

In this parable, the first son readily agrees to go to the field but bluntly refuses to keep his word. The second son also refuses to go but after reconsidering the request he then goes to the field. The second son repents and turns from his rebellion, but the first doesn't. The first son represents the religious leaders who readily say the right things but outright refuse to dirty their hands with the true requirements of the Lord. The second son represents the sickest of sinners who would never intend to serve the Lord in any way but repent from their wickedness and serve Him by performing whatever task He requests.

Parable of the Evil Renters

Matthew 21: ³³ "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.⁹⁵ ³⁴ "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. ³⁵ "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ "Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. ³⁷ "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ "But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' ³⁹ "They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" ⁴¹ They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE Lord, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? ⁹⁶ ⁴³ "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. ⁴⁴ "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

By now the priests know Jesus is speaking about them; their hearts are burning as they listen and they do not rebut one word. Jesus pours His condemnation out on the religious leaders with the story about the evil renters of the vineyard. The priests cannot miss the direct correlation between the story and their proven track records. They are the ones who have beaten and killed the men sent by the Lord. They are the ones who have mistreated the spokesmen of God. They are the ones who will kill the Father's only Son. They are not the leaders of the kingdom of God as they profess to be and they will be crushed when the Chief Corner stone falls on them.

Priests and Pharisees Angry

Matthew 21: ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

Even the dumbest of the dumb priests understand that Jesus in speaking of their wicked lives. The only thing standing in the way of their anger is the Lord's favor among the people. He is still the miracle working Messiah in the eyes of the crowd, and the priests' murderous hearts can't turn the people against Him.

Heaven Compared to a Wedding Feast

Matthew 22: ¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. ³ "And he

⁹⁵ Isaiah 5:2

⁹⁶ Psalm 118:22-23

sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. ⁴ "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. ⁸ "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' ¹⁰ "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are called, but few are chosen."

It is still Monday and the Lord relates the third parable which will anger the priests even more. In a different way He makes certain that they understand that they are the invited guests to the kingdom of heaven, but they have killed the servants of the Lord sent to give them greeting from the throne above and offer them a place at the table of the marriage feast. Because of their evil ways, they are not worthy to attend the feast and they, the Jewish leaders who are rejecting Him as the Messiah, will be destroyed. Jesus will invite others from the highways and byways of the Jewish world, but not all of them will be welcome at the feast. Proper attire, wedding clothes pure and white, must be worn. The man not dressed in the proper clothing will be cast far from the feast into the darkness of the place of eternal doom. The story ends with the Lord saying "Many are called but few are chosen." "Called" and "chosen" have the same root word but "chosen" has an additional prefix that establishes a distinction in their meanings. In modern English it might be better to say, many are called but few are called out from the called. Just as the Lord called many to join Him as disciples, Jesus called only 12 to be the apostles. Notice that Jesus made the choice. This passage is different because the destiny of the called being called out is based solely on their belief in the Messiah. It is still the Lord's purpose to offer His coming to the Jews first. The Gospel of Matthew is written to the Jews and therefore this passage is intended for no other ethnic group and it is not found in the other Gospels.

The Gospel of Matthew
Lesson 14
Matthew 22:15 – Matthew 23:39

Plot to Trap Jesus - Taxes

Matthew 22: ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. ¹⁷ "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ "Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. ²⁰ And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

In their plot to trap Jesus, the Pharisees send their own disciples along with the Herodians to question Him. We must not mistake these disciples as followers of Jesus. They are faithful believers in the Pharisees and their restrictive, sinful ways. The Herodians are with them but they are not a religious group; they are a political group which supports the efforts, policies and leadership of their king, Herod. In America, they would be thought of as Democrats or Republicans. The envoy from each group approaches Jesus to trap Him by using a political issue, taxes. Once again, Jesus will not be entrapped by their plan. Their coins bear the image of Caesar so Jesus teaches them to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

Plot Foiled

Matthew 22: ²² And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

The disciples of the Pharisees and the worldly Herodians are not versed enough in the oratory arts to counter the answer of the Lord. Jesus' answer seems logical and right in their understanding. They probably agree wholeheartedly with Him and had they stayed around, would possibly have become believers. Not able to rebut the Lord, they simply leave.

Whose Wife in Heaven

Matthew 22: ²³ On that day some Sadducees (~~who say there is no resurrection~~) came to Jesus and questioned Him, ²⁴ asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.'⁹⁷ ²⁵ "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; ²⁶ so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ "Last of all, the woman died. ²⁸ "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." ²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Later on Tuesday, the Sadducees take their turn at Jesus. After a woman has been the wife of several brothers without bearing a child, the Sadducees want to know which husband will have her as a wife in heaven. Once again, this topic is strictly Jewish in nature and its

⁹⁷ Deuteronomy 25:5-6; Genesis 38:8

source is Deuteronomy 25:5-6. The Law's intent is to carry on the heritage and legacy of the dead brother. The ploy of the Sadducees of stretching out the story through seven brothers is probably meant for amusement and entrapment. They do not expect the Lord's answer as Jesus moves the subject matter past the subject of heaven to the discussion of the resurrection. The Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection; therefore, the Lord has trapped them in their debate which usually takes place with the Pharisees who do believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees do not "understand the Scripture or the power of God" because in the time following the resurrection, there are no marital relationships just as angels cannot enter into marriage relationships.⁹⁸

Regarding the Resurrection

Matthew 22:³¹ "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ³²'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁹⁹ ³³ When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

To prove to the Sadducees that the resurrection is a reality in which they must believe, Jesus takes them back to the beginning of their Book of Exodus and what it says about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all of whom have been physically dead more than 400 years at the time of its writing. He is not their God because they are dead; He is their God because they are living even though their bodies are dead.¹⁰⁰ The people who hear the Sadducees question Jesus are astonished with His response but the Sadducees can say nothing in return.

Greatest Commandment Question

Matthew 22:³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵ One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, " YOU SHALL LOVE THE Lord YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." ³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'¹⁰¹ ⁴⁰ "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

No doubt the setback for the Sadducees thrills the Pharisees; Jesus has proven the Pharisaical position to them. Nevertheless, the two groups join together, mustering their forces to entrap the Lord.

⁹⁸ Jesus' answer in Matthew 22:30 cancels the doctrine proposed by many that in the Old Testament book of Genesis, the angels had marital relationships with the daughters of men and a race of giants were born. It is impossible for an angel to have a sexual relationship with humans; angels are neither male nor female, and they do not have sex organs. They are spiritual beings without flesh and blood. Fallen angels would at times enter into a human body to control it for their purposes, and it was called demon possession. However, if the demon caused the human to enter into a sexual relationship with another human and a child was born, it would be fully human unless another demon possessed the body. Nothing angelic would be transferred in the sexual act. When Jesus mentions "marriage relationships" it means the sexual relationship. The purpose of the Deuteronomy 25:5-6 relationship was purely sexual to bring about a male child to carry on the name of the dead relative. Once the male child was born, the sexual relationship rarely continued.

⁹⁹ Exodus 3:6

¹⁰⁰ At Jesus' resurrection, all three fathers mentioned in the passage as well as all the bodies of the believers from the Old Testament days will be resurrected from the grave, rejoined with their souls and taken to heaven with the Lord. See the thought found in Matthew 27:52-53 concerning the events surrounding the Lord's resurrection.

¹⁰¹ Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; 1 Samuel 15:22

At that time, the scribes (lawyers) of the Sanhedrin held to 613 commandments. The positive commandments numbered 248, the exact number of the known parts of the human body at that time. The negative commandments numbered 365 representing the days of the year. The scribe wants to know which of the 613 laws stand above all the others. Jesus' commandments easily answer their question by quoting one Law and one passage from the Prophets. The first is found in Deuteronomy and repeated in Leviticus. The second is found in 1st Samuel.¹⁰²

Whose Son

Matthew 22: ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "The son of David." ⁴³ He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, ⁴⁴ 'THE Lord SAID TO MY Lord, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET"'?¹⁰³ ⁴⁵ "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" ⁴⁶ No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

It is now time for the Lord to question the Pharisees still gathered in the temple area that Tuesday afternoon. Because of the context, it is possible that the Sadducees have left the room because Jesus does not address them for the rest of the day.

Jesus asks the Pharisees a leading question about Christ and "whose son is He." They reply that the Christ (Messiah) will be the son of David. To confound them even more than before, Jesus draws their attention to David's statement located in Psalms 110:1 in which David calls the Christ Lord, not son. In David's day it was not proper to call one's son Lord. How can David's son be his Lord also? Jesus' question is a real problem for the theology of the Pharisees. They are unable to answer Him, possibly confounded because they have never entertained the question and debated it enough to establish their ritualistic answer. If Christ is the son of David, then Jesus fits the bill. But if Christ existed before David so that he could call Him Lord, their answer must be wrong and they are dumbfounded. The Pharisees are struck with the problem of the eternal deity of Jesus and the humanity of His virgin birth. They neither reply to nor address the Lord the rest of the day, but He has much more to say to them that afternoon, Tuesday, April 4th, of AD 30.

Seated in the Chair of Moses

Matthew 23: ¹ Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, ² saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; ³ therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*. ⁴ "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger. ⁵ "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*.⁶ "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. ¹⁰⁴

Moses never sat in a specific seat to judge the people in the traditional sense. The 'chair of Moses' is a Hebraism that refers to his place of authority among the people under the direction of the Lord. Moses oversaw both the religious lives of the people and the

¹⁰² Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; 1 Samuel 15:22

¹⁰³ Psalm 110:1

¹⁰⁴ Numbers 15:38-39

political environment in which they lived. The members of the Sanhedrin are the controllers of the same two parts of Jewish life in Jesus' day. Unlike Moses, the Sanhedrin members are hypocrites, looking out for their own good rather than for the best for the people. Moses was honest and forthright. The Sanhedrin is conniving and ruthless. Moses facilitated the needs of the people. The Sanhedrin steal from the people to facilitate their own desires. Moses was the servant of the people. The Sanhedrin expects to be served by the people. The difference between how Moses ruled from the seat is in polar opposition as to how the Sanhedrin rules. The Sanhedrin may say the right words but their conduct proves they do not place the same standards on themselves as they do the people. They want to be teachers of men but they do not deserve the title.

Do Not

Matthew 23: ⁸ "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ "Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ.

The apostles are not to allow the people to call them teacher, father, or leader. The Holy Spirit is the teacher, the heavenly Father is the Father and Jesus is the Leader. In context, Jesus is telling the apostles and His followers that they are not to become perverted the way the Sanhedrin has by lording their titles and places of authority over those in their care. The apostles do not know it yet, but in a sense, they will soon sit in the seat of Christ on earth when He returns to heaven. They are not to pervert that seat as the Sanhedrin has perverted the seat of Moses.

Exalted Humbled

Matthew 23: ¹¹ "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

The Sanhedrin seeks to be first in everything religious and political the same way Moses was, but he was humble and they are arrogant. In this passage Jesus has not departed from His previous theme; His followers must always be as innocent as little children in order to become the greatest in the kingdom.

First Woe

Matthew 23: ¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. ¹⁴ [~~"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.~~]

The Sanhedrin is guilty of seven infractions against the Lord and His plan. These seven infractions represent the ways they are perverting the seat of Moses. Jesus warns them of their hypocrisy as He begins each accusation with the phrase, "Woe to you." Unlike Moses who led the people to God, the Sanhedrin has blocked their people and themselves from the opportunity to know God.

Second Woe

Matthew 23: ¹⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

The second infraction of the Sanhedrin concerns the handling of Gentiles who are the scum of the earth to Jews unless they convert to Judaism. Converts were in the wilderness with

Moses. Caleb, one of the twelve spies was a Gentile convert, but Moses led him down the path of truth to the Lord. He was so faithful that he and Joshua were the only two of the twelve spies allowed to enter the Promised Land. When the Sanhedrin won a convert, they taught him all the ways to turn away from the truth resulting in his eternal doom.

Third Woe

Matthew 23: ¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' ¹⁷ "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? ¹⁸ "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' ¹⁹ "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? ²⁰ "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹ "And whoever swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. ²² "And whoever swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

The third woe is difficult to understand. We struggle with it because we are not accustomed with Temple life, but the apostles and the Sanhedrin understand clearly the Lord's intent.

In this passage Jesus is condemning the Sanhedrin for splitting hairs! In their theology, swearing by the temple means nothing, but if someone swears by the gold of the temple, it is an oath that cannot be broken. How ludicrous! The stones of the temple are not important enough to swear an oath upon, but the gold is. Swearing an oath on the altar means nothing to the Sanhedrin, but swearing on the offering is so important that an oath upon it cannot be broken. How insane! Jesus' condemnation is the same through the rest of the warning. The Sanhedrin does not understand that an oath upon any part of the temple or its furniture is an oath to the throne of God and He who sits upon it. The Sanhedrin's stupidity is revealed by their hairsplitting over words. ¹⁰⁵

Fourth Woe

Matthew 23: ²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. ²⁴ "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

The Lord is not condemning tithing. He is condemning the Sanhedrin for neglecting the harder provisions of the law. Tithing is measurable and easily seen by all, but justice, mercy and faithfulness are so subjective that it is difficult to calculate their effects. Justice, mercy and faithfulness are not always defined the same way by everyone. As religious and political leaders of the Jews, the Sanhedrin should have focused on the weightier issues that are extremely difficult for the regular Jewish follower. Jesus' reference to the gnat and camel are an insult to the Sanhedrin. Both creatures are ceremonially unclean for the Jew. ¹⁰⁶ Touching either will cause problems in their culture. The Jewish Talmud addresses the problem when it says, "if a Jew kills a gnat on a Sabbath, he is as guilty of sin as if he killed a camel on the Sabbath." ¹⁰⁷ Therefore, to the Sanhedrin, Jesus' words are an offense.

¹⁰⁵ We must be careful not to split hairs with people. Baptism in "Jesus' name only" is splitting hairs. Failing to say the sinner's prayer correctly is splitting hairs, etc.

¹⁰⁶ Leviticus 11:4, 20, 23, 42

¹⁰⁷ Jer. *Shabb*. 107

Fifth Woe

Matthew 23: ²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. ²⁶ "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Jesus judges the Sanhedrin guilty of extortion and excess in this fifth woe. It is a picture of the wickedness found in both religious and political settings. On the surface, the Sanhedrin looks clean, pure, and holy but internally it is filthy.

We must notice that Jesus addresses one Pharisee at the end of this woe, asking him to clean up the inside of the cup along with the dish "so that the outside [of both] may become clean also." It is a softer, gentler, friendlier tone to someone He knows, someone He needs to encourage to mend his ways. A sole Pharisee who is still blind but close to seeing the truth found in the Lord must be in the group.

Sixth Woe

Matthew 23: ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Many Bible students miss the importance of this sixth woe. In that day the tombs of the wealthy were kept clean and the gardens around them were manicured regularly. But the stone tombs of the poor people are neglected in the fields and by the roadsides. Just before Passover each year, the ugly tombs are whitewashed with powdered lime dust so the travelers entering the city can avoid them and not be defiled by touching them.¹⁰⁸ The old decaying bones are still in the whitewashed tombs and they temporarily look better for the feast, but nothing has changed inside. Jesus condemns the Sanhedrin for being whitewashed religious hypocrites, attempting to hide the reality found inside.

¹⁰⁸ Numbers 19:16