



Matthew 22:15-40

# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

Ever since the Romans arrived on the scene in 64 BC, the Jewish people were divided over how to respond to their rule. The **Zealots**, an ultra-nationalistic group, proclaimed revolution to be God's solution. The **Essenes** withdrew, waiting anxiously for the Messiah to lead a violent overthrow of the Romans.

The **Sadducees** practiced a form of cooperation since it was Rome who kept them securely in their position over the temple and over the people. The **Pharisees**, condemning Rome's pagan excesses, viewed the foreign oppressors as God's hand punishing his people for their unfaithfulness to the Torah. The country was in turmoil, each faction longing in a different way for the freedom they desired.  
—Ray Vander Laan

Jesus' identity and authority take center stage in Matthew 21-22. There are three Messianic actions (21:1-22), three Messianic parables (21:23-22:14), and three Messianic tests/challenges (22:15-40).

Jesus' ministry began with Satan testing Him three times in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Now His ministry comes to an end with the Jewish religious leaders testing Him three times in the temple courts.

These three tests come from different groups with different agendas but they each are intended to "trap" Jesus in His words, discredit Him in front of the people, and possibly get Him arrested by the Romans.

The three questions—taxes, resurrection, and great commandment—may not seem as relevant to us on the surface but, in essence, they ask three big questions that we still have to contend with today:

1. How do we relate to the \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Is Christian faith just a huge \_\_\_\_\_?
3. What is the most \_\_\_\_\_ thing to do in life?

## Q #1 — IS IT RIGHT TO PAY TAXES TO CAESAR? (22:15-22)

The Pharisees (religious conservatives) and Herodians (political opportunists) come to Jesus with a boatload of flattery and a very loaded question: *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*



**The Trap:** If "yes," He will upset the \_\_\_\_\_.  
If "no," He will upset the \_\_\_\_\_.

**The Truth:** *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

*Jesus was going to die as the Lamb of God, and it was necessary for the lamb to be examined before Passover (Ex. 12:3-6). If any blemish whatsoever was found on the lamb, it could not be sacrificed. Jesus was examined publicly by His enemies, and they could find no fault in Him.*

—Warren Wiersbe

**Test.** Greek, *peirazo*, "to test one's faith; to tempt or to solicit to sin" (Matt. 4:1, 3; 22:18, 35).

*Paying the poll tax was the most obvious sign of submission to Rome. In AD 6, Judas of Galilee led a revolt against the first procurator because he took a census for tax purposes. Zealots claimed the poll tax was a God-dishonoring badge of slavery to the pagans... Roman coins bore an image of the emperor's head along with an offensive inscription ("Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus" on one side and "pontifex maximus"—high priest, on the other).*

—D. A. Carson

*Verse 21 inspired the Reformation doctrine of differing spheres of authority for government and religion and proved foundational for the American constitutional separation of church and state.*

—Craig A. Blomberg

There is a distinction between the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

**The Theology:** God is the \_\_\_\_\_ of all things (1 Chr. 29:11).

## Q #2 — IS THE RESURRECTION AN ABSURDITY? (22:23-33)

The Sadducees were religious liberals with political clout. They comprised most of the Sanhedrin, even though they were practically atheistic, not believing in angels, the spiritual realm, or a future resurrection (Acts 23:8).

**The Trap:** If He affirms resurrection, He looks \_\_\_\_\_.  
If He denies resurrection, He looks \_\_\_\_\_.

**The Truth:** If you don't believe in God's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ then you end up believing in everything or nothing at all.

Resurrected life is different than our present physical life (1 Cor. 15:35-49).

God is not the God of the dead but of the \_\_\_\_\_ (Exodus 3:6; cf. Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; John 11:25-26; 1 Cor. 15:12-19).

**The Theology:** God is the \_\_\_\_\_ of all life (Acts 17:25).

## Q #3 — WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT? (22:34-40)

The Pharisees like Jesus' answer (Lk. 20:39) but they still want to trap Him. One of their number, an expert in the Mosaic law, tests Him with another question: *Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*

**The Trap:** If He picks one, He diminishes the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Law.  
If He doesn't, He diminishes His \_\_\_\_\_.

**The Truth:** The Ten Commandments, and the whole law, are summed up in loving God (Deut. 6:5) and loving others (Lev. 19:18).

Love is the fulfillment of the Law because it motivates true obedience, from the heart, to all of God's commandments (Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:14).

**The Theology:** God is the \_\_\_\_\_ of all love (1 John 4:7-8).

*We await the return of Jesus Christ, the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth...**Until that day, we are a people in tension.***

*On the one hand, we belong to the broader culture in which we find ourselves; on the other, we belong to the culture of the consummated kingdom of God... Our true city is the new Jerusalem, even while we still belong to Paris or Budapest or New York.*

—D. A. Carson

*The Sadducees produced a question which, they believed, reduced the doctrine of the resurrection of the body to an absurdity.*

—William Barclay

**Levirate marriage** (lit., "marriage with a brother-in-law") was described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Its purpose was to preserve a family's name and inheritance.

*If there is no God, nothing matters. If there is a God, nothing else matters.*

—H. G. Wells

*We are more sure to arise out of our graves than out of our beds.*

—Thomas Watson (1620-86)

*What Jesus declares to be inappropriate in heaven is marriage not love. Heavenly relationships are not something less than marriage, but something more. He does not say that love between those who have been married on earth will vanish, but rather implies that it will be broadened so that no one is excluded.*

—R. T. France

*God created you for the first and greatest commandment, to be a lover of God.*

—Sam Storms