



Matthew 22:41–46

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” “The son of David,” they replied. 43 He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

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 can he be his son?” 46 No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt)

And so Jesus completes his sustained debating with the religious establishment in Jerusalem. This is his crowning piece of wisdom that silences his opponents. The next time he will see his opponents is in the garden of Gethsemane. That Jesus ‘won’ the debate here won’t stop the Pharisees

and teachers of the law. They will turn up to arrest him and hand him over to Rome for execution. We'll get to that in a moment. That's important.

The first thing to note however is that this encounter is a little weird. Quirky, even. It's like an insider joke. Am I supposed to 'get it'?

I read an article a couple of years ago in the Sydney Morning Herald where the journalist interviewed some Anglican ministers. Those ministers chuckled about a little joke between them and the journalist wrote in her article: 'Anglican jokes: gentle and a bit odd.' That's what's going on here, but it's an essentially Jewish riddle, rather than an Anglican one.

The Pharisees knew Psalm 110, which goes:

Of David. A psalm.

1 The Lord says to my lord:

‘Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.’

2 The Lord will extend your mighty
sceptre from Zion, saying,

‘Rule in the midst of your ene-
mies!’

3 Your troops will be willing
on your day of battle.

They knew that King David wrote the Psalm. They knew that it was about a military victory of someone called ‘my Lord’ over ‘your enemies’. They knew it was a

Messianic Psalm, that one to come would drive out the enemies of Israel from Zion (Jerusalem) and on that day, the troops would be willing. But Jesus turns to the Pharisees and asks them a simple question that they can easily answer:

42 “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

They knew the answer. Everyone knew the answer.

“The son of David,” they replied.

In other words, King David was the model for a Messiah to follow in his line or dynasty. The one to come who will rule and rescue will need to be of the house and line of King David. The Messiah will need

to be a son, grandson, great grandson, or great, great, great, great, great, great, grandson of King David. You get the point.

One thousand years after David wrote those words, a great, great, great, grandson of king David is standing there in front of them, and he isn't 'pointing the guns' at the enemy over there. He's 'pointing the guns' (well, words, actually) at the enemy within. He is criticising the heart of Israel; not the behaviour of their enemies. He's going for the home team; not the opposing team. He knows that the actual problem with the world is 'within', not 'others'.

So Jesus asks a Jewish riddle: gentle and a bit odd. But one they can't answer:

43 He said to them, "How is it then

that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

44 “The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.””

‘The Lord said to my Lord.’ That’s the key. This is David speaking. And David is talking about two Lords here: One is God, a Lord who speaks and says to another Lord, ‘my Lord.’ He’s effectively saying to the other Lord, ‘you will win the greatest battle humankind has ever known!’

Who is this second Lord? Who was above David? ‘God says to my master, you will win over your enemies.’ And yet Jews called the Messiah ‘the Son of David’ and a Son

can't be above his father can he? So Jesus asks a question they can't answer:

If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

And with these words, the religious establishment stop trying to win, and set about killing him.

Think

The best thing to do now is to read over it a few times. It's not easy. But the key to unlocking it is these words:

“How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’?”

When David says: ‘God says to my mas-

ter, you will win over your enemies', he is speaking words from God and saying something that he may not have understood back then; that David would have an heir who was greater than him.

And that person is standing in front of the Pharisees right now. This is God in the flesh. David's Lord, and ours. And he is there because the Lord (God) appointed him. But this is where it gets special. What is the enemy that this Lord will defeat? And who are the willing troops ready to do battle?

The answer is not Rome, and the disciples aren't about to be a crack military army. They were fishermen and tax collectors led by a carpenter. No – they will run when this Messiah faces up to the enemy and

thrashes it. The answer is that the enemy is sin within! That's why he goes for the home team. That's why he attacks Israel's leaders. He knows that the problem is in our own hearts. Sin has to be defeated. And that can't be done with a sword. Death has to be defeated, and you can't defeat death with a human army. Jesus will reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. But, as Paul writes later, the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Tom Wright writes,

“It is because Jesus knows that sin and death can only be defeated by David's master going to meet them in single, unarmed combat that he continues his work, as Matthew will tell us, all the way to the cross itself.”

Pray

So pray. Be silenced by this and all the wisdom Jesus has been bringing to our hearts in Jerusalem. And submit your heart to this Lord. He is currently at the right hand of the Father, ruling and rescuing. Peter writes: “In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord.” That’s what David was doing by the Spirit. You can say to him too: “You are my Lord.”

This is ultimately what it means to be ‘on the right side of history’. Thank him.

And repent of believing that the problem is always in ‘the other’. There is something in our own hearts (sin) that Jesus needed to defeat. Let him defeat it. And, raised and seated with ‘my lord’ at the right hand

of the Father, we set our minds on things above. Do just that.