

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

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Services: Diocesan Service
Series: A Sting in The Tale – Matthew’s Parables
Title: Traps
Passage: Matthew 22:15-33
Outline: **1. Enemies**
2. Friend
3. Becoming a Friend

INTRODUCTION

- How are you at answering tough questions? What about questions that are designed to trap you?
- On a light note I heard this one recently. How is possible to ride into town on Friday, stay three nights, and then ride out on Friday? It would work if your horse is called Friday!
- Perhaps more seriously, you’ve been questioned by the media, cross-examined by a barrister, or been a politician. There are real traps people face.
- Many of us think of a good answer to avoid a trap 24 hours later when it is too late to do anything about it.
- This is unlike Jesus who perfectly answers questions that were designed to trap him.
- We are going to look at two of the trap questions asked by his enemies and hear his masterful answers.

1. ENEMIES

The First Trap

- The first trap was laid by his enemy, the Pharisees. In response to Jesus telling three parables against them, we are told in verse 15:

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Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.

- The Pharisees sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.
- The Herodians have previously been mentioned as being enemies of Jesus.
- This was an unlikely partnership. They were divided over taxes but united in wanting to trap Jesus.
- When they found Jesus, they proceeded to flatter him with words. In verse 16:

“Teacher”, they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention , to who they are.”

- While these words were insincerely spoken, what a true and awesome description of Jesus – man of integrity, teaches the way of God, and is not swayed by others!
- After trying to butter him up, they set the trap in verse 17:

“Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

- If Jesus were to say yes, people would wonder whether he is the Messiah who has come to free them from Roman rule which was what people expected the Messiah to do.
- If Jesus were to say no, he could be considered a revolutionary and be in danger of being arrested
- Jesus knew their evil intent and their hypocrisy in pretending to be sincere when they weren’t and said in verse 18:

...why are you trying to trap me?

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- Through an illustration of a coin and a few basic questions, he replied in verse 21:

“So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

- Jesus’ answer avoided the trap. In so doing he was also able to show that the government has the right to exist and collect taxes and that God is to be honoured as well.
- Their response was to be amazed and they left him

The Second Trap

- It’s certainly was a tough day in the office for Jesus. We are told in verse 23:

That same day the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.

- The Sadducees were another enemy of Jesus who were known not to believe in the afterlife and that only the first five books of the Bible were authoritative.
- In verses 24-27, they draw on a responsibility of a brother to marry his brother’s widow in the event of a childless death so that his name could be carried on.
- The Sadducees create an absurd hypothetical scenario of each brother dying so that up to seven brothers marry the widow and then she dies.
- The trap set by the Sadducees is in verse 28:

Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

- For some this may be a very real pastoral concern (Dick France). Encountering more than one former spouse in heaven could be very real for people (Dick France).

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- However, the Sadducees were trying to show that Jesus' belief and teaching about the resurrection was ridiculous.
- The question was designed to trap Jesus, but Jesus is equal to the task in escaping such a threat.
- He knows their evil heart just like he knew the evil intent of the Pharisees and Herodians in the first trap.
- Jesus' response to them is what you wouldn't want to hear, verse 29:

... "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."

- Jesus criticizes the Sadducees for the narrowness of their view of what resurrection life would be like. They thought it would be just like this life. They did not know the power of God.
- Jesus specifically teaches in verse 30:

"At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage they will be like the angels in heaven."

- While there won't be marriage, he didn't say that there won't be love. In fact there will be perfect love and fellowship with God and with one another.
- For some this may seem very hard to accept. Perhaps you were looking forward to being reunited with your spouse as a married couple in heaven.
- There are a lot of questions about what our state will be like in heaven, but the bible says that we won't be disappointed.
- While Jesus is saying that the Sadducees were in error about their thinking about marriage in heaven, Jesus' bigger criticism is about their disbelief in there being a resurrection.

Jesus is able to quickly dispel their view by quoting from the text they find authoritative going back to Moses' encounter with the burning bush where God says to Moses in verse 32:

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“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

- Jesus is saying that when God spoke to Moses a long time after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob he is as much a God of them as he was when they were alive. So based on this it is reasonable to assume that there will be a resurrection to come.
- Just like the first answer of Jesus the crowds were astonished at his teaching.

What does this mean?

- So far we have seen Jesus, the master trap avoider, a man of integrity who teaches the way of God, and is not swayed by people. We have seen a place for government, the absence of marriage in heaven, and the resurrection being true.
- However, I don't think this is what these scenes are all about fundamentally. You must remember that Jesus was answering questions from his enemies that were set up as traps. Jesus' enemies weren't wanting to enter the classroom but the battle field.
- What I find extremely striking in these scenes is the insight into the heart of his enemies, depicted most clearly in verse 18:

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent,

- Perhaps this evil intent seems far off to you relegated to a story thousands of years ago in a place and region of the world many miles from you.
- Perhaps we could say that it was just these Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees that had evil intent and were trying to trap Jesus and that doesn't have anything to do with us today.
- But then there may be people listening today that would seek to trap Jesus if they could. In which case they would be no different to the enemies of Jesus that we have heard about.

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- The Bible tells us that it is not just the religious opponents of Jesus' day that were enemies of Jesus. The Bible tells us that we are all enemies of Jesus until we are made his friends.
- How concerning it is to read in John 2:24 that Jesus would not entrust himself to the people who saw the signs he was performing because he "knew what was in each person".

2. FRIEND

- Jesus' desire was not to destroy his enemies in the scene – this didn't mean that he wouldn't give them a few rockets like we read in Chapter 24.
- Instead, Jesus desire was that his enemies would be made his friends. He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". (5:44)

- A friend of Jesus is not someone who has evil intent against him in a settled way. He or she is not someone who tries to trap him.
- Instead, a friend of Jesus is someone who seeks to honour him, follow him, and to build God's kingdom not tear it down.

3. BECOMING A FRIEND

- What is needed to shift from being an enemy of Jesus to becoming his friend?
- A heart that has been made clean. Where evil intent toward Jesus is no longer a permanent resident.
- How is this brought about? Through the death of Jesus upon the Cross and our response turning to Jesus, living for him, and trusting that his blood has washed us clean of our sin.
- If you are enemy, you will be silenced on judgment day and face eternity without him.

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- If you are a friend of Jesus you can look forward to resurrection life for eternity with him
- Who are you? Friend or an enemy?