

## WEEK XIV

### *Matthew 22*

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

### *Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar*

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “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. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

### *Marriage at the Resurrection*

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. “Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and

third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘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.”

When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

### *The Greatest Commandment*

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan House, 1984. Print.

## ***COMMENTARY***

I see the story of the Wedding Banquet and the question of paying taxes to Caesar as complimentary. To begin, the story about paying taxes relates to the relationship between spirituality and the world. We live in both worlds and “owe taxes” to both. In the world, we have responsibilities. We need to provide for our material well-being. We need shelter, clothes, food, and some form of transportation. This means that we need money, which means we need a job.

If we do not provide for ourselves, we are not in a position to do good to others. We would be dependent on others rather than giving to others. But when we have the means for providing, we are in a position to do good. Our primary way of doing good is through our vocation. John Calvin articulated a doctrine of vocation, from which we get the Protestant work ethic. Calvin said that our work is as sacred a calling as is the call to ministry. We minister to the general good when we do our calling. The auto mechanic ministers to the general good when he or she keeps cars running so everyone else can do their own goods to the world. A judge ministers to the general good when he or she administers justice to keep society within the bounds of social order. A teacher ministers to the general good when he or she educates their pupils to be informed members of society. Every form of work is a form of service. And service is sacred. Service is love for the neighbor in action. Swedenborg adopted this doctrine of the Protestant work ethic and called it “uses.”

But working alone without love for service and without worship can be worldliness. When all we care about is our work and the money it brings, we are the guests who were invited to the wedding but were too busy to come.

The wedding banquet is a metaphor for God’s kingdom, or heaven. In several places, union with Jesus is compared to a wedding banquet. This is especially clear in the book of Revelation 19:6-9,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready;

to her it has been granted to be clothed

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”<sup>2</sup>

The marriage supper of the Lamb is our union with Jesus. It is our hearts being filled with Jesus’ love and our minds being enlightened by Jesus’ wisdom. Then we are “married” to Jesus. Being filled with love and wisdom, we refrain from sin. This is symbolized by the fine linen clean and white which the saints are dressed in. The

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

clothes people wear in heaven are a reflection of what is in their hearts. So the wedding guest who wasn't wearing wedding clothes is thrown outside the wedding party. The guest symbolizes those who are not pure in heart, so their clothing is not "wedding" clothes.

The story says that the invited guests are busy with worldly concerns—one with his farm and another with his business. This represents people who have their mind only on worldly matters. We saw above that work can be a holy calling and a means of service to the neighbor. But worldly concerns can be the only things a person cares about. Then food, shelter, and clothes become controlling interests. People set their hearts on big, expensive show-homes, designer clothes, high-end cars. They can even predominate so much that they force people to work long hours and sometimes leverage their finances with crippling debt. These are the people who have no time for the wedding banquet. They are caught up in the world. Rather than seeing the world as a place where they can do good, the world is their master and they are slaves to the world.

The marriage to Jesus begins in this world. If we have not made a beginning on the spiritual marriage here on earth, we will not be given in marriage in the next life. That is what Jesus means when he says, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." We won't be given in marriage because the marriage must happen here on earth first.

Most Christians do not take this passage symbolically, as Swedenborg does. They take it to mean that there are no marriages at all in heaven. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Dante's beloved Beatrice leads him up through hell, purgatory, and through heaven.

But at the end of the story, Dante and Beatrice are gazing on the Beatific Vision separately, there is no marriage between them, no consummation of their marriage. Swedenborg claims that marriages persist in heaven, that humans enjoy full sexuality, and, marriages.

The actual question that elicits Jesus statement about marriage is a trick question. The Sadducees think they've come up with a proof against the afterlife. Seven men are one by one married to a woman upon the death of her spouses. If there is a life after death, she would be a polygamist—married to seven men. But Jesus says that they have it all wrong. The Jewish law that forced a woman to be married to brother after brother when no children have been born is not what marriage is all about. It is about love. And it is about the spiritual marriage of union with Jesus.

Swedenborg does talk about repeated marriages in the next life. When external concerns fall away, and who a person truly is emerges, then people find who their true loves really are. They then marry the ones their heart truly desires.

We think of the Hebrew Scriptures as a set of rules for behavior. In fact, there are 613 rules in it—mitzvahs—in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus extracts 2: Deuteronomy 6:13—Love God above all; and Leviticus 19:18—Love the neighbor as yourself. If we do both, we will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb and in heavenly joy forever.