**Matthew Sermon XIV**

**Coming Into the Kingdom**

Introduction:

This is our New Years sermon. I will not be talking about resolutions or even plans for 2024. But, a brief comment.

We are a very young church with very young Christians we need to nurture, strengthen and mature. This year we will emphasize the basics of Christianity and we will be doing training in the basics of Christian relationships and Christian living.

We will grow in Bible knowledge.

We will grow in our quiet times and our relationship with God.

And we will grow. My goal: 40 by the end of 2024.;

**Review: Last week: Jesus Enters Jerusalem**

Matthew 20:1-16 The Parable of the Workers in the Field.

Those who work in the kingdom of God for many years receive the same reward as those who come to work at the last hour. God’s justice is surprising by human standards, but rather than complain that God is unfair, we should rejoice at his grace and generosity. Besides, would it not be better to serve longer than to have served for less time? So, why complain?!

Matthew 21:1-11 Jesus enters Jerusalem as a king.

This is the fulfillment of so much prophecy. They left Caesarea Philippi. Now they have arrived in Jerusalem. The Messiah must die in Jerusalem. All of human history points to the events about to unfold in Jerusalem.

Jesus comes as king to Jerusalem but he does not ride in on a horse, he arrives, “gentle, and riding on a donkey.”

This is a deeply symbolic act. The kingdom of God has arrived and the Messiah is changing everything.

Matthew 21:12-13 Jesus is a lion (he overturns the tables) and a lamb (gentle and riding on a donkey).

*Matthew 21:18-22 Jesus curses a fig tree.*

*This act, as his entry on a donkey and as his clearing of the temple is deeply symbolic. Jesus is teaching about his coming as king to Jerusalem.*

*This act is symbolic. The fig tree represents the Jewish people. Jesus came to them, expecting to yield a great crop. Jesus says to Israel: “May you never bear fruit again!*

*Jesus comes to us, expecting to yield a crop. Hopefully, we will bear much fruit.*

Today: **Coming into the Kingdom of God.**Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:15-24 The parable of the wedding banquet.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a banquet for his Son.

The king is God.

The banquet is the kingdom of God—whether it is the church or “heaven” is left unclear on purpose.

Point: Being in the kingdom is like being at a banquet. We have abundant provisions!

v. 5 They paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.

Luke 14:16-21 A parallel passage.

Q: Have you been making excuses for not taking part in the things of the kingdom? Not out sharing with us on campus, or missing meetings of the church, or taking part in the campus conference in March…

I have work. I do not have the time. I do not like driving in the mountains…

v. 18 I just bought a field.

Q: What do you think about his excuse? Shouldn’t he have checked out the field before he bought it?

I just started a new program at the university.

Didn’t you consider whether this would interfere in your commitment to God before you signed up?

I just started a new job.

Didn’t you ask if you could have Sunday and Wednesday evening off before you took the job?

v. 19 I just bought five yoke of oxen. I have to make sure they are OK.

I already paid for my vacation. I did not know that the church was going to have a campaign.

I planned to move to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ when I retired a long time ago. Sure, there is no church there, but, I planned this before I was baptized.

I know that we are going to plant a church in Stockton in 2025, but that is not convenient to me right now.

v. 20 I just got married. Q: Why can’t a married person come? Hmmm.. [Note: The Jews had a custom that a newly wed man got one year off from military or other compulsory service]

We are in love. Sure, she is not a disciple, but this is love.

We are living together and already have a child together, what do you expect?

Example: Oscar Rodriguez in San Diego….

Back in Matthew 22:6 Note: The king does not beg them to come. He sends us out to find good-hearted people. Poor, lame, uneducated, illegal aliens, whoever…

v. 6-7 This is what happened to the prophets and to God’s Son, and it foreshadows the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

v. 8 God says, OK, the Jews are not interested, now let us go to the Gentiles.

v. 10 So his servants went over to UCM, MC, Food Max, the mall and invited all kinds of people.

v. 11 Who is this person who is not wearing correct wedding clothes?

Gal 3:26-27 It is people who have not been clothed with Christ! It is people who have not been baptized into Christ.

This man completely shocked!!!! He was totally convinced he belonged at the banquet.

Many will be surprised on that day!!! It is our job to teach them correctly and help them to put on Christ!!!

Who is this man? He is literally thousands of people right here in Merced who think that they are saved, but they are not!

I sure hope this is not you!

Matthew 22:15-46 The Pharisees and the Saducees try to trap Jesus, either to discredit him or to give basis for his arrest.

Matther 22:15-22 The Pharisees: We will not have any great preaching points here. Let’s just be impressed with Jesus’ wisdom!

v. 17 This is the poll tax levied on every Israelite by Rome.

If he says yes, he will be called a collaborator with the Romans. The tax was the cause of a rebellion by Julian of Galilee in 6 BC. He will lose the support of many radical Jews.

If he says no, he can be charged with sedition and give evidence that could be used against him when they had him arrested and tried before Pilate. They think they have Jesus between a rock and a hard place.

Q: Is it lawful. Is it acceptable for a Jew to show obeisance to a pagan emperor?

Jesus: Whose image is on this coin (the Roman denarius required by the poll tax)? The emperor. The Jews were not allowed to use coins with a “graven image” on it.

It had the inscription “son of God” on it. They used their own copper coins without the objectionable image on it, and only used the denarius to pay the tax. These coins were dirty.

Jesus: “render” ie give back these coins to Caesar.

The principle: Loyalty to God supercedes loyalty to any state, but it is not violated by submission to governing authorities. (which is consistent with Romans 13 Submit to governing authorities and pay your taxes)

This would make the zealots happy, because he condemned the Romans, while at the same time avoiding saying anything illegal. A very shrewd answer.

Matthew 22:23-33 Now the Sadducees take their shot. They are the rulers and oversee the temple.

Next: What about the law of Levirate Marriage? Deut 25:5-6

The Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection. They only accept the Pentateuch. The Pharisees accept the entire Jewish canon (including Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2) and believe in the resurrection.

They think they have Jesus trapped!!!

They are discussing the law of Levirate Marriage Deut 25:5-6, which was designed to prevent women from being completely abandoned.

The Pharisees and you believe in the resurrection, but what about this!!!????

Jesus: the brilliant teacher and theologian responds:

They are “in error” for at least two reasons:

You do not know the Scripture: First, they assume that the situation in heaven is the same as on earth. But they are wrong. No marriage in heaven.

In a world of eternal life, procreation is not needed!!!

Question for us: Do you KNOW the Scripture, or is your knowledge superficial, like that of the Sadducees???

You do not know the power of God: Second, they misinterpret the Bible, as the resurrection is real.

Question for us: Do you KNOW the power of God?

Then Jesus cleverly argues for the resurrection from the Pentateuch, using Exodus 3:6. YHWH is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but he is the God of the living, not the dead, so there is life after death.

v. 33 The Sadducees cynical trap/question had the opposite effect of that desired!

Q: Are you astonished at Jesus’ teaching? You should be!

Matthew 22:34-40 Pharisees: Good job, Jesus!

The Pharisees take a second shot!!! OK, you are so smart, let’s see you answer the hardest question of all!!!

v. 34 Picture this. The Pharisees have a pow-wow.

Pharisee #1: OK. We are smarter than the Sadducees. We know the Bible better than they do. So, how are we going to trap Jesus.

Pharisee #2 an “expert”: I know. Let’s ask him the hardest question of all!

What is the greatest commandment? To the Jews, some commands were more weighty than others, but all 613 were equally binding. They hope they can accuse Jesus of repudiating parts of the Law.

Jesus’ response is brilliant and it is original!

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Leviticus 19:18

“All the law and Prophets hang on these.” In other words, everything God asks us to do he does so because he loves us and everything he asks us to do, he wants us to do, not so as to earn salvation, but because we love him. Without love binding things together, it is all a religious burden.

Jesus has already quoted Hosea 6:6 twice. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Love is what binds all the Scripture together!!! It is what binds all of Christianity together!

It is what binds the “trinity” together.

Giving preeminence to Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Leviticus 19:18 does not invalidate the other 611 laws. It gives them meaning and purpose!

Gal 5:6 The only thing that matters is faith, expressing itself in love.

Wait: Doesn’t obedience matter? Yes, of course!!! But the kind of obedience God wants is obedience motivated by love, not by obligation.

Here is a question for us this morning. It is not complicated:

Do you love God with all your heart, your soul and your mind?

Are you willing to apply this love of God to loving your neighbor (which Matthew 5:43-48 told us includes your “enemies”) as you love yourself.

Then, welcome to the Kingdom of God!!!

The questions for us:

1. Will you accept the invitation to the banquet? Will you drop everything right now and come into the kingdom of God? Have you put on the proper clothes in Christian baptism?

2. Are you ready to love God with all your heart, soul and mind? And to apply that love of God to loving all of your fellow humans?

Then you are ready to come into the Kingdom of God!