

**Nineteenth Sunday of Pentecost
Festival of Friendship
September 25, 2005
Matthew 22:34-46**

Pastor Paul Janke

The Two Most Important Questions You Will Ever Answer

1. *Who is Jesus?*
2. *How will you handle the demands of God's law?*

^{NIV} Matthew 22:34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,⁴² "What do you think about the Christ? 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.

Dear Friends of our Savior,

Every day people ask us questions. Most of these questions are mundane. "Paper or plastic?" "Would you like fries with that?" "How are you doing?" The other day America Online wanted to know whether I was worried about approach of Hurricane Rita. And the sports page asked whether I thought Barry Bonds used steroids to hit so many home runs. I'm not really sure why my internet service provider and the local paper ask those questions. I can't believe that my opinion on these things matters a whole lot. They're just more of the mundane questions we hear every day.

But the part of Matthew's Gospel that we're looking at this morning yields two questions that are anything but mundane. In fact, these

two questions are very likely the most important questions you will ever answer. The first one is, "Who is Jesus?" The second one is, "How will you handle the demands of God's law?" Let's spend a few minutes this morning finding the Bible's answers to these questions.

1. Who is Jesus?

There are a lot of questions here in Matthew 22. Several of them are asked by Jesus' enemies in the hope that Jesus won't know how to answer them and will look foolish. First, the Pharisees wanted to know: **"Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"** Besides having a holy preoccupation with keeping the law, the Pharisees also wanted the Romans out of Palestine—as soon as possible! They figured that with this question they could either get Jesus for advocating the non-payment of taxes or for being too considerate of their Roman overlords. But Jesus said, **"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."** Then it was the Sadducees turn. The Sadducees were OK with the Romans, but they didn't believe in the resurrection. So they concocted a story about a woman who was married consecutively to seven brothers and then they asked whose wife this woman would be in heaven. They were thinking that their question might show how foolish a belief in the resurrection of the dead is. But Jesus answered, **"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."** Then the Pharisees came back to try it again and one of them asked Jesus, *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"* We're going to come back to that last question, but for now I'd just like you to note that Jesus answered each question and answered each one perfectly.

Now I want to take you to the end of this chapter where Jesus starts asking some questions. It says here, *"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?'"* The Pharisees knew their Bibles very well. When Jesus asked them about the Christ, they knew he was referring to the long-awaited Messiah, that is, the Anointed One, the King who by God's promise would come and rescue his people. Whose son is the Christ? That's easy: David's son. The Pharisees agreed that there were many Scripture passages indicating that the Christ would be a descendant of the great King David.

But then Jesus quotes a Bible passages for these Bible scholars. It's from Psalm 110, a psalm written by David and a psalm that all the Pharisees would have agreed was a prophecy of the Christ, the

Messiah. Jesus says, *"How is it that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'"*" In this passage, the Christ is called "Lord." That's the same as calling him God. The Pharisees knew that. So now Jesus asks one more question: *"If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"* The Pharisees didn't know how to answer. Or at least they didn't want to answer. And from that day forward they didn't ask Jesus any more questions.

But the question Jesus asks is one that all of us are going to have to answer. In fact, it's the most important question we will ever have to answer, because our answer to that question will make the difference in whether we spend eternity in heaven or in hell. What do you think about Jesus? Is he the Christ, the King chosen by God and sent by him as our Rescuer? Is he the Lord (God)? Depending on the way we answer, Jesus says, we'll either be acquitted or condemned.

Most people are willing to say nice things about Jesus. Most would readily agree that Jesus was a good man. Many would chime in that Jesus was a wise teacher and not balk at calling Jesus a wonderful example of what all men should be. But that's not how Jesus answers the question about his identity. He says here that as the Christ he is both David's son and David's Lord. That is, he is both a true man descended from King David, and at the same time true God from all eternity. And if Jesus isn't right about that, then, as C.S. Lewis noted, we shouldn't be calling him a good man. If Jesus claimed to be the Lord God and he's not, then he might be a liar or he might be a lunatic, out of touch with reality, but he's not a good man. That's not really one of our options. Jesus is either the Lord God or he's a liar or a lunatic. So, who is he? Take your pick. But know that the stakes are high. And know, too, that if you say, "Jesus is Lord," the Holy Spirit has been at work in your heart to lead you to that confession.

Maybe, though, you're still wondering why your answer to this question about Jesus identity is so important. It's like this: If we could save ourselves, it might not matter what we think about Jesus. But the fact is, we can't save ourselves. Not one of us. Not one person in the world can save himself or herself. Only Jesus can save us. Let me show you why that is.

2. How will you handle the demands of God's law?

In the first part of today's Gospel reading it says, *"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?'" Like I said before, the Pharisees had a holy preoccupation with the law. They had counted up all the laws God gave Israel through Moses and calculated that there were 613 separate laws. They specified that there were 248 (one for each part of the human body) that said, "Do this!" and another 365 (one for each day of the year) that said, "Don't do that!" Well, when you're asked to pick one law out of 613 that's the *most* important, you can see how tough that is. Chances are, your critics are going to disagree with the law you nominate. They're going to ask you what you have against the other laws.

But, as always, Jesus answers wisely. He quotes a passage from the book of Deuteronomy, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**" This, Jesus says, is the first and greatest commandment. And then he goes on, this time quoting from Leviticus, and says, "**And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'**" The whole law boils down to this: Love. Love God. Love your neighbor. Jesus made it look easy. Nothing for his critics to criticize. Nothing for these argumentative types to argue about. Love. That's the fulfillment of the law.

But while we may well be in awe of how easily Jesus answered his critics, keeping the law is anything but easy. Forget about the 613 separate provisions of the law, what Jesus tells us to do here is impossible. When God tells us that he wants us to love him with all our heart and all our mind and all our soul, he's requiring that we love him with every fiber of our being. No lapses in our love. No divided loyalty with our love. God wants to be the undisputed King of our hearts and wants never to come in second to anything or anyone. I can't do that. I don't believe you can do that either. And we've still got to deal with that other demand: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Self-love comes pretty easily to most of us. We take good care of #1. But who of us would dare lay claim to having consistently loved our fellow human beings as much as we love ourselves. We can't do that either, can we?

So here's that other ultra-important question: How are you going to handle the demands of God's law? Are you going to live the illusion that says, "I've done what God commands"? I think it's pretty plain that we haven't. None of us have. Are you going to live your life in resentment toward God because he asks you to do something you aren't equipped to do? Or are you going to do what the Bible urges and concede the obvious—that you've failed to love God or your

neighbor as the Lord commands—confess that you're a sinner and then look to Jesus, the David's son and David's Lord, as the Savior God sent for you?

Jesus lived a life of flawless love. He loved people who were physically sick and spiritually lost even when their needs impinged on his own. He loved those guys who spent days trying to come up with questions that would make him look foolish. He loved his disciple Peter even when Peter in his moment of weakness swore that he didn't know Jesus. Jesus even loved those soldiers who with cruel efficiency affixed his body to the cross out there at Calvary. And he loved those who howled their taunts at him as he hung there dying. Jesus loved you and me enough to enter this fallen world and share our humanity and pour out his life in order to settle our debt of sin and gain admission to heaven for us. That was love like God demanded—and that is the love by which we are forgiven of our sins and saved from eternal death. How will you handle the demands of God's law—love God and love your neighbor and do it perfectly? Handle it this way: Trust in Jesus. God promises that all who trust in Jesus will have his obedience credited to their account.

Some questions are more important than others. I don't really care whether I carry my groceries home in paper or plastic. And if I didn't order fries, I probably didn't want them. But the questions here in Matthew 22 are of another order entirely. How we answer these questions makes a difference for all eternity. Who is Jesus? He's true God and true man, our Savior. And how will we handle the demands of God's law? We'll trust Jesus. He fulfilled the law for us. Important answers to important questions. Amen.