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Matthew 22:41 - 22:46



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg examines Matthew 22:41-46 and corrects a common misinterpretation of Jesus' question to the Pharisees. Rather than asking for their opinion of himself, Jesus is inquiring about their beliefs regarding the Messiah and his relationship to King David. Gregg notes that while David refers to the Messiah as his "Lord", he also recognizes him as his son, indicating a divine and human nature. Additionally, Gregg explains the lineage of Jesus through his maternal grandfather Heli and affirms the Christian belief in the incarnation of God in human form.

Transcript

If you can, would you look with me at Matthew chapter 22, beginning at verse 41. There we read, While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? They said to him, The son of David. He said to them, How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord? Saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.

If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare question him any more. Now that last statement, from that day they did not dare question him any more, reflects the fact that this particular day was a day when many had been questioning him. There had been many confrontations from the religious establishments, some from the Pharisees, some from the Sadducees.

And then there was this lawyer who came and challenged him. So Jesus had had a series of attacks, of a certain sort, rhetorical attacks, where his enemies were trying to, as it says, ensnare him in his words, or entangle him in his words. They were trying to find some way to find fault with him, asking him trick questions that would place him on the horns of a dilemma, where if he answered one way, he would offend one sector of the population.

If he answered the other way, he would offend the other sector. And the idea was to get him to say something that would get him into trouble. Well, Jesus was always more than

a match for any debate opponents, and that's because he was the truth.

And when you have the truth, you always have the best arguments. Now, there was a story I heard, and I'm sure that some of you out there know more details of it than I do, but there was a certain general on the battlefield, as I understand, who was told by one of his lesser officers that the enemy had surrounded them, that they've got us surrounded. And the general said, good, there's no way they can escape from us now.

And it reminds me of that when I see these people converging on Jesus. They've got him surrounded. They're coming at him from every side, trying to find fault with him, trying to nail him on some theological technicality or something.

And it says, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them. Now, in other words, since they had come and they had surrounded him and they were gathered there against him, Jesus, well, his attitude seems to be, well, they can't get away now. And he says, okay, you've asked me a lot of questions.

Let me ask you a question now. Now, they apparently decided to play along with this because they, after all, it would only seem fair if he's been answering their questions that he should be able to ask one of his own. And he says, what do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? Now, when we hear him Christ, we immediately associate, of course, with Jesus because he is the Christ.

And therefore, I've heard some people mistakenly think that Jesus was asking them, what do you think about me? You know, what's your opinion about me? Now, Jesus wasn't asking, what do you think about me? He said, what do you think about the Christ? Now, of course, we who are Christians know that Jesus is the Christ, but his opponents did not. The opponents had their own view of who the Christ was and who the Christ would be. They did not identify that with Jesus.

And so his question was not intended as a question of what was their opinion about him, but what was their doctrine, what was their belief about the Christ? Now, by the way, we should realize, I think many of you do, but some may not, the word Christ is simply the same word as the word Messiah, only from a different language. The word Messiah is taken from the Hebrew for the word Hamashiach, which means the Anointed One. And when this word is translated into the Greek, the Greek word for the Anointed One is Christos, from which we get our English word Christ.

Christ is simply an anglicizing of the Greek word Christos. So Christos, or Christ, is the same word as Messiah. The difference being the difference between Hebrew and Greek.

So even though Jesus and his opponents in this debate were probably speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, which is like Hebrew, and he probably used the word Messiah, what do you think about the Messiah? Because the New Testament has come down to us in Greek,

the New Testament writers translated everything into Greek for us. Those of us who don't read Greek might say that's not very helpful, but anyway, most of the people in the empire in those days did read Greek, and that was the purpose for translating it that way. But where Jesus is here presented as having said, what do you think of the Christ? His actual words were, in all likelihood, what is your view of the Messiah? And of course the Jews had a view of the Messiah long before Jesus appeared on the scene.

The Messiah was a character spoken of in the Old Testament a great deal. I don't mean to indicate that you would find the word Messiah in the Old Testament a great deal. That would not be so.

The word Messiah is very seldom found in the Old Testament. However, the prophets continually referred to a day when God would send one who would deliver his people from their oppressors, would establish a king of the most righteous and noble sort, and that he would be the famous ruler and deliverer of his people. Now, the Jews had different opinions about the Messiah.

Some of them believed he would be a merely human figure. Others believed he would be somewhat more of a supernatural figure. But all agreed with one doctrine about the Messiah, and that was that he would be descended from David.

Now, the reason for that is that in 2 Samuel chapter 7, we read that when David was at a certain point in his life prosperous and reigning and his wars were essentially behind him and he was now just a fat and sassy king and he was living in a good palace, he began to be concerned because the Ark of the Covenant, which was that Jewish piece of furniture from the tabernacle that represented the presence of God, that the Ark of the Covenant was not housed as magnificently as David himself was housed. The Ark at that time was just kept inside of a tent. And David called the prophet Nathan and said, You know, I live in this palace with all this luxury, and yet God's house is nothing much but a tent.

And Nathan encouraged David along the lines of what David was thinking, namely that David would like to build a more elaborate house for the Ark of the Covenant, a house for God, in other words, a temple. And Nathan at first encouraged David in this, and then God corrected Nathan and said, No, go back and tell David that this is not what I want him to do. But he did say, There will be a son of yours that will come afterward, and I will establish his kingdom forever, and he will build a house for my name.

Now, in the midst of making this promise that Solomon would come after David and build the temple, there were certain things stated in 2 Samuel chapter 7 and verse 12 and following that spoke of a king that God would send through David's line. Solomon would be the first, but there would be a whole line of kings, and ultimately this kingdom would be established forever in the reign of the Messiah. Now, from that point on, from David's day on, the Jews knew that when the Messiah comes, he will come through the line of David.

And for the most part, it seemed to be the opinion of most Jewish people that the Messiah would be very much like David, that he'd be a military man, he'd be a ruler who would conquer all of the surrounding nations and make them pay tribute to him, that he would bring back the dignity and the glory to the nation of Israel after they had been oppressed by neighboring countries and so forth, that this Messiah would be the one who would inaugurate the most glorious age of Israel's history. And they fondly anticipated the coming of this one, the Messiah. And in many cases, they did not expect the Messiah to be anything more than a mere man, just like David was a mere man.

Now, David was a remarkable man. I mean, even as a boy, he was able to kill a giant body of God. But there had been other remarkable people like that in the Maccabean period, a small band of zealous Jews had been able to drive out a much larger oppressing Syrian army.

And the Jews had known in their history their glory days, the days of Gideon, when Gideon with only 300 men drove out the Midianites, a much larger army of 20,000 men or more. And so they kind of anticipated that there would be another man, a mere man, but with the help of God would do extraordinary things and would deliver his people and reign over them in justice and righteousness. And they certainly looked forward to that day as they lived under the grinding oppression of the Romans in the time of Jesus.

So the Jews spoke frequently of the Messiah. Of course, most of them did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. But Jesus was now questioning them about their view, their doctrine.

What was their theological conception of the Messiah? He said, now, what do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he or whose son will the Messiah be when he comes? And they said to him, the son of David. That would be the most common answer that anyone would give. Any Jew who had been through the basic catechism in the synagogue would be able to give that.

Whose son is the Messiah? The Messiah is the son of David. In fact, the expression, the son of David, became a messianic title. You will often find in the story of Jesus that people who recognized Jesus as Messiah said, son of David, son of David, Hosanna to the son of David.

So the term son of David simply means the Messiah. So the answer that these people gave to Jesus' question was not hard to anticipate. In fact, I'm sure that Jesus knew exactly the answer they would give.

And he was prepared for a second question, a follow-up on it. He says, how then does David in the Spirit call him Lord? Now, the question here is, if the Messiah is the son of David, why would David call this Messiah his Lord? Does a man speak to his own son and call him Lord, my Lord? Of course, the answer to that is no. Now, when did David ever

speak of the Messiah as his Lord? Well, Jesus quotes from David's writings.

Here in verse 44, he quotes from Psalm 110. By the way, of all the chapters in the Old Testament, none is quoted from more frequently in the New Testament than Psalm 110. It is the most frequently drawn upon passage from the Old Testament by the New Testament writers.

Jesus himself calls upon it. Psalm 110 begins with these words, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. Now, there's two Lords here.

If you could read this in the original Hebrew, you would note that the first Lord was the word Yahweh or Jehovah. It's the name of God. And it is sometimes translated Lord, but we would more properly read it, Yahweh said to my Lord.

So here we have Yahweh speaking and he's speaking to somebody else. To this other person he says, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. The Jews always recognized that as the kind of thing that Yahweh would say to the Messiah.

And therefore, they knew that this passage about Yahweh speaking to this person and saying sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool was a passage that applied to the coming Messiah. The thing here is that David was writing the passage and he spoke of the Messiah in these terms, my Lord. Yahweh said to my Lord.

Now, David, therefore, referred to the Messiah as my Lord, which is a term of deference. It is a reference to one's own inferiority to the person who is thus called Lord. And Jesus is making a point of this.

Okay, you guys, you say that the Messiah is the son of David. Fair enough. Why did David call him Lord then? Now, and what Jesus says after he quotes the verse, he says, if David then calls him Lord, how is he his son? Now, it sounds as if Jesus is disagreeing with their answer when they said he is David's son.

It sounds like Jesus is saying, no, how could that be? He can't be David's son. Look, David called him Lord. But that's not what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is not denying that the Messiah would be the son of David. Jesus himself was, in fact, descended from David. And it was true that the Messiah had to be descended from David.

This is something that Jesus was not denying. The point of Jesus' comment here is that in addition to being the son of David, there must be something more about the Messiah that you people are missing. You are acknowledging that he will be the son of David, and of course no one could deny this.

But the fact that David refers to this Messiah as his Lord suggests that there's more

there than that. To the status of the Messiah, there must be something additional that adds additional dignity, additional rank, additional loftiness to the Messiah that places him even above David so that David calls him his Lord. Now, what is it that gives the Messiah that rank above even his ancestor David? Now, Jesus does not answer that.

But we know the answer, we who are Christians know, because the Messiah was, in fact, descended from David. But beyond that, he was the incarnation of God himself. And thus, as the incarnation of God, he is referred to as the son of God.

And that, of course, gives him a dignity and a position that is above David. He was not only David's son, he was David's God. There is mystery in this, no doubt.

It's the mystery of the incarnation in Scripture. However, it is declared very plainly to be so. For example, we have Romans 1, where Paul said that he was separated to the gospel of God.

And in verse 2, speaking of the gospel of God, he says, which he promised before through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, his God-Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Now, you see, of Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Christ is the Lord, and David himself called the Christ, my Lord. He says of him, this man, Jesus, was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, but was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness.

And this is saying that there's two sides of Jesus, two sides of the Messiah. There is the divine side, and there is the human side. According to the flesh means the human side, and according to the spirit, he's born of the seed of David.

When it comes to his human ancestry, it's quite clear that David was in that ancestry. But that's not all there is to know, and that's what Jesus was trying to get across to these people. He did not say it in plain words.

He asked them to work it out. If David calls him Lord, how is he David's son? Isn't there something more to this than you're recognizing? Isn't the Messiah's status something more than that of a mere man? If he can be descended from David, and yet David looks up to him, and calls him Lord, and recognizes him as his superior. Now, in the course of making this comment, Jesus, as I said, was not denying that the Messiah would be the Son of David.

There are some who wonder whether Jesus was the Son of David or was descended from David for the simple reason that the genealogy of Jesus, which is given in Matthew, is indeed the genealogy of one descended from David. However, the person in Matthew chapter 1's genealogy who is thus descended from David is Joseph, who married Mary.

And the Bible is explicit on the point that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus.

So, the fact that Joseph was descended from David, as the genealogy in Matthew chapter 1 tells us, does not tell us really anything about the physical descent of Jesus Christ, since Jesus was not born a son of Joseph. If he was, then we could clearly say he was descended from David, because we have that genealogy there. But, since Jesus had no human father, and was indeed the Son of God, then his human genealogy has to be traced from his mother's side.

Now, there's a slight difficulty there, because we don't have anything in the Bible that declares itself to be Mary's genealogy. And that has led some to suspect that maybe we don't have any proof that Jesus was biologically the seed of David. And if he was not, then, of course, he couldn't be the Messiah.

But there is evidence, one has to think a bit about it, and study a bit, but there is evidence that Jesus was descended physically from David through his mother, as well as through, I mean, not through Joseph, but through Mary. This evidence is found in Luke chapter 3, beginning at verse 23. It says, Now Jesus himself began his ministry at the age of thirty years old, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Methath, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, etc., etc., down to verse 31, Nathan, the son of David.

Okay, well, here we have, obviously, a genealogy that includes David. And if someone descended from David, who is it? It sounds like it, too, is the genealogy of Joseph, because it says that Jesus was being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Methath, etc. So, once again, it looks like we have the genealogy of Joseph.

Now, there is something to be observed, however. The genealogy here is different than the genealogy in Matthew, entirely different. It is the genealogy of a different person.

And yet, both sound as if they are the genealogies of Joseph. But this cannot be. Therefore, many scholars believe, and this makes perfectly good sense to me, that in Matthew chapter 3, we have not the genealogy of Joseph, but of Mary.

And when it says that Jesus was, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, Luke is not saying that Jesus was the son of Joseph. That should be all placed in parentheses. That Jesus was, in parentheses, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, but, in fact, was descended from Heli, the son of Methath, etc.

If that is the way it should be read, and there is every reason to think that it is, then it is saying that although Jesus was generally and publicly regarded to be the son of Joseph, yet he was not. He was the son of, or descended from, another man named Heli. Heli would be Jesus' nearest male ancestor.

And in the case of one who has no human father, his nearest male ancestor would be his mother's father, his maternal grandfather. And that would make Heli Mary's father. Now, I hope I didn't say that in a way that makes it sound too complex.

It's actually extremely simple. But the evidence, I think, is very strong in favor of Luke chapter 3 presenting the genealogy of Mary, not of Joseph. And since we find this person in Luke chapter 3, he's all descended from David, we have proof that Jesus was, as the Messiah, must be the son of David.

I'd point out one other feature, and that is that Jesus is talking about David, and he quotes Psalm 110, and he says this little comment. He says, How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord? That's Matthew 22, 43. When David wrote the Psalms, he was writing in the Spirit, according to Jesus.

This seems to be an affirmation from Jesus that the Psalms are inspired, or at least the Psalms of David are inspired. Genuine evangelical Christians usually have no question about this, but some would wonder, was that ever affirmed in the New Testament? It was. Jesus said that David, when he wrote Psalm 110, was writing in the Spirit.

And he doesn't simply say, Why does David call him Lord? He says, Why does David in the Spirit call him Lord? As if to say, you know, it's not just that David could have been making a mistake here. He said it through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit revealed this to David, and therefore David, by the Holy Spirit, knew the Messiah would be not only a descendant of himself, David, but also something far more.

Someone so superior to David that David could call him Lord. We have an explanation the Pharisees could not give, and that is, we know that he was the Son of God.