. There is no evidence that any of the rabbis prior to Jesus had brought these two texts together. According to Jesus Himself, the two texts He has chosen are together sufficiently strong to bear the weight of the entire Old Testament.

The burden of the prophets was exactly this: a heart devotion toward God and a sacrificial devotion to the covenant community and the world around them. The prophet Micah summarizes it well: *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* Jesus' emphasis on love is not remotely akin to the cheap sentimentality of songs like 'All the World needs now is love' or 'All you need is love'. Rather, Jesus' words, and the Old Testament passages that form their basis, are the primary lens for interpreting and applying the Law and the Prophets. For just as Jesus' concept for 'neighbor' is expansive and unlimited, the 'love' which God expects is equally unlimited. The comprehensive nature of the love which these two texts demand makes them eminently suitable for the role of summarizing the Law and the Prophets, as the lawyer has asked. All of the Old Testament (and New Testament) revelation is understood to express the same divine will.

BIG IDEA: Love toward God and our neighbor is the lens with which God expects us to view all of life, and all of the Law and Prophets for this is how Jesus lived and how He expects us to live.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do you think about the Old Testament? Do you see it as revealing the heart of a loving God toward His fallen creatures? As redeemed children, do you love kindness and justice? Do you walk humbly before your God?
- **Challenge:** Commit yourself to a Bible reading plan that includes reading through the Old Testament.



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