

# THE TRIUMPH OF GOD IS BASED ON LOVE

## Matthew 22: 34-46

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

### INTRODUCTION

How would you recognize members of these groups of people? What would be some of their shared characteristics?

- Packer fans
- Deer hunters
- Doll collectors
- Antique car collectors
- The people of God

We all know that associations of people share common values and characteristics. When a person collects dolls we automatically know that he shares certain things in common with other collectors of dolls. While all groups have diversity among their membership, yet there are always certain things that every member shares in common with the other members of the group. This is no less true of the people of God. From the beginning of Matthew's gospel it has been clear that one of the central purposes for this record of Jesus' life was to identify who are the true people of God. Here at the end of Matthew 22, three days before he is betrayed, arrested and crucified, Jesus sets forward the three distinguishing marks of the people of God. He identifies the core characteristics that all who belong to God share in common. He describes who are the people over whom God is ruling and among whom God is living.

### STUDY

1. In what sense is the question that the Pharisees ask in v. 34 a "test" of Jesus? How are they hoping he will fail the test?

*The question they ask goes right to the heart of their disagreement with Jesus. They relentlessly accuse him of breaking the commands of God because of his disregard for their religious regulations (See*

*Matthew 9:11, 12:1-2, 10-14, 15:1-14). They believe that he will, by answering this question, reveal his disdain for God's law and thus incur the wrath of the Jewish people.*

2. How does Jesus answer their question?

*Jesus answers their question in two parts. First, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 he says the greatest and first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Then he quotes Leviticus 19:18 as the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Then, he says in v. 40, "Upon these two depend the whole law and the prophets."*

3. What does he mean by v. 40, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"?

*The phrase "the Law and the Prophets" is the Jewish way of saying the entire OT. When he says the first and greatest commandment is to love God with your whole being and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself he does not mean that these two are the first two commandments in a list of commandments. He is not suggesting that it is possible to arrange all of God's commands in a list of importance with these two at the top. Neither is he saying that these are the only two commands that matter. He isn't saying you can just ignore every other command God made and just concentrate on these two. Rather, what v. 40 tells us is that every word of the OT is related to these two commands in some way. Love for God and neighbor is at the heart of the entire OT. The OT was given, in part, for the purpose of promoting love for God and for people.*

4. What does it mean to say that loving God with our whole being is the "first and greatest commandment" upon which the whole Law and Prophets hang?

*Jesus is simply stating the purpose of human existence. The reason God made us, made the world, continues to give us breath and continues to keep the world existing is so that each and every human being will love God with their whole being. It is the purpose for which we exist.*

5. What does it mean to love God with our whole beings (This is what the phrase, “heart, soul and mind” means. We are to love God with every part of our being.)? Consider, what do we mean when we say that a boy is “head over heels” in love with a girl or someone loves the Packers body and soul? (See Deut. 10:12—11:1)

*The religious leaders made the condition of being the people of God obedience to rules and regulations. They talked much of duty and morality. They castigated people for not doing the right thing and prided themselves for doing what was right. Jesus’ complaint against them is the same as God’s complaint against humanity throughout the centuries. The problem isn’t first that we do the wrong thing. The first problem is that we love the wrong things. Jesus, like the entire OT, teaches that it is what a man loves that will determine what a man does. Men who love God will obey God. In fact, obedience to God’s laws is the delight of all who love God. Jesus tells us that the only people who can consider themselves the people of God are those who are impressed with and attracted to God above all other persons and things. The people who delight to please God and be with God and long for God are the only people who can be considered the people of God. Every person in here knows what it is like to love something or someone. You know how it is when you love someone. Your mind is full of thoughts of them. You anticipate your next meeting with them. You plan ways that you can please them. You gladly deny yourself other pleasures in order to enjoy the pleasure of being with them. Displeasing them grieves you. Pleasing them pleases you. There are two indispensable things that must exist if love is taking place. First, there must be an affection for the one loved. The heart must be attracted to the other person. There must be passion or at least the yearning for passion or there is no love. However, there must also be action. Words and feelings of love are meaningless without action. Love always acts.*

6. What evidence do you see in yourself that you love God?

**God is living among and ruling over the people who love God with their whole being.**

7. Jesus says that the second commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” is “like” the first commandment. What are some ways that the second commandment is similar to the first one?

*The second is like it in five ways: First, both are commands. These are not suggestions. There are no exception clauses like you don’t have to love God when you feel sick or you don’t have to love people who say bad things about you. These are both commands from God to you. Second, both are commands to love. Again, Jesus is dealing with first causes here. What you love matters more than anything else because what your heart finds attractive determines everything else about you. Third, the second is like the first in that it is a command to love persons. The first command is a command to love the greatest of all persons, the second is a command to love those persons who are made in his image. Fourth, the second is a command to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Just we are to love God with our whole being, with every part of us, so we are to love our neighbor with the same attentiveness and the same intensity that we love ourselves. Finally, the entire OT hangs on this command just like it hangs on the first command. In other words, every word of the OT is a description of what love for others looks like. It tells us what love does. Just like the OT describes how those who love God will obey God so it tells us how those who love people act towards others. It reveals the blessings that come to those who love others and warns of the misery that comes to those who refuse to love others.*

8. What does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves?

*First, we love others as ourselves when we are as passionate about meeting the needs of others as we are about getting our own needs met. None of us is indifferent to whether or not we eat or sleep or have enough money or friends. We all desire to have our needs met. We are delighted when they are met and sad when they are not met. So we must be passionate about meeting the needs of others. Meeting the needs of others is to give us joy. It is not simply a matter of duty. Second, we all take the initiative to be sure our own needs are met. We are not passive when it comes to meeting our needs. So we must take the initiative to meet the needs of others. We are aware of our needs and desires all the time. We pay attention to our physical,*

social and emotional needs. We do not love others when we are indifferent to their concerns and desires. Thoughtfulness and planning are part of what it takes to love others. Third, we don't get mad at ourselves when we have needs. We consider it legitimate to have needs. We don't judge ourselves and criticize ourselves for having needs. So we must not judge or criticize others who have needs. Fourth, we all know that not every need we feel ought to be met. We do love ourselves by disciplining ourselves. We do not give in to every whim and desire because we know that not everything we want is good for us. We also know that some discomfort is actually necessary to a healthy and whole life. So we are discerning in the ways in which we love our neighbor.

**9.** Does this command teach that we cannot love others unless we first love ourselves, as many Christians assert?

*No. In fact, that line of reasoning is exactly the opposite of what Jesus says here. The assumption of this verse is that all human beings love themselves. The reason the person with low self-esteem feels so bad is because they are not being loved the way they want to be loved. Low self-esteem is how many of us respond to not being loved as we desire. We are sad because people do not love us, as we deserve. All of us believe that we deserve to be loved. Anger and sadness are two of the emotions we have when we are not loved as we demand.*

**10.** What is the significance to the order of the commands?

*There two reasons why love for others is the second commandment. First, God is supreme in his universe, not man. The ultimate purpose of all things is the glory, the supremacy of God. So if you make anything more important than love for God you are despising and dishonoring the greatest and best of all beings. Second, you cannot truly love others if you don't first love God. The main reason is because if you don't love God first, then your love for others will always be manipulative. You will only love others in order to get something from them. You will persist in love only as long as you are receiving adequate compensation for your love. Only if you love God can you love others without requiring any repayment of your love.*

*The only people who can freely love others for their good are those who don't need anything from the other in order to be happy.*

**11.** What evidence do you see in your life that you love others as you love yourself?

**God is living among and ruling over the people who love others as they love themselves.**

**12.** Jesus concludes his conversation with the Pharisees by asking them a question: "Whose son is the Christ?" Why is Jesus asking them about the identity of the Messiah?

*What Jesus does is take these men to the central question, the one they have been asking since John the Baptist appeared on the scene three years prior to this conversation. It is the question that has been behind the entire controversy with Jesus since his entry into Jerusalem two days prior to this with the crowds shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David." The goal of the religious teachers has been to prove to the crowds what they are convinced of, Jesus is not the Messiah but a fraud. So Jesus takes the battle to them to find out if they know they can identify Messiah.*

**13.** The Pharisees correctly say that the Messiah will be the son of David. However, Jesus then asks them to explain why it is that if the Messiah is David's son then how is it that David calls his son, his Lord in Psalm 110:1. The Pharisees are unable to answer this final question and no one dares to ask him any other question. Why does this final question of Jesus silence the religious leaders?

*They are certain that Jesus is not the Messiah and they have been trying to prove that he is not the Messiah. However, Jesus, by asking this question exposes the fact that they do not even know who the Messiah is. Their idea of the identity of the Messiah cannot handle all that the OT says about the Messiah. Their reading of the OT is selective reading. They only like the parts they think support their position and they ignore the rest. Jesus publicly exposes their inadequate understanding of the OT and therefore their fitness to judge whether or not he is the Messiah. How can they know he is not*

*the Messiah when they don't even know who the Messiah is? So he silences his critics but he does not extinguish their hatred which in a few days will consume him.*

**14.** What is Jesus saying about the Messiah by this quote?

*The Messiah is both the Son of David and the Lord of David. What Jesus is obviously referring to is the fact that the Messiah is both human and divine. He is both the Son of Man and the Son of God.*

**15.** While one of the reasons Jesus asks this question at this point is to silence and expose the Pharisees there is at least one other reason that Matthew wants to record this question and Jesus' quotation of Psalm 110:1 right after quoting the two great commandments. Look at Psalm 110:1 and describe what it says in light of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. How will the Messiah leave the earth, be exalted to God's right hand and then come back to put his feet on the necks of his enemies?

*First, notice that the Messiah who is human and therefore must be born into this world is going to be taken up into heaven for a period of time before he conquers all of his enemies and sets up God's kingdom on earth. This verse contradicts the expectation of the majority of Jewish people that when the Messiah came he would immediately set up God's kingdom on earth. This verse envisions a period of time when the Messiah is not on earth but in heaven waiting that final victory. Second, it points to the Messiah leaving the earth. How will this happen? Jesus has told the disciples repeatedly that he must go to Jerusalem and be betrayed and killed to fulfill the Scriptures. In just these two chapters he has quoted several passages that contain this same basic idea, the Messiah is rejected and he appears to be weak but then he becomes the king and he is chief cornerstone. Jesus is pointing, by quoting Psalm 110:1 to his exaltation by means of the cross. His challenge to the Pharisees is designed to reveal not only his divine/human nature but also that it will be by means of the cross that he will be exalted.*

**16.** What is the bad news that vv. 34-40 bad news and how is Jesus' quoting Psalm 110:1 the antidote to this bad news?

*I don't know about you but to be told that God is commanding me to love him with my whole being and my neighbor as myself is not good news. It is not in me to love God or people. Commanding me, or any other sinner to love God and other people is like commanding a horse to love eating meat or like commanding a Chicago Cubs fan to love John Smoltz, the Atlanta Brave's ace pitcher or like commanding me to love lima beans. I hate lima beans. I cannot love what I hate. Every human being is naturally God's enemy and therefore has no ability to love God or other people because no one can love what they hate.*

*Jesus, the one who is God and Man comes to die upon the cross to do two things. First, he dies to satisfy God's anger against all those who do not love him or others. Second, he dies to also purchase the promises of God. Chief among those promises is the promise of the new covenant. Jesus by his death gains the glory of sitting at God's right hand from where he sends forth the Holy Spirit who gives new hearts to his people so that we love God and people. We become those who delight in pleasing God and people because God gives us his Holy Spirit for the sake of Jesus. We have a complete Savior who not only gains our pardon for our hatred of God and man but also gains for us new passions, a new heart that delights to love God by obeying his commands and to love our neighbor as ourselves.*

*Therefore, all those who are members of God's kingdom are trusting in and waiting for Jesus Christ. All who belong to God's kingdom rejoice in this Savior who died for our sins and who lives to give us new hearts of love for God and people.*

**17.** Are you delighted that Yahweh said to David's Son, "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet"?

**God is living among and ruling over the people who trust Jesus Christ with their whole life.**