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Introduction

We have been following the debates between Jesus and the religious leaders in Israel that took place in the temple at Jerusalem (cf. Mk. 12.35, *as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"*). Repeatedly, the Pharisees and Sadducees tried to ensnare Jesus in some kind of trap in order to tare Him down and lift themselves up in the eyes of the people. They set one trap after another and Jesus not only escaped each trap, but He used the occasions as teaching opportunities that give the post-resurrection church instruction in the good news, encouragement regarding the future, and guidance on practical matters of holy living. The people marveled and we marvel at His answers. Now the time has come to turn the tables around and put the religious authorities on the hot seat. Matthew 22.41-46 records the table-turning trap that Jesus set for His opponents. He sets the trap by presenting his opponents with two questions: a question with an obviously simple answer and a question with a profoundly difficult answer.

The Pharisees have no problem answering the first question: ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." (22.41-42). Many OT passages teach that the throne of David will abide for all generations because God promises the establishment of his offspring forever: ³ You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ⁴ 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations (Ps. 89.3-4).

Jesus now takes the offensive and challenges the Pharisees. The first question He poses is an easy one to answer. The easy answer furnishes a premise in an argument that lies behind all the questions. The second question, building on the first, is profoundly difficult to answer. ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? ⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" (22.43-45)

To help us look more closely at this table-turning trap, we can hang our thoughts on two hooks using questions as our format: 1) Why is the question of Jesus difficult for the Pharisees? 2) What gospel does the question of Jesus give to us? The second hook leads naturally into implications and applications.

1A. Why is the question of Jesus difficult for the Pharisees?

You may already have an answer to the challenging question of Jesus. It may therefore seem to you that the answer to the second question, like the first, is simple and obvious. Of course, that makes us wonder about the silence of the Pharisees. There is some kind of difficulty here and we will do well to discover what it is.

1) Fragmented reading of Scripture

The question of Jesus is difficult because the rabbis read Scripture in a fragmented way.

If you view the coming of the kingdom in terms typical of that day, you will emphasize the fact that a descendant of David will come to deliver Israel from Roman oppression. Resting on Isaiah 11, you will stress the killing of the wicked: **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.** ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall

strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Similarly, you will stress the promise of security in the land that Jeremiah promised: ⁵ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely (Jer. 23.5-6).

Accordingly, the leaders have difficulty with the second question because they read Scripture in a fragmented way. They emphasize what they want to hear. God will restore David's throne putting on this throne a descendent of David from among them. Then, their king will destroy their enemies, especially the Romans. What they do not see is that there is much more to Messiah's kingship than the establishment of rule on an earthly throne. There is something *unique* and *heavenly* about this descendent of David. It is the case, notably, that *His throne is at the right hand of God*. Furthermore, *David calls Him, "my Lord."* (22.43-44). The pious leaders omit these parts of the picture. They do not think about Scripture in terms of its wholeness; they do not receive it in its fullness. Selfish pride and political ambition distort their vision of the fabric of Scripture. They tend to isolate individual threads of truth. We have testimony to this earlier in Matthew regarding the Sadducees about whom Jesus said, "You do not know the Scriptures because you fail to read them in their logical wholeness" (Mat. 22.29-32). The religious leaders have difficulty with the Scriptures because, on one hand, they add long lists of laws to God's commandments (confusing the picture). On the other hand, they miss many details of Scripture (fragmenting the picture). However, there is another key reason for their difficulty with the Scripture to which Jesus points them.

2) Animosity toward Christ

They hate Him. They intuitively will not even allow themselves to get close to acknowledging something positive about Him that lifts Him up and gives Him honor in any way, shape, or form. They are jealous and self-seeking shepherds of God's flock. They see a lifting up of Jesus as a putting down of themselves. Hence, though they surely know the claims of the people and the cries of children proclaiming Jesus as the son of David, they respond to those acclamations with a biting challenge to His authority as a teacher. Recall, that when Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, healed people in the temple, and forcefully cleansed the temple the religious leaders were *indignant* (Mat. 21.15). It incensed them in a particular way to hear the children saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David":

¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." ¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?"..... ²³ And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Mat. 21.13-16, 23).

Interestingly, the Pharisees and Sadducees do not quiz Him about the messianic claims that He made through the enthusiastic claims of the crowds and children. The answer of the Pharisees coupled with the claims that Jesus is the son of David put two premises of a simple argument in place.

Premise 1: The son of David is the Messiah

Premise 2: Jesus is the son of David

The Pharisees refuse to follow out the argument. They sense where Jesus is leading them. The conclusion is clear, intuitive, logical, and inescapable: the conclusion is that Jesus is the Messiah.

The son of David is the Messiah

Jesus is the son of David

Therefore, Jesus is the Messiah

They refuse to answer, even with a single word or a brief statement, **And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions** (Mat.22.46).

2A. What gospel does the question of Jesus give to us?

There is intellectual difficulty here to be sure; the challenge to our reasoning skills is maximal. As we shall see, however, the difficulty for understanding is only part of the picture because Jesus uses the occasion to teach us the gospel from the OT clearly. Thus, there is *difficulty coupled with the promise of insight and encouragement based on Psalm 110.*

A PSALM OF DAVID. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." ² The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! ³ Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. ⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." ⁵ The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. ⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth. ⁷ He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

We can put our fingers on the promise by working with this text in steps.

1) Step 1: the text speaks about Jesus

From the argument Jesus presented, we know that He is both David's son and David's Lord (cf. the Hymn, Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted, Trinity, 192: Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, See him dying on the tree! 'Tis the Christ by man rejected; Yes, my soul, 'tis he, 'tis he. 'Tis the long-expected Prophet, *David's Son, yet David's Lord*; By his Son God now has spoken: 'Tis the true and faithful Word).

David by the Spirit acknowledges His Lordship, calling Him **my Lord**. The Spirit teaches the Lordship of Jesus (David spoke **in the Spirit**). Scripture (Psalm 110) teaches His Lordship. God the Father recognizes His Lordship (**The LORD says to my Lord**). Because David, the Spirit, Scripture, and the Father do this, the leaders of the covenant people ought to do this too, *and we ought to do so as well.*

Thus, Jesus is the son of David and He is the promised Messiah. David refers to Him as *my Lord* because He is the Lord; He is divine (both son of man and son of God). We now come face to face with the profound mystery of the person of our Lord. We know Him and yet we must say, "no one knows the Son, except the Father" because only God can plumb the depths of the Lord Jesus who is one person with two natures forever.

2) Step 2: the text predicts victory in the midst of opposition

David says his son is the exalted Lord that triumphs over all His enemies. **Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." ² The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!** This is important when we take note of where Jesus is in His ministry when He spoke these words. He is in the middle of tense opposition by the religious leaders of Israel; He is about to die in less than a week at their hands and the hands of the crowds that follow Him superficially. Jesus tells us that though He is about to die in the clutches of His enemies, He has the Father's promise of exaltation: His enemies will become the footstool of His feet.

To firm up this point, let me ask you a question, "What accounts for the change in the throne-footstool image (Isa. 66.1-2)? Recall, that image reflects the inauguration of the Creator's sovereign rule over all that He made in creation week; thus, the heavens are His throne, and the earth is the footstool of His feet. Now, per Psalm 110, earth becomes enemies. What explains this change? What does the change add to the teaching on Sabbath kingship? The fall into sin explains the presence of enemies on the Lord's earth. Therefore, His rule includes the conquest of all His and our enemies. All His enemies are now under His rule and in His kingdom. Later, in the future harvest, He will come and separate out His enemies for judgment (Mat. 13.41-42).

3) Step 3: The text promises redemption by a mediator

There is another significant change in the king-throne-footstool image. Psalm 110 teaches that the king has a holy people: **Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.** (110.3). When we explain this in its context, then we have the pure gospel before us in all its wonder. How can there be a holy

people from a fallen and sinful earth? The answer is in the unusual office that the king assumes. Did you notice it when we read the Psalm? First, the Lord confirms the certainty of His purposes; “**The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind**” (110.4a). Then, He says these striking words about the son of David who is universal Sabbath king: “**You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**” (110.4b).

Now we need some perspective on our Lord’s ancestry back to David. Genealogy is extremely important and Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus back through David to Abraham (Mat. 1.1-17). However, Melchizedek does not have a genealogy. On one hand, the Creator as Sabbath king and universal sovereign over heaven and earth has a genealogy. On the other hand, the king is a priest that has no genealogy. The former stresses His true humanity (as God) and the latter stresses His true deity (as a priest). Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek; He is superior to Abraham. This shows us that the Abrahamic covenant finds fulfillment through Him and He is divine in doing the work of a priest to mediate between God and sinners. The Creator and universal sovereign God is our redeemer, Jesus-Messiah, the son of David!

The victory of Christ over His enemies includes His work as mediator between God and man. Thus, the very death that Christ died at the whim of sinful people is part of the victory that occurs in the midst of His enemies.

Application:

Jesus turns the table toward you and you must give Him an answer to the difficult question. The only way to answer the question of Jesus properly and fully is to acknowledge who Jesus is and to bow down at His feet in worship in personal terms. In other words, to apply this text, you must individualize and personalize. You must say to Jesus, “you are Lord and you are my Lord.”

You are superior to David; you are David’s son and David’s Lord.

You are God the Son, both Son of Man and Son of God.

You are triumphant over your enemies, securing that triumph right in their very midst.

Thus, in their hatred, they killed you on a cross, but you triumphed as a priest/mediator.

You are Sabbath king by death and resurrection; you are my Sabbath king.

Of course, the blessing promised has the condition that you do not approach Scripture and the person of Jesus the way that the Pharisees did. You must turn away from your selfishness, acknowledge it, and put forth the effort and self-discipline that goes hand in hand with godliness. As Paul says, you must discipline yourselves for godliness (1 Tim 4.7-8).

Thus, it is so appropriate that we think about Jesus as David’s son yet David’s Lord in the context of communion (cf. “Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted,” Trinity Hymnal, 192). To stir your thoughts on this point, we might ask, what makes this so appropriate for communion? What is the connection between communion and the words of Jesus pointing back to Psalm 110? We find our answer by doing what we should always be doing, namely, by going back to the OT context. Jesus points us to particular things, but these things have a context to which He also points us. As noted earlier, the context of Psalm 110 includes the fact that the offspring of David will not only have supreme authority in heaven and on earth, but He will have that authority as a priest. In other words, He is our ladder from this earthly realm of sin to the heavenly realm of righteousness by the sacrifice of His own blood as our great high priest. In the end, we must worship in exorbitant terms, even with poetic embellishments:

Hark! the voice of love and mercy Sounds aloud from Calvary;

See, it rends the rocks asunder, Shakes the earth, and veils the sky:

"It is finished!" Hear the dying Saviour cry.

Tune your harps anew, ye seraphs, Join to sing the glorious theme;

All in earth, and all in heaven, Join to praise Emmanuel's Name:

Alleluia!

Glory to the bleeding Lamb!