

10.22.23 Week 1 Participant Material **Getting Ready for the King**

What Belongs to God – Have Your Priorities Straight Matthew 22:15-22

Thank you: Thank you for your willingness to participate in our four-week focus on *Getting Ready for the King*. If you knew a king was coming to your home, that would impact how you spent your time, energy, and resources. A pending royal visit would shape and influence your priorities. In the few days between when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday and before his betrayal and arrest on Thursday night, the Gospel of Matthew shares several encounters that Jesus has with people as well as some key moments of teaching. Much of the teaching in these few days is focused on **being prepared and ready**, for example, for the return of the landowner (21:33-46), for a wedding feast being given by a king (22:1-14), for the coming of the bridegroom (25:1-13), or the return of a master who entrusted his property to his servants (25:14-30). As followers of Christ, we want to make sure we're doing what we're supposed to be doing as disciples. To use the imagery from one parable, we want to make sure we have our priorities straight and our "wedding robe" of righteousness (Matthew 22:12) so we can enjoy the banquet with the king.

Context: The setting for this week's scripture is the last week of Jesus' life. On Sunday, he entered Jerusalem and was hailed by the crowds as "*the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee*" (Matthew 21:11). Then Jesus drives out all who are buying and selling in the temple, overturning tables, then healing people, and making those in positions of religious authority angry (Matthew 21:15). On Monday, Jesus enters the temple again and the chief priests and elders question who gave him the authority to do what he's doing (Matthew 21:23). Like a typical rabbi, Jesus answers their question with a question about John the Baptist which they refuse to answer. Then Jesus proceeds to tell three different parables: about a man who had two sons, a landowner who planted a vineyard, and a marriage feast, all of which condemn the actions of those in positions of religious authority. They recognize this and want to arrest him (Matthew 21:46) and plot to trap him

by getting him to say something that will get him in trouble with the governing Roman authorities or his followers or both.

Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSV).

15 Then the **Pharisees** went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.
 16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the **Herodians**, saying,
“Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, *“Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used for the tax.”* And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, *“Whose head is this, and whose title?”* 21 They answered, *“The emperor’s.”* Then he said to them, *“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* 22 When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.”

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include this confrontation. Whenever people question Jesus from a place of malice or insincerity, it never goes well for them. Jesus was happy to answer questions that came from a place of truly seeking and wanting to learn (for example, Matthew 19:16-22), even if the questioner found the answer difficult. It’s ironic that they say, *“we know that you are sincere,”* when they are not being sincere. Yet, what they say about Jesus in verse 16 is 100 percent accurate. Jesus is sincere and teaches the way of God in accordance with truth, shows deference to no one; and doesn’t regard people with partiality.

Ice Breaker Questions

1. What is something that’s a priority for you? What is something you habitually do? For example, spending time with family and important relationships, exercising, attending worship, watching a favorite program, engaging in a favorite activity?

2. What do you do if you know you have guests coming to your home for a visit, a meal, or to stay with you? Why do you do what you do to prepare for their visit?

Questions for Discussion

1. In Matthew 22:18, there is malicious intent behind the question posed to Jesus by the Pharisees and Herodians. Why do you think they were trying to trap Jesus? How did they hope he'd answer?
2. What does Jesus mean when he says: *"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."* How do you discern what belongs to God and what belongs to "the emperor" or "Caesar?"
3. How does your faith influence your priorities in terms of the daily and weekly choices you make as far as how you spend your time, what you read or listen to, how you allocate your resources, where you devote your energy, and how you treat and regard other people?

4. 1 Peter 2:17 states, *"Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor."* How do we do each of those things? What would it look like for you and us to honor everyone and to love the family of believers?

5. How would you describe the relationship between fearing God and honoring the supreme political leader?

6. How do we make sure our faith informs our politics rather than our politics shaping our faith? Can you clearly support and connect your political views with the teaching and ministry of Jesus?

Prayer: Almighty, most holy God, faithful through the ages, we thank you for this time together to study and learn from your Word, to get to know one another better, and to take seriously the teaching of Jesus. Help us to continue to grow and change and become more like Jesus. May his priorities shape our own, and may our lives reflect his love, grace, and mercy. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.