

*But when the Pharisees heard that he 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.” Whose Son Is the Christ? 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. Matthew 22:34-46*

As we open our Bibles to Matthew 22:34 this morning, we pick up where we left off last week. We still find ourselves on the Wednesday of the last week of Jesus’ life on earth, Jesus is still on the grounds of the Temple, and he is still being questioned by the religious leaders of the day. The verse previous to today’s text tells us that when *“the crowd”* about him heard Jesus’ answers to their questions - *“they were astonished.”* Well, they very well should have been *“astonished”* - because Jesus was and is and always will be God – which means there are some questions about God that cannot be answered by anyone but God Himself. In Isaiah 55:8-9 God declares, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* Because His thoughts and ways are higher than ours, it has been said that where God places a period, let no man put a question mark.

That being said - it is still inherent within fallen humanity’s fallen nature to question God and His ways. The questions began as Jesus walked into Galilee and said, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel . . . and follow me”* (Mark 1:15; 17). The questions continued as Jesus then went about preaching and teaching and healing and casting out demons, living his life for the purpose of God for glory of God. Every time he put a period to God’s truth, men put a question mark. Throughout Matthew’s gospel we read that Jesus was continuously being questioned by the scribes, chief priests, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees - in an attempt to trick him and trap him in his words, so that they might accuse him and bring about his death. Time and time again, as the questions came, Jesus responded in ways that baffled those who questioned him, with a dazzling display of divine knowledge, wisdom and thoughts from on high - always putting periods where men had been putting question marks. And, in midst of the vast fog of Jesus being questioned, we read:

*“When the Pharisees heard that he 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?’”*

In seeing the Sadducees had failed to trap Jesus, one of the Pharisee’s who was a *“lawyer”* – in that he was a scholar and an expert in the interpretation and application of the Old Testament law of Moses – stepped forward to *“test”* Jesus by asking him the question: *“Which is the great commandment in the Law?”* This was actually a burning question in Jesus’ day, as many rabbis and scholars and religious leaders debated which was the most important commandment of not only the Ten Commandments, the Law given by God, but also of the 600 plus man-made laws connected to the Ten Commandments. While the Sadducees only acknowledged the first five books of the Old Testament, and disregarded the rest - the Pharisees so esteemed and embraced the entire Old Testament and its law, that they expanded on them – and surrounded God’s law with 613 additional rules and regulations of their own. They referred to these additional rules as a *“fence around the law”* designed to keep anyone from crossing any lines that might result in any form of disobedience. Some of them taught that there were 248 positive rules and regulations of what someone should do, and 365 negative rules and regulations of what someone should not do; altogether making a total of 613.

Those 613 precepts, made up from the law of God, touched on every conceivable area of life. Some of them were thought to be very crucial; and others of them were thought to touch on only minor areas of life. Some were said to be "weighty", and others "light." And so, it would be natural that, among the Pharisees, there would be a lot of arguments over which of those laws were of the greatest importance. They would naturally want to 'systematize' those laws in an orderly manner—which would make it necessary to define which were the main ones and which were the subordinate ones. Among all the other controversies and confrontations and questioning Jesus faced, he was now challenged with the *ultimate question* of “*Which commandment is the most important of all?*” This question cut through all the word games and positioning and power struggles, and got to the real heart of the issue.

*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.”*

In his answer to the ultimate question, Jesus does not speak of the ten commandments nor of any man-given laws; instead he references a foundational text from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, a text which commands God’s people to love God with everything that is within their being – with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is a command to God’s people to give their full devotion to Him, to not be half-hearted in their love towards God. Furthermore, another command comes on the heels of the command to love God with our all: a command to love our neighbor as ourselves from Leviticus 19:18. Though the context of the passage in Leviticus describes the Hebrew people loving their fellow Jews, Jesus broadened this command in his teachings to include love for all people: those who are in need, those who cross our paths in this life, and even those who are our enemies. Jesus told us that when we love God we will then also love our enemies, even to the point of praying for them and blessing them.

In his answer to the ultimate question “Which commandment is the most important of all?” or “What is the most important thing we are to do in all of life?” Jesus pointed to the means by which we are to live out our God-created purpose in all of life: we were created for a love relationship with God - a love relationship that is so full of God’s love for us and so full of our love for God, that it pours out all over anyone and everyone that we encounter in life. This was the answer Jesus gave the Pharisees when they asked him which commandment he favoured as the greatest. The response of Jesus was not to choose a commandment and hold it above the others but rather to give a supreme governing *principle*, which makes any commandment great. The *principal* is *love*. He included all the commandments in his answer: “*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.*”

It is often forgotten in most discussions of the laws of God, that foundationally they are not to be used as an arbitrary set of rules, but rather supremely as an expression of the moral character of God. What God demands can never be detached from who and what He is. The moral character of God is ultimately expressed in the statement: “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). Therefore all true expressions of the law of God must involve an expression of the love of God. Therefore the principle by which the law of God is to function is the principle, which expresses that God is love. That love is firstly towards God and secondly towards people. To detach God’s law from God’s love may be legally correct - but it will cease to express the character of God. Jesus lived himself out this relationship of law and love. That is why Jesus said “*these two commandments*” of God’s love “*depend all the Law and the Prophets.*”

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus declared that the greatest commandment is to love God because he knew that to “*love God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind*” is a humanly unreasonable demand. It means that everything upon which our heart is set, everything with our soul is preoccupied and everything that interests and captivates our mind will express love for God. The reality is that our hearts, souls and minds give more evidence of selfishness and indifference than love. This is often true in the teaching of Jesus, as he presents the requirements of God in such a way as to expose the inevitable despair that comes to the conscientious heart of the person who would try to live this way. If the law is summed up in the word love because God is love, then true righteousness is only possible by the expression of the life of God himself, lived miraculously within those claim Christ and who truly love God. True love is a fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of the determined Christian. The Spirit of God is alone its source. Hence all the law and all the prophets hang on these two commands to love God and all others. Unless we are driven to an honest despair of our own ability, and learn to rest in the sufficiency of God alone, we can never fulfil the demands of the God’s law and God’s love.

Jesus said: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” In the gospel of Mark, the apostle also adds “*with all your strength*” - reflecting the words spoken by God in Deuteronomy 6:5. But that really doesn’t change what Jesus is saying. He is not telling us that our love for God is to be broken into three or four different categories, but rather there should be a totality, a comprehensiveness, a fullness of depth/width and length to our love for God. We are to love God with every part of our being through the aspects of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Jesus tells us that we are to love God with all of our *hearts*. We usually use the term “*heart*” to refer to the center of our emotions, but the Jews used it to refer to the core of one’s being and seat of the will. What “*loving God with all of our hearts*” basically means is that God is to have the exclusive first place in all our desires and affections. We obviously we must love people and we do love other things along with loving Him; but we must love Him above everything—even the things that we hold most dear in this world. Jesus Himself put it this way: “*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*” (Matthew 10:37).

Jesus also tells us that we are to love God with all of our *souls*. Our “*soul*” is the center of our inner-life; and is, in fact, the essence of who we are. Our souls are our very selves. And the truth is, whatever we might say, we all really love our selves – and thus spend most of our lives protecting and nurturing and promoting the “*selves*” God has given us. It’s hard to think of anything that is more “*yours*” than your own being. But the purpose of the lives that God has given us with the “*soul*” that makes us what we individually are—is not an end in and of itself. Rather, the purpose of our lives is to be that with which we predominantly and pre-eminently and passionately love God first with our souls. In Romans 12:1-3 Paul wrote: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*” How do we “*measure*” our “*faith*” so we might “*discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*”? The “*measure of faith that God has assigned*” is the greatest commandment to love God with all of our souls. When we love God out of the essence of who we are, we will not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

Christ also calls us to love God with all of our *minds*. The mind is the center of our intellect, beliefs, convictions, and expressions of our inner-self. It’s one of the most private parts of our being. What goes on in our minds is ours, and is accessible to no one except those to whom we choose to share our thoughts. And Jesus here tells us that the greatest commandment is that we are each to love God with all our intellect and reasoning. As King David prayed, “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*” (Psalm 19:14).

In other texts in Bible we also called to love God with all of our *strength*. The Greek word translated as “*strength*” has a root meaning that gives emphasis to the power implied in having ability. The idea here would be doing all within our power to love God. This corresponds to “might” or “power” of that strength in Deuteronomy 6:5 which expresses both force and that which is exceeding. The concept here is having a love for God that exceeds all else, which will take up all of your strength in pursuit of it.

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all of your strength.”* Do you love God with all of your heart? Do you love God exceedingly above anything and anyone else? How much time and energy do you put into pursuing God so you might give more of your heart and your life to Him? Do you love God with all your mind? Do you put in the necessary time and effort to read, study, memorize and meditate on God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible and in your own life? Do you love God with all your soul? What is your level of passion to have more of God in your life? What sense of desire do you have to know Him and love Him even more?

A church can have large attendance and a beautiful building; it can be theologically pure, and be involved in lots of ministry activity. But when a people of God, when a church, loses its primary love for God or loses their passionate love for God more than anyone or anything else – the size of the church, all of its ministry, all of its activity is empty and hollow. Without a deep, intimate love for God, all the church does is meaningless. The people of God who claim Christ, are to be about the business of loving God with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength. The Bible tells us that Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple because they were using God’s house for the purpose of doing their own business. The business of the church is not to be business as the world knows it; the church is to be about the business of the Kingdom of God. The business of the Kingdom of God is the business of love relationships: a love relationship with God that is so deep and so wide and so powerful and so passionate and so expansive - that it bursts through and out and in and over the puny boundaries of our hearts and attitudes and opinions, and on into the hearts and lives of each one who God puts around us. Jesus puts that reality before us when he tells us we are to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength – and then to love others just as much as we love ourselves.

*“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.”*

These two commandments together are the greatest commandment. They are directly interrelated but not identical. The connection between loving God and loving one’s neighbor is deeply intertwined. Our Lord is pointing out that we cannot love God in isolation from all other relationships in life. In fact the true reality of our love for God will be expressed in all our conduct and relationships. What that means is that if we are truly loving God with all of our hearts, minds, soul and strength – we will live out distinctive lifestyles which dramatically reflect God’s love in every way – in the way we conduct our business, in the way we function in our community, in the way we relate and deal with our families - and the way we worship and pray and learn and grow, care for and serve and respect and forgive one another in the church. It all begins with loving God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength.

Here is where we see the proper order of God’s purposes for the church. The evangelical community of faith in our time claims the Great Commission to be the priority of the church: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:19-20). But Jesus doesn’t agree with that. He calls the church to the priority of the Greatest Commandment - because the witness of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ flows not out of evangelistic passion or methods or systems or organization or knocking on doors, but out of a deep and authentic personal love relationship with God. When the Church and those who claim Christ as Lord and Savior have the deep love relationship with God, they will submit to one another in that same love, and the lost and broken world around us will be drawn to us and be healed in Jesus name.

In other words, the Great Commission erupts and explodes out of the Greatest Commandment as we love God and we love others as God loves them, when we love God as we ought. The Commission to mission is fulfilled when the Great Commandment is first priority of the church. We are called and created to reflect and share the love of God we have been given in Jesus Christ. As we joyfully do so, God is glorified both as we are transformed by God's love and as the world is transformed by God's love through us. When asked the ultimate question - "*Which commandment is the most important of all?*" or "What is the most important thing we are to do in all of life?" - Jesus responded by saying: "*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.*"

Jesus spoke these words as he stepped ever closer to a cross where he would reveal the great depths of God's love for us. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*" (John 3:16-17). This was Jesus' purpose in life. This is what he had been telling his disciples over the past few weeks and what he had been saying through parables to the religious leaders who opposed him and questioned him over the past few days. And so after answering their question regarding the ultimate question about which commandment is the most important of all - Jesus, in order to further reveal who he truly was, went on the offensive, not by answering any more questions, but by asking an ultimate question of his own.

*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." Matthew 22:41-42*

The question Jesus asked - "*What do you think about the Christ?*" - would have been an ultimate question to the Pharisees because "Who is the Messiah?" was the ultimate issue of Jesus' day. For hundreds of years the nation of Israel had been waiting for the Messiah that God had long ago promised. Jesus had given the correct answers to the peripheral questions of the religious leaders of the day, but this was the central question - the ultimate question - upon which everything else in the Jewish faith built. This was the question Jesus asked his disciples in Caesarea Philippi: "*Who do you say that I am?*" to which Peter answered: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:15). After that Jesus began to speak about his purpose, and over time also telling his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and that he would be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Jesus did not explain what he had to do until they had understood who he was. The teaching and work of Jesus Christ can never make sense without a knowledge of whom Jesus truly is. All earlier questions about were asked from not from the knowledge of who Jesus was but from ignorance about who he was.

And so the question Jesus asked about the Christ was specific. "*What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?*" The Pharisees answer? "*The son of David.*" This would have been the standard reply of the day. While the religious leaders of Jesus' day misunderstood much of the Hebrew Scriptures, they did at least understand this aspect of the identity of the Messiah. He would be the "*Son of David,*" which they did understand was a messianic term. The Messiah was expected to restore the royal line of David to the throne of Israel. He would be a political and military leader who threw off the oppressive subservience of Israel to Rome, and re-establish their dignity, their power, and their glory - and more than that, be the conqueror of all nations. If their answer was correct, the Christ/Messiah is David's son. It is amazing that the Pharisees answered Jesus so quickly that the Christ would be "*the son of David,*" for that phrase had been applied to Jesus two days earlier when Jesus entered Jerusalem and the multitudes of people and shouted to Him, "*Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*" And so Jesus then responds to their answer by asking:

*"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?"*

Jesus' questions put the Pharisees between a rock and a hard place - in that he references a quote from Psalm 110:1 which is a Psalm written by David, and as Jesus states here, David wrote this Psalm by the Holy Spirit. This was not David writing poetry but God the Holy Spirit revealing divine truth through David, and the truth revealed was a conversation that took place in God's presence. The first "Lord" mentioned is the covenant name for God, which we usually pronounce as Yahweh. The second "Lord" refers to "David's Lord" which Jesus indicates is the Messiah or Christ. David then, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reveals that the "Lord" (Yahweh) said to the "Lord" (Messiah): "*Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.*" This would have really troubled the Pharisees.

What is happening here is that God the Father told God the Son to sit at His right side until all His enemies were subdued and brought into defeat before Him. That will happen, which Philippians 2:10-11 describes will be when "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" But Jesus' point here is that David called the Messiah his Lord before the Messiah had become His son - and the Messiah existed prior to David and was his lord, yet the Messiah was also the direct descendent of David. How could that be? There is only one way that could be. The Messiah/Christ would have to be someone or something much more than a mere man. That is exactly who Jesus claimed to be. He was much more than just a man for he existed prior to becoming a man and was in fact equal with God. Matthew tells us that when Jesus asked the ultimate question about who he truly was - "*no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*"

Jesus is God, the Son of God, the light of the life of men, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, and from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace *because* he left the glory of heaven and came down to earth in the flesh of humanity, to sacrifice his life on a cross in our place for our sins, so we might be forgiven and cleansed and redeemed and restored back to God, so we might have a new life here on earth and a new life after death in the glory of heaven with God forever and ever.

*You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Ephesians 2:1-7

*Because of the great love with which he loved us, he made us alive together with Christ.* To be significant enough to God to be loved by God is the ultimate end in all of life. Our response to that calling should be to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. That is our calling; that is our purpose. Everything, everything starts with loving God. When we think about our own lives, we must truthfully admit that we seldom start with loving God. We usually start with the demands made upon us, instead of looking to the God who is able to lead us through the issues and problems and the pressures that confront or entangle us. We so often get so wrapped up with the struggle, that we can't get our minds off the effort of the struggle and back onto God. Jesus tells us to start by loving God. When you start with God, you start with One who sees the whole problem and everything involved in it. Loving God and each other and others is the central purpose of our existence. God's intention in loving us is to offer His love to others through the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the silver platter of relational excellence. The loving way Christians behave toward each other is designed to catch the world's attention and create an entry point for the message of the good news of the gospel. May God use us as His instruments of His love to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in the season before us. As Zephaniah 3:17 proclaims: "*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*" 2019-03-03

Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church