

TRAPPED BY WHAT WE DON'T KNOW **(Matthew 22:15-33)**

I once heard about a small church that was searching for a pastor. During the search process they interviewed a young preacher with very little experience as a prospective pastor. As the interview began the chairman of the search committee asked the nervous young man if he knew the Bible. He said, "Yessir. I know the Bible real well."

The chairman asked, "What part of the Bible do you like?"

He said, "I like the New Testament."

The chairman said, "Well, why don't you tell us the story of the Prodigal Son?"

The young preacher swallowed hard and said, "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus who had two sons. The younger son went down to Jericho by night for some riotous living, as he was riding in his fiery chariot, he caught his hair in a tree limb and he hung there—for 40 days and 40 nights. Finally, Delilah came out and cut off his hair and he fell on the stony ground—and the thorns grew up and choked him half to death. The next morning Solomon and his wife Gomorrah came by and carried him down to the boat dock and he caught a ship to Nineveh.

When he got there, he saw Queen Jezebel sitting on the wall, and he said, 'Toss her down, boys,' and they said, 'How many times shall we toss her down, seven times?

And he said, 'Nay, but seventy times seven,' so they chunked her down...and she burst asunder in their midst...and they picked up twelve baskets of the fragments that remained . . . and in the resurrection whose wife will she be?"

When he finished the chairperson nodded and asked the young man to step out in the hallway for a moment. After the door was closed, the chairman said to the committee, "Folks, he's awfully young, and he doesn't have much experience, but he really knows his Bible—let's call him as our pastor!"

At the risk of being like that young man, this morning I'm going to combine elements from two different stories. Fortunately, the stories are found back to back, and it just so happens that it is from the second story that we find the question: "At the resurrection, whose wife shall she be?" Let's read the two stories. They are found beginning in Matthew 22:15.

It is helpful to keep in mind that beginning with Matthew 22:15 and going through Matthew 22:39, Jesus is asked and answers questions from a succession of religious and political groups who came to Him. Most of the questions were asked with the intent of tripping Him up and finding some ammunition to use against Him.

The key idea is found in v. 15. "Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him in His words." The word *entangle* means *to set a trap*. That word was used in the world of hunting and fishing. This was the only time that word is used in the NT. Jesus used other words that conveyed a similar idea. In Luke 5:4, Jesus said, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." In 5:10, Jesus promised, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."

Followers of Jesus want to catch men in order that they would be blessed, while the enemies of Jesus wanted to catch Him in order to bring Him down and condemn Him.

It is interesting who were conspiring together against Jesus—the Pharisees and the Herodians. Normally, these two groups would have nothing to do with one another. The Pharisees were strict observers of the Law while the Herodians lived by the motto, “Go along to get along.” They had bought into the Greek lifestyle. The two groups had almost nothing in common except a common enemy—Jesus. They worked together to catch, to trap Jesus.

We have a saying: “Politics makes strange bedfellows.” Both the Pharisees and the Herodians looked at the political map, and they believed that Jesus was a threat to their power and their plans. Despite their differences, they came together to get rid of Jesus.

In an effort to trap Jesus, however, the Pharisees and the Herodians ended up trapping ourselves. If we are not careful, we can do the very same thing. We will come back to the first story, but let’s consider the second one for a moment.

A different group came to see Jesus in v. 23. Who were the Sadducees? The Sadducees were religious, but they are best described by what they did not believe in? They didn’t believe in the supernatural, in life after death, in the resurrection, and they didn’t accept anything other than the Torah as Scripture. They asked Jesus a silly question . . . Jesus told them in v. 29 that they were in error. He said, “You are wrong.” They were wrong because of what they did not know.

When I was growing up, I was told things that I later discovered were not true. I was told that sticks and stones could break my bones but names would never hurt me. That’s not true. I was also told that what people don’t know won’t hurt them. That is not true either. What you don’t know can most certainly hurt you. We are told in Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” A lack of knowledge is a dangerous, dangerous thing.

The title of today’s message is “Trapped by What We Don’t Know.” I want to focus on three things that will hurt us and trap us if we don’t know these things.

I. WE TRAP OURSELVES WHEN WE DON’T KNOW WHO WE ARE.

This week I came across an internet article concerning the most famous lines from motion pictures. The AFI compiled a list of the top 100 lines from the last 100 years. Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz garnered two of the top 25. At #4 was her statement, “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” At #23 is her pronouncement, “There’s no place like home.” Coming in at #5 is Humphrey Bogart’s iconic line in *Casablanca*, “Here’s looking at you, kid.” From *Star Wars* at #8, “May the force be with you.” Sitting at #6 is Clint Eastwood’s challenge to a young punk, “Go ahead, make my day.” At #1, from *Gone with the Wind*, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a [you know what].”

If you were to compile a list of Jesus’ best lines, this one would surely make the top 10, maybe even the top 5. Jesus said in Matthew 22:21, “Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the thing that are God’s.”

There is a whole lot more to this passage than an exhortation to pay our taxes.

The enemies of Jesus tried to put Him between a rock and a hard place. That wanted

Him in a position that so however He answered, He would face opposition. The tax Jesus was asked about was called the poll tax. It was a tax levied against the Jews in Judea. If you were Roman and lived in Judea, you didn't have to pay it. If you were a Jew living in Nazareth, you didn't have to pay it. The Jews in Judea were not happy one bit to have to pay this tax that was clearly unfair.

If Jesus said, "Common guys, it's the law; you've gotta pay it," he would have lost the support of the people." If He had said, "I don't care what Caesar in Rome says or even what Pilate, here in Jerusalem says. The tax is unfair. Don't pay it," word of what He said would have been leaked to the Governor, and Jesus would have been in hot water from the Roman authorities.

Jesus showed great wisdom with His answer. Basically, He said, "Bring me a coin. Whose picture is this? And whose name is on this coin?" The image of Caesar was on the coin and in Latin the words, "Son of God." On the other side, it said, "Pontifex Maximus" (High Priest).

Now, in v. 17, Jesus gets to the punch line, so to speak. He gets to the point: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

When you and I look at a coin it usually has the picture of a president on the front side of the coin. On either the front or the back side of the coin, one of the two, it will have the words: "United States of America." Our money was printed by our federal government and regardless of how unpopular it is, we are to give to our government what we are legally required to give.

The most important point Jesus was making is that we are to give to God what belongs to God. Just as a coin bears an image of someone, we bear the image of Someone. Whose image do we bear? What did God say when He planned to create man? Look at Genesis 1:26-27.

We bear the image of God. The Pharisees and the Herodians did not realize who they were. They thought they were keepers either of their religious or political sect. I'm sure they had many ideas of who they were, but what they did not know is that they were bearers of the divine image.

We are as well. But we commonly do not reflect upon that fact. If someone asks you, "Who are you?" how would you answer that question? We commonly answer the question who we are with a description of what we do?

I may have told you this story before, but it is a story worth telling and hearing again. It comes from one of my heroes in ministry—Fred Craddock. Dr. Craddock earned his undergraduate degree at Phillips University here in Enid. After receiving his doctorate, he came back to Enid and taught at Phillips for several years. From here, he went on to become a professor of preaching at Emory University in Atlanta. One day Fred was passing through Gatlinburg, TN while on vacation with his wife. They stopped for lunch at a local restaurant. Before long, a stately, white-haired gentleman came to his table and asked, "Where are you folks from?"

Fred wasn't interested in talking. "From out of state, just passing through," he said.

The gentleman pressed a little further, "And what kind of work do you do, sir?"

"I happen to be a professor of homiletics. You wouldn't know what that is!"

The man said, “Oh, yes. You teach young preachers how to preach. Well, let me tell you about a young preacher that meant an awful lot to my life.”

The old man continued:

See that mountain ridge over there? I was born and raised in the valley just beyond. I had a good Christian mother, and we were very poor. I never knew who my daddy was. I was what they called back then an illegitimate child. When we came into town on Saturday, we were shunned by all the good people. They wouldn't let their kids play with me and walked on the other side of the street when they saw us coming.

We had a little Methodist church up the valley. I would sneak in after the service started and slip out before the benediction so I would not have to face the church people and feel their disapproval.

One day the bishop sent a new pastor to the church. He was young and talked so I could understand him (I was just 13).

[One Sunday] After the sermon, he walked to the back of the church, announced that he wanted to meet everyone present, and then pronounced the benediction. I was trapped. I waited until the church was empty, hunkered down in the corner, hoping he wouldn't notice me. But he did. The new preacher walked over to me, thrust out his hand and said, “Glad to see you, boy. And tell me, who's your daddy?”

I turned red and dropped my head! Then, as he took me by the chin and pulled my face up to look him straight in the eye, he said: “Oh, you don't need to tell me; I already know. I see the family resemblance. I see it in your face. You are a child of God.” In the years to follow, that young preacher taught me what it meant to be a child of God. All that I am today and what I have achieved in life, I owe in large measure to that young preacher, like the young fellows you are teaching in your seminary now, sir.

Finally, the old man introduced himself. “My name is Ben Hooper. I have served twice as the governor of Tennessee. I'm retired now. Welcome to our town; and be sure to tell those young preachers at the seminary that the most important thing they will ever do in their ministry may be to tell some boy or girl about their Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ.”

Who are you? You are a bearer of the divine image. If you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, you are becoming more like Him every day.

If you don't realize that you bear the image of God you put yourself in dangerous and difficult situations. There is a second way we endanger ourselves.

II. WE TRAP OURSELVES WHEN WE DON'T KNOW THE WORD OF GOD.

Look again at v. 29. When we do not know what God has said and what God wants, we are in a desperate situation.

The Sadducees did not understand what God's word taught so they came up with a

ridiculous story to make fun of the resurrection. They only succeeded in making themselves look ridiculous.

Let's illustrate what things are like when we don't have or know God's word. Look at 2 Chronicles 15:3, 5-6.

Listen to what Pastor Tony Evans said about 2 Chronicles 15. He wrote:

The stunning thing about the situation in 2 Chronicles 15 is that God was the cause of Israel's distress, not the sinners in that culture or the devil.

Now when God is your problem, then only God is your solution. If God is ticked off, it doesn't matter whom you elect or what programs you initiate. Until His anger is assuaged, you won't be able to fix what's wrong or spend enough money to buy your way out of your dilemma.

I believe that is where America finds itself today. While the Bible is not lost in our society, the knowledge of the Bible is. By and large, people do not know what God's word says. In fact, the vast majority of Christians are biblically illiterate. That is why we have Christians who believe in reincarnation, who read their horoscope daily, who take positions on moral issues that are completely at odds with what the Bible teaches.

In addition to reading the word of God, we also need to wrestle with it. We need to meditate upon the words of Scripture. Seminary professor Donald Whitney used a cup of tea to illustrate what it means to meditate upon the Bible.

In this analogy your mind is the cup of hot water and the tea bag represents your intake of Scripture. Hearing God's Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea's flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag. Reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word are like additional plunges of the tea bag into the cup. The more frequently the tea enters the water, the more permeating its effect.

Meditation, however, is like immersing the bag completely and letting it steep until all the rich tea flavor has been extracted and the hot water is thoroughly tintured reddish brown. Meditation on Scripture is letting the Bible brew in the brain. Thus, we might say that as the tea colors the water, meditation likewise "colors" our thinking. When we meditate on Scripture it colors our thinking about God, about God's ways and His world, and about ourselves.

When we fail to know and heed God's word, we put ourselves in a precarious position, to say the least.

III. WE TRAP OURSELVES WHEN WE DON'T KNOW THE POWER OF GOD.

In addition to not knowing the word of God, sadly, the Sadducees did not appreciate the power of God.

Many years ago, J.B. Phillips wrote a book entitled, *Your God Is Too Small*. In the first half of the book he dealt with people's misconceptions about who God is. God is not

a policeman; He is not an overbearing parent; He is not an old man who winks at sin.

We are often powerless in our lives because we fail to recognize and thus avail ourselves of God's power.

In his study *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby taught that when you say, "I can't do this" or "I can't do that," your statements reveal more what you think about God than what you think about yourself. How powerful is your God?

Years ago, when I was in college, there was a song I heard several times that has stuck with me. After I graduated from college, I went with a group of students and faculty from OBU to the island nation of Trinidad. Almost every night, I preached, and one night before I stood up to preach, Mary Henniger and Cory Baldrige sang this song. To me, it is a beautiful song. More importantly, it is a song with a powerful message. Listen to the lyrics:

In this very room
there's quite enough love
for one like me,
And in this very room
there's quite enough joy
for one like me,
And there's quite enough hope
and quite enough power
to chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus . . .
Is in this very room.

And in this very room
there's quite enough
love for all of us,
And in this very room
there's quite enough joy
for all of us,
And there's quite enough hope
and quite enough power
to chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus . . .
Is in this very room.

In this very room
there's quite enough love
for all the world,
And in this very room
there's quite enough joy
for all the world,
And there's quite enough hope

and quite enough power
to chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus . . .
is in this very room.

I would add that when Jesus is in your life, your very life, there will be quite enough love, and quite enough joy, and quite enough hope, and power. So, let me ask you, “Is Jesus in your life? Does His Spirit reside in your heart?”

If you want to live a vibrant, successful, and fruitful life as a believer, you need to know three things. You need to know who you are; you need to know the word of God, and you need to know the power of God that is available to you through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit.