

Gospel of Matthew

22:41~46 – 23:1~13

The Pretenders



HEADLINES - JESUS WINS WAR OF WITS!!!



Jesus has been getting grilled by the Pharisees and Sadducees for the past 3½ years, but it really had gotten intense when He arrived in Jerusalem this last time to celebrate Passover with His disciples and fulfill their obligation of annual pilgrimage to the temple. But He finally shuts them up for good after this exchange!

But back at the temple, as His listeners gather around to hear Him teach again – listeners that included the Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and teachers of the Law - Jesus turns the tables on them and asks them a question first, before they can ask Him one. It is a leading question – one that every Jew knew the answer to. *Whose son is the Christ supposed to be?* But He is asking this to set up His next question. He is trying to get at something else entirely and this is just a lead-in to that. They give the obvious answer – that the Christ was to be the son (descendant) of David. Jesus doesn't really disagree with them. But challenges their simple conclusion with a riddle from scripture that they cannot answer! So, if He is just a son, why does David refer to Him as “*my Lord*” in **Ps. 110:1**?! Ps. 110 was well-known to be a prophetic passage concerning the coming Christ, the Promised One of Israel who would come and build the seat of power in a new empire – the Kingdom of God! This Psalm speaks in apocalyptic language of God's plans for His Promised One. It is somewhat hard to decipher, like most prophetic/apocalyptic language, but it is obviously connects the Promised One to some kind of world conquest, so it was well-accepted as a messianic portion of scripture – in other words – it was believed to be about the coming Messiah!

[Ps. 110]

So in a chapter that these men acknowledge is about the Promised Messiah, the scriptures refer to the Promised One as “*my Lord*”. If David is the author of this Psalm (and Jesus indicates that he is, and is not disagreed with by the O.T. scholars) then David is referring to his descendant as his “Lord”. A King calls no one “Lord” unless that person is a greater King and has power and authority over even him. So Jesus puts this theological riddle to these biblical “experts”. How could David call his own son, or descendant, “*Lord*”? Jesus is not actually questioning that the Messiah would be coming through David’s genetic line. God had promised that very thing in [2 Sam. 7:13-16]. The passage starts out being about Solomon and ends up being about a future descendant who would be someone very special – obviously more than a man! He is someone who sits at the right hand of God and who will rule forever! No mere man fits that description! Jesus is pointing out that the Messiah was no mere man!



[Isaiah 11:1-9] Jesus didn’t fit all of this description either – some of it, but not all - *not yet anyway*! Jesus had indeed sat at God the Father’s right hand as “*the Word*” - 2nd member of God’s tri-unity. He couldn’t prove that, to these men, of course, except maybe through the great miracles of healing that He performed.

The miracles should have convinced the enemies of Jesus! Not even the greatest prophets before Jesus had ever come even close to equaling the sheer volume of all these wonderful miracles that Jesus was performing daily! It was far greater than even the output of Moses who had indeed wrought some great miracles – **the 10 plagues** of Egypt, the **parting of the Red Sea**, the **sweetening of the bitter waters**, the **floating axe head**, daily **manna** on the ground for the people to eat, a river of **water from the desert rock** (twice) and many others!

But Jesus would not at that time establish an earthly empire over all of the nations of earth by force. His Kingdom at this time was of a spiritual nature. It would be carved out of all the nations, established one citizen at a time when people heard about and believed in Jesus and entrusted their salvation and their heart and lives to Him and to His purposes. But one great and terrible day, He *will* rule the nations, taking them by force and exacting a terrible judgment in the process! In that day, the gentle Savior will transition from His role as Savior/Advocate to also become conquering King – [Rev. 19:11-16]!

The War of Realms / One Last Battle of the Age [Rev. 19].

The seer heard a mighty roar – from heaven’s multitude
They’re celebrating noisily – for joy is heaven’s food!
Shouting “*Glory Hallelujah – Salvation is the LORD’s!*
Salvation, Glory, Power be” – And thus the volume soared!

*“His judgment is unerring – against the blighted whore
Who’s infected earth with evil things – and opened wide for more
Who is renown in history – for murder of the saints
Whose retribution day has come – from God without restraints*



*And smoke rises above her ruins – now and forevermore
As like the smoke of sacrifice – her death has pleased the Lord!”*
The four and twenty elders bow – as do the four creatures
And prostrate do they worship God – praising His countless features!

“Amen, and Hallelujah” they – will cry unto the throne
Not out of fear but out of love – their voices will intone
And then resounding from the throne – a voice responds to them.
“Oh praise the Lord, you great and small – and praise the Lord again!”



Again, the multitude sounds out – so great, so vast, their call
It sounds like pealing thunder or – perhaps a waterfall
“*Hallelujah*”, they all cry out – “*The Lord Almighty reigns!*
Rejoice, be glad, and celebrate – His glory will be gained!”

The wedding of the Lamb is now – and His bride is nearly ready
She wears the finest linen bright – and she, herself, is steady
The clothes she wears, so fine and white – immaculate indeed
Stand for the righteous acts of saints – the ones that Jesus freed



And then an angel spoke and told – the writer to write down
These truths that come from God above – the truth that will abound
That those who are invited are - the ones extremely blessed
They line the tables of the hall – for they are heaven’s guests

The wedding supper of the Lamb – has blessed those who are there
And brings the seer to his knees – in-the attitude of prayer.
But the luminary from on high – rejects his rapt attentions
“Don’t worship me, but only God – I won’t have this invention!”



*For just like you, I serve the Lord – and serve His gospel too!
We're fellow servants, you and I – with **all** who love Him true!"*
This precious testimony of – Jesus, the Living Christ
Is prophecy of finest worth – which can't be overpriced!

And then the heavens parted wide – to-a white horse standing tall
And a rider seated on the horse – who is the Lord of all
He's called the "Faithful and the True" – who judges and makes war.
And all heaven waits to see – that He will right the score



His eyes like orbs of blazing fire – with crowns upon His head
And-a tattooed name, a mystery – that is not known or read
He wears a robe that's dipped in blood – He is the Word of God
He leads a stunning cavalry – a splendid sight that awes

This white army follows their King – their tunics bright and clean
But it seems they don't have much to do – for HE's the war machine
For from His mouth darts a sharp sword – to strike the nations down
He'll ruin them with His spoken word – and cow them with His frown



He'll tread the winepress of the wrath – Him who is Almighty
And rule them with a rod of iron – for He will not tread lightly!
On His thigh and on His robe – a noble Name is shared
“The King of Kings and Lord of Lords” – to-whom nothing can compare!

And silhouetted in the sun, an angel calls the birds
*“The ‘great supper of God’ he calls – ‘is ready to be served!
Come eat the carrion of men – from every walk of life
from kings to paupers they will die – for-they choose to stand and fight!’”*



The Beast, and all the Kings of earth – gather for one great battle
They throw their armies on the sword – like so much worthless chattel
And so they die in monstrous heaps – and when it's all concluded
The Beast and his false prophet lie – in chains they've not eluded

Into the burning sulfur of – the lake of fire they go
Their screams of rage and agony – echo above the glow
And back on earth the silence grows – for there are few survived
So God's wrathful meal is served – it's winged guests arrived!



That terrible war to put an end to war and to establish a peace of 1000 years, will be coming to earth one day when the Risen and Living Christ returns. Everything will be different at His second coming! It will be a different age, and He will be here on a different mission - for *judgment*, not salvation. But even in judgment, He will be saving the world! He will be ridding the world of its corrupt kings and their blind followers who in their abject narcissism always resist the King of Kings, Earth's Creator. At that time the Christ will also rid human beings of their inclination/attraction to what is wrong and evil and false! For a 1000 years the people of earth will be content under the just and generous leadership of "*Him who is Faithful and True*" and of the saints of God who assist Him - who rule with Him at all levels of government! They will be able to be used by God in a just government because they listened to God, and by cooperating with the transformational work of the Spirit of God, they were qualified to rule and reign with God. They are the true and authentic followers of Jesus Christ - the incorruptibles who will also be faithful and true like their leader.



Back to our next text this morning. These religious leaders of Judea were men who were masquerading as representatives of God, but they were only representatives of themselves! Jesus looked right through them. He saw into their hearts and souls. He read their minds and motives, and He rejected them. They could have no part in the the True God because they were idolaters of the self. They used piety to get ahead in life. Their hearts were hardened in opposition to the actual direction of God! We have many Christians that do the same. It happens at every level, but prominent Christian leaders come easily to mind, charismatic personalities, who can command a stage, make the camera love them, and charm a microphone, but who are as narcissistic and cynical as an atheist - false as a wooden nickel with a coat of metallic paint! That is why Jesus asserts that "the first will be last and the last will be first". What God looks at is the heart. He listens to the inner conversations of the Me, Myself, and I. He knows by what we say to ourselves in our own head who is real and who is not. He is not fooled. He cannot be not conned!

1-4 - They do not practice what they preach. They pile on a heavy burden that they force others to carry. The followers of Jesus must avoid hypocrisies.

5-7 - They love appearances and making a show of their own “spirituality”. They live for the accolades and respect and honor of others. These motives corrupt a person, and a follower of Jesus is to avoid doing the same.

7-10 - They love their titles – rabbi/master, father, teacher, and are gratified when others refer to them by honorific titles. The followers of Jesus, on the other hand should avoid titles if at all possible. Insisting upon the titles of “Reverend”/ “pastor”/“doctor”/ “apostle”/“elder-overseer” is nothing more than pretensions. Pretensions are of the world system, as if someone is special, holier than the next guy, closer to God, wiser than everyone else! Christ-followers are not to think of themselves in this way, nor to let others give them undue and overblown honor! A pastor is not aristocracy! They are just another human being who should be trying to follow Jesus as best they can. If they have more influence it should be because they have a knowledge of God’s word, some common sense and ideas that are demonstrably better than others. Pastors, like everyone else, are always a combination of good characteristics and bad. In fact, I give you fair warning that narcissists are drawn to the ministry in disproportionate numbers, because the title and position can be exploited into a place of power over others! Alpha male or female people that try to impress, people, that grasp for more than having their place in the brotherhood or sisterhood, are to be help suspect for having pretentions that are contrary to the Kingdom values! They will generally do a lot of damage before finally being turned out! These are the wolves among the flock! The sheep want to follow the Shepherd. The wolf wants to BE the Shepherd so that others might follow them!



Vs. 11-12 - The Kingdom values are those of love, faith, humility, kindness, and grace/patience. Servanthood is what we are to seek, not a throne! We seek to serve, not be served! If our spiritual gift is leadership, it must be humble leadership. We lead from behind! The purpose of God is to produce the fruit of humility in His followers. A gifted leader must lead by faith and reason, not lording it over anyone because of false aggrandizement! A gifted leader should not even see themselves as THE leader. A “gifted” leader is not truly gifted with leadership without the “gift” of humility accompanying it! In God’s Kingdom, humility is a necessary ingredient of leadership. A leader is to model servant leadership by treating *everyone* as their equal. They should believe this to that point that they are a bit surprised and taken aback by the mantle of leadership, and always a bit uncomfortable and at odds with it. But valuing humility, and recognizing its importance in the body life of the church, a leader within God’s Kingdom is always trying to produce Christ-followers who are also humble. We are “*followers*” after all, following the one Supreme leader who is truly worthy!



13,14 - Leaders who are egotistical are a turnoff. Jesus makes that clear here. They are an obstacle in themselves! They keep people from God! They leave a sour taste in people's mouth. They provide an easy excuse for people to turn away from God. People see the egoist and say to themselves, "*I don't want that. I wouldn't want to end up like them!*" Since we represent God to others, we give them a dim view of God if we do not represent Him with humility and kindness! All that human nature needs is the slightest excuse.

*In the 3 yrs before I came to this church, I was working construction - (have I mentioned that a time or two?) – well, I have to say that it was illustrated to me then that the most common reason/excuse that men refuse to give their lives to Jesus is because of their experiences with Christians who claimed to represent God to them and who have left such a bad impression that the mere mention of Jesus in a conversation would leave them backing up, asking me specifically not to go there. *In 1958, a book was published with the title, "The Ugly American" which told of the ineffectiveness of American policy in Southeast Asia because of the pompous and condescending attitudes of its American representatives. In contrast, the communists came in and acted like they were the people's best friend and won the hearts and minds of the people that had been turned off by the Americans. In the end, it wasn't ideology that won the day for the communists in Southeast Asia, but good representation! In the same way, a large percentage of Christians have misrepresented Christ in their respective worlds and made him an anathema/detestable to the very people who need Him so desperately. They wear Christ like a crown of thorns! It is actually painful to watch! Let me personalize this by asking – if I went to your neighbors and/or colleagues in the workplace what they thought of you and what they thought of your brand of Christianity from what they knew of you, what could they tell me?



Just remember, the key to sharing Christ is relationship, not ideology - most of the time!