

The Theme of Scripture

Mt 22:34-46 (ESV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Word of God for today is our Gospel text concerning the dialogue between the Pharisees and Jesus. Let us pray: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. AMEN.”

Dear saints of St. John’s,

We meet Jesus once again under interrogation. Our section from Matthew chapter 22 comes right in the middle of Holy Week, before the Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus is teaching God’s Word openly in the temple. Yet, many are still asking themselves, “Who is this man?” Right before our text some Sadducees ask Jesus a question about the resurrection of the dead. In our text, Jesus must answer a question from the hand of the Pharisees. These religious rulers, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, want to see if Jesus is on “their side”. They want him to weigh in on the theological debates of the day. The unfortunate thing is that they are missing the point of Jesus. They only see him as an important teacher of God’s Word. They fail to see him as the true God of Israel. Hear again the text for today,

When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 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 is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”? If then David 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 to ask him any more questions.

Our text focuses on two characters: our Lord and the lawyer. The lawyer wants to test Jesus with a question. Our Lord takes on the challenge and returns the favor with his own. Even if this lawyer, this expert in the Law of God, is asking this question from bad intentions, he still asks an important question: “**What is the greatest commandment in the Law?**” It is as if he were to say, “Jesus, please condense all the Bible into a sentence. What should I take away from God’s Word?” Our Lord answers him sincerely and he answers it in a way which would have made the lawyer happy. The lawyer probably would have thought Jesus was on “his team.” Yet, Jesus does not want to leave the lawyer with only this question. He wants to show the lawyer, and each of us, that to condense all the Bible into one sentence requires more than just what we ought

to do. With Jesus' own question, our Lord teaches that the Bible is not only about what we ought to do (love God and love neighbor) but also about himself – this son of David who is also David's Lord. If someone were to ask you, "What is the Bible all about?", with our text for today, you could say, "It is about how I am to love God and about how God loves me in Jesus Christ." How I am to love God, that is the lawyer's question. How God loves me, that is Jesus' question.

When the Pharisees approached Jesus, they were still trying to decipher who Jesus was, what sort of teacher he was. The action of the lawyer is kind of like what we do with politicians. When someone is running for office, we ask questions like, "What is your platform? What are your important issues? How will you fix them?" In this same way, the lawyer was asking Jesus an important theological question, "What is the great commandment in the Law?" Now, we're not talking here about rules in the city ordinances or statutes within government constitutions. When the lawyer asks about the great commandment in the Law, he is speaking of God's Word and the five books of Moses. Remember, there's a lot of prescriptions and rules within Scripture: who you're not supposed to marry, how to treat the poor, how to worship God properly, how you're supposed to treat disobedient children, and so on, and so on. How are we supposed to sift all that out? How do I prioritize what I'm supposed to do as a faithful child of God? This is the question the lawyer asks.

Jesus answers the question with this quotation: "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.**" Your whole life is described here with our Lord's answer. All you need to be worried about is with these two things: loving God and loving neighbor. Who is God? God is the LORD *your* God. Mark clearly these two important phrases: "the LORD" and "your God." The LORD is the specific name God has given his people. When I hear "the LORD," I think about everything God has done for his people. He is the LORD who created them. He is the LORD who saved them from the Egyptians. He is the LORD who brought them and planted them within the promised land. The LORD is also "your God." He's not just a God who is out there, somewhere unreachable. He is the God who comes down to be your God. He is yours and you are His.

So, what is this relationship between the LORD and you, His people? We've already talked about what God has done, but what you are called to do is to love Him. Now, to love God is not to think about him occasionally. He's not your long-distance relative. You don't think, "Oh, hey, I haven't talked to God in a while, maybe I should give him a ring." No, listen to how Jesus describes this love of God, "**with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**" When Jesus lists these items out (heart, soul, mind) he wants to say, "love God with every fiber of your being, with everything you have; with every waking moment of your life." Now, what does this

mean? Am I supposed to run away to a secluded spot, live by myself, and spend all my time reading the Bible and praying? Would that fulfill this commandment? No, because of the second commandment Jesus gives.

He says, “**And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**” “A second is like it.” Our Lord states that this loving your neighbor as yourself is loving God. When you love your neighbor, you love God. When you want to love God, you go and love your neighbor. So, to love God requires you to properly love your neighbor. Leaving everything behind would not be loving God. To love God with all your heart, soul, and mind means to love those whom God has placed in your life to love. To love God requires me to ask these questions, “How do I be the best husband? How do I be the best father? How do I be the best vicar? How do I be the best citizen, the best Topeka resident, the best next-door neighbor?” When I am trying to answer those questions according to what God says, then I am seeking to love God.

When you open your Bible and read from any place, you will find God commanding you to love him either by the “You shall...” statements or by examples of how God’s people have lived. But that is not everything God has to say in His Word. There is also his love for us in Christ Jesus. That is the other great topic of the Bible. Jesus wanted to remind the lawyer of this other great topic, so he asked his own question. He noticed them focusing on the “love God with all your heart, soul, and mind” to the detriment of “the LORD your God.” How do we know this? They fail to see that the LORD their God stands right before them, that they could touch their God if they reached out and grabbed Jesus. Without acknowledging that Jesus is their God, they miss the whole point of loving God.

Jesus tries to guide them to this understanding by asking a question of his own. He says, “**What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?**” The Pharisees need to be shown the importance of the Christ, the promised one of God. They knew though some of the promises concerning the Christ. They knew it was to be one of David’s sons. Even if they didn’t know that the whole Scripture was about this Christ, they knew enough to answer Jesus’ first question on one specific prophecy of God. The little the Pharisees knew, Jesus wanted them to admit. Ultimately, Jesus wanted them to admit He was this son of David, this Christ. If they don’t admit that Jesus is David’s Son, that this son of David is the LORD their God, they have no hope of loving God. They cannot understand and live out the great commandment. To help them understand, our Lord points them to Psalm 110. Jesus says, “**How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?**” So, Jesus quotes Psalm 110 with the words “The LORD said to my Lord...”. There are three important characters in this statement of Jesus: the LORD

(the God of Israel), David (the speaker), and David's Lord (whom he calls "my Lord", that is the Christ).

If you understand how these three relate to each other within Jesus' question, then you understand what Jesus is saying about himself and see how God loves you in Christ Jesus. David in this psalm is speaking of his son, the one promised by God. Yet, this son of David is not like any man (e.g., Solomon). Recognize two things about this son of David: he is called David's Lord and he does things only God does. First, David would not normally call his son his own Lord. A lord is a ruler or a master. Fathers are lords over their sons, not sons over their fathers. Thus, this son of David is greater than any human lord. Second, this Lord of David sits at the right hand of the LORD, the God of Israel. The LORD does not share his glory with anyone. To sit at the LORD's right hand must mean this Lord of David shares the very glory and honor of the one true God. As a crude analogy, it is like how grandpa does not let anyone else sit in his own recliner; it is for himself only. That is the honor of sitting at God's right hand.

Jesus spends all this time trying to prove who he is because of the work he is about to do. Jesus, the son of David who is David's Lord, is about to accomplish the work described in Psalm 110: he will reign "**until I [God] put your enemies under your feet**". Destroying and reigning over God's enemies is the work of David's Lord, the work of Jesus. Remember, Jesus is saying these words days away from His crucifixion. He is staring death in the face, ready to vanquish the enemies of God, to destroy death, sin and the devil. Jesus wants the Pharisees to know that this is his mission, this is why he left the throne of God to be born of the Virgin Mary. The Pharisees needed to know that the LORD their God, the one whom they should love (and tried to love) wholeheartedly, is standing right in front of them, ready to die for them.

So, if someone, like your child, asks you, "What is the Bible all about?", according to what you heard today from Jesus, you can answer, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself. This teaches me both my love for God and God's love for me. My Lord and God is the Son of David, Jesus Christ, who sits at God's right hand and has vanquished my enemies." Everything in Scripture points to those two things: love of God and God's love for me. I need a constant reminder that everything I orientate my life toward should be God, and that I can only love God if I am also loving my neighbor. Yet, I can never forget that the only reason Jesus is *my* Lord and *my* God is because he brought me into his kingdom. He bought me back from death and sin by pouring out his precious blood. He is the one who made me his own. Because of all this, I will live with him forever just as he is risen from the dead. Thus, I will never forget that my God loves me and I too should love my God. AMEN.