

April 11, 2007

“They will reverence my son.” Pathetic words of a hopelessly indulgent, loving father? Or the steely resolve of an outraged Father? Both. The Father loves the Son and has given Him authority to judge, John 5:20-30. And they who rejected Him will indeed give reverence to Him for at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord, Philippians 2:9, 10. He is become the head of the corner. They perceive He is speaking of them but do not seem to even comprehend the warning plea in His words.

The opposition united. Groups who were bitter rivals consolidated their forces against a common enemy. One after another they sent shrewd men with carefully selected questions to Him to catch Him in His words. Each in turn failed, completely confounded by the wisdom of His responses. Three parties approached Him each from a perspective reflecting a primary point of real controversy amongst them. They genuinely did not agree, and could not come to agreement, on these issues. Their reasoning seems to be “if we can’t agree together on these issues He will be hopelessly confused when confronted with these questions.” He wasn’t! They were the ones silenced by His responses. They are the three shepherds Zechariah prophesied would be put to shame in one day.

Zechariah 11:8 Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.

Each instance brings two interlaced themes to our attention.

Taxes, and Government, Caesars’ coin;

Death/Resurrection, and marriage;

The greatest commandment of the Law, Love for God and for one another,

As a bonus, courtesy of the Lord,

The presentation of great David’s greater Son.

Jesus put them to flight and firmly established that He had wisdom worthy of the prophesied Messiah they expected. No man dared ask Him any more questions after that. And they didn’t. He had routed them but in so doing sealed His death warrant. Though He antagonized them He was not suicidal but simply a faithful witness to them, His beloved people Israel. Faithful unto death. It was now His hour to go to the cross. He does nothing to avoid it.

Caesar. The Jews deeply resented the Roman occupation and particularly despised paying the taxes demanded by them. Jewish tax gatherers (publicans) were hated as traitors. Jesus had come upon the scene upsetting the established traditions of the law freely declaring a more stringent test of man’s love for God than

even their strict traditions demanded. Certainly He would reject the very idea of paying tribute to Caesar. Doing so would get Him crossways with the Roman authorities and end His public ministry. He didn’t. He turns this quandary into a searching challenge, “render to God the things that are God’s.” How simple. There was a deeper issue at stake here too. Caesar demanded he be regarded as god to be worshiped. The face on the coin was that of a living idol. This was a head-on challenge to the Son of Man from the Devil who was behind the throne of Caesar. We are to give the god of the world and his representatives the taxes they demand. Give the God of the universe our hearts. But, consistent with this example of the Lord, we are more than once commanded to pay our taxes to what ever government God has placed in authority, clean or corrupt. Romans 13:6, 1Peter 2:13-15. A corrupt or ineffective government is better than anarchy. Looking deeper we see that behind the Jews’ chaffing at the domination of the Roman occupation lay their own refusal to acknowledge the reason they were in this state. They had departed from the God of their fathers and were under His discipline. They refused to repent, most recently, despite the call for it by John the Baptist and Jesus Himself. The Old testament is full of instances where God uses one nation as a scourge for another which is refusing to give Him His rightful place. He still does, which is one reason for the wars that are so common in history and today..

Resurrection. Next Jesus settled the issue of resurrection. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Men go to great lengths to avoid facing the fact of their accountability to God. If there is not resurrection there is no judgement to fear. (Similarly if there is no Creator there is no accountability. Evolution theory provides a handy way of denying man’s responsibility to His Creator.) “Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?” The Sadducees and the priests, though powerful leaders of the people, with a form of godliness, were not godly in any meaningful sense of the word. They did not know the scriptures and they did not know the power of God. Religious in name only. They and the Pharisees were at opposite poles of the Jewish world of that day. Don’t we see examples of both in the Christendom today? Legal zeal versus a mere form of godliness, neither according to scripture.. Beware we not fall into either ditch.

There is a wry saying that there are only two sure things in life: death and taxes. (For a believer even death is not sure, but taxes are due next week.) But for man on earth the three sure things are God’s love, resurrection (or rapture).and taxes, Every human being that dies will be

raised from the dead. Yes, both saints and sinners, but not at the same time.

John 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

No one could be raised to stand before the Great White Throne if Jesus had not died and rose again. Likewise none could be raised in the body to enjoy heaven with Him.

We have a wonderful peek into the heavenly state that awaits us. There will not be marriage. This seems hard to accept now for couples that are deeply in love, and some for many years. But our relationships will be even better then. (Note the Lord's plain declaration of the roles of men and women here upon earth. Men marry. Women are given in marriage.) He will marry His Bride, the church, in that day, Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-9. Our joy as part of that will exceed any we have enjoyed in our marriage here on earth.

His declaration that God is the God of the living, naming their revered ancestors, deflated their pretensions to prestige and superiority. He later refers to another ancestor, David, to confound their warped thinking.

The Scribe. A scribe came to Jesus with their final test question. "Which is the first commandment of all?" What did he expect Jesus to say? Would Jesus renounce the Law? That would incite a riot. But He had earlier announced some commandments as superceding the Law of Moses and in particular the traditions the Jews added to the Law. He words "but I say unto you" must have really grated on them. The scribe was baiting Him but was pleasantly surprised at the Lord's reply. Jesus readily quotes scriptures from Moses.

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. 31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

These sum up the responsibility of all mankind from the creation to the end of the world. The New Testament builds upon these scriptures in many places. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. And since God is Love those who practice love become like Him. And Christ's death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit He sent from heaven give us power to love. We could not otherwise. But now we do.

The scribe (still acting as a superior) commended Jesus' response. Then, enlarging upon the meaning and

implications of those scriptures, he went so far as to say love surpassed the offerings prescribed in the Law. What insight! The Lord encourages Him, saying authoritatively "thou art not far from the Kingdom of God,"—not far from saving faith. He gives the scribe more to consider.

David's Son. The Lord now confronted the scribes with the scriptures that forecast the Messiah would be David's Lord. Could this be? David's son, Messiah (Christ), greater than David himself? And would this son be seated at God's right hand, there to await the time when his enemies would be made his footstool? Wouldn't Messiah destroy his enemies immediately when he came? That was what they believed. What was this about waiting? What was this about a man seated at God's right hand in heaven? How could that be? Was the Messiah to be a man seated at God's right hand before he was even born? That didn't add up. Well then, would the Messiah somehow be taken to heaven at some point in his life like Elijah was? The other alternative was unthinkable. Would the Messiah die? Would he then be raised and taken to heaven after his resurrection? Unthinkable! Yet how else could they account for this strange mystery Jesus had presented them from their own scriptures? God is not the God of the dead but of the living. David was among the living though his body still lay in his tomb. David said (by the Holy Spirit) the coming Christ was his Lord. Could they accept the fact that this lowly Man Jesus was David's Lord, the Living One come down among men? But David himself prophesied this. They could not argue against Jesus' facts.

They had been ready to stone Him more than once for His assertions that He was God's Son. But no! That was too much to believe! So they didn't.

Then Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes. They were totally inconsistent with the statements of the scribe in his response to Jesus' answer.

"Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, 39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: 40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation."

Jesus then went and purposely took a seat across from the collection box and attentively watched those who were bringing contributions. How rude! But He is not there as a curious, idle spectator but as Lord of the temple and of those worshiping there. He simply demonstrated this by briefly watching over the collection box. How appropriate. He knows our hearts and what we give Him. This is the third time widows are mentioned in this chapter.

By Ron Canner, April 11, 2007