

Matthew 22:34-40

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Date: 03 May 2020

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[0 : 00] So our text this morning, as Nathan said, is Matthew 22, verses 34 through 30. So let's start by reading our text. This is the Word of God, and it reads, 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 the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commands depend all the law and the prophets.

So today's passage answers one of the most basic questions of Christian living. What does God desire of mankind? If we can perfectly obey the two commands that are given here throughout our lives perfectly, we will fulfill the law.

That's what Jesus is teaching. No one but the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, has been able to do so. And as we'll see today, loving God and others in this way requires a whole self-devotion to God and to his work at all times.

[1 : 17] So my goal for this morning is for us to grow in our understanding of what these two commands actually require of us, that we may understand the heart of God in a more real sense, greater treasure, the atoning work of Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the law and imputed his righteousness to his people, and therefore grow in our ability to display the love we have for one another in a tangible way.

So to do so, we'll take a look at this text in four points, and I'll refer back to them as we go. But it'll be the context, the question, the commands, and the connection, and the connection between those two commands.

So firstly, let's look at our first main point, the context. So this passage in Matthew 22 has zoomed into the last week of Jesus' life.

He has made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. He has driven out the money changers, and the next morning he curses the fig tree. It withers immediately, according to Matthew's account, and he enters the temple again to teach.

We read in chapter 21, When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?

[2 : 43] So the question that this particular leader asks is in the context of Jesus coming into the temple, teaching, and his authority being challenged. So Jesus' following teaching is bookended by two simple questions that they cannot or will not answer.

And these questions expose the religious leaders' hypocrisy and ignorance of the law. So the first question, what Jesus directly responds to this challenge, he asks them where John the Baptist's baptism came from.

And they discuss it among themselves, as it says in chapter 21. And if they said from heaven, Jesus would say to them, Why then do you not believe? But if they say from man, they are afraid of the crowds, for they all hold that John was a prophet.

So they answer Jesus, We do not know. And he said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. And then on the other end, after our teaching, following our text, Christ asks them how the Messiah, as the son of David, is referred to by David as my Lord, which, again, they cannot or will not give an answer.

So in between these two bookends, we find three parables that are specifically targeting the religious leaders who have come to challenge him. And then we find three questions asked of

Jesus in order to test him.

[4 : 08] So in summary, we first have the parable of the two sons, where Jesus concludes in verse 31 of chapter 21, The tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you, these religious leaders.

And then we have the parable of the tenants and the parable of the wedding feasts, both showing the betrayal of Israel's leaders of God's original plan, accusing them of killing his messengers and denying his son.

We know that these Jewish leaders understand that Christ is speaking about them, and they want to arrest him, but again, they fear the crowds. So instead, they resort to outsmarting him.

So after, of course, they are unable to do this, we know that they eventually abandon this plan of outsmarting Jesus and instead bring false witnesses against Christ and convict him of crimes that he didn't commit and would crucify him on the cross.

But they're not quite to that point yet. They're first trying to shame him or trip him up in his words. So our text this morning is the third in a series of questions that the leaders are asking.

[5 : 21] And Jesus takes the opportunity to teach about three fundamental relationships. So firstly, we see the Pharisees joining the Herodians, asking about our relationship with government, to which Jesus answers, render to Caesar that which is Caesar's.

Then we see the Sadducees asking a question about the afterlife, to which Jesus answers, there is no marriage in the afterlife, and God is not a God of the dead, but of the living, thus confirming the resurrection.

And then we have our text, where the Pharisees send a scribe or a lawyer concerning the relationship between man and the law. So that's the context of our passage this morning.

Let's take a look at the question asked to test Jesus. So this question is asked by a lawyer or a scribe. And so this type of Pharisee would have had little to do with actually leading the people or teaching, but was more of an academic expert on the law.

So this question is clearly meant to test Jesus, but if you read Mark's account of the same story in chapter 12, he seems to have a bit more of a positive impression. So we know that this Pharisee is trying to test Jesus, but at the same time, we also see him in some ways in Mark's account, genuinely seeking after wisdom.

[6 : 43] No matter this particular scribe's intent, we do know that some of the Jewish leaders were converted, or at least some came to Christ in humility, seeking to learn Nicodemus being one example of those.

Now, as he asks our Lord, which is the greatest commandment? He's not simply asking, which is the first command among many that we should obey? Rather, he's asking, which is the preeminent command that informs all the others?

The great command is in a category of its own. So we can know this from a couple of different points. Firstly, from Jesus's response, and then if you read the scribe's response in Mark's account, this is the question that he is asking.

We also know from the rabbinic tradition, the rabbis held that there were 613 commands found in the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses' teaching, one command for each letter in the Ten Commandments.

248 of these commands were positive in nature, asking us to do something, whereas 365 were negative or forbidding in nature. So as a shortcut, the rabbis would categorize these commands into heavier commands and into lighter commands so that they could focus on the heaviest and not worry so much on the light ones.

[8 : 08] And there was an ongoing disagreement among the rabbis, which were the heavy ones, which were the light ones, and which was the heaviest of them all. So this scribe was asking Jesus a commonly disputed question.

Now, likely what was happening in the rabbis' minds is that they were trying to take a shortcut on God's law. They were trying to see what was the least amount of effort that they could put in to feel or to be justified before God in their minds.

We have a tendency in this direction as well, and we know that this contradicts James' later teaching that falling short at one point in the law renders us guilty under the whole law.

So let's take a look at Jesus' response in our third main point. We'll, of course, spend a little bit more time here and in the next one, the two commands.

So firstly, I want to address these commands separately, and then we'll examine the connection between them since that's kind of the main point of what Jesus is saying here. So firstly, sub-point A, if you're taking notes, we'll look at the great command.

[9 : 17] So as many of you know, Jesus is quoting here from the Shema found in Deuteronomy chapter 6, which reads, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

In Matthew's account, we find all of your mind, and in Mark's account, we find all of your mind and strength. And I'll address that apparent discrepancy here in a second.

But this was certainly the most precious of Jewish scriptures. They would have said this at least twice a day. They had it written on their doorposts, and the Pharisees literally wore it on their foreheads and tiny scrolls rolled up in their phylacteries.

So it was already a strong candidate for the great command in the Jewish mind. Now as we look at this, I don't want to focus on the love part just yet, but I'd like to look at some other aspects of this text.

So firstly, let's briefly unpack what we are supposed to love God with. Our heart and our soul and this third thing, either strength, mind, or mind, and strength.

[10 : 22] Before we do this, I want to recommend the series by the Bible Project, which some of you are probably familiar with on the Shema. It's kind of a word study on some of these different words.

It's where I got a lot of the information here. But of course, the videos add some visual aids as well. So firstly, loving God with our heart. The Jewish people understood this concept differently than the modern American understanding of the heart.

Typically, when we say heart, we primarily are referring to our feelings or our affections. And while the Hebrew understanding would have included these two things, it would have accomplished, accomplished, encompass, sorry, much more.

In the words of Tim Mackey, the Israelites would have had no concept of the brain or mind or even any word for it. They imagine that all humans' intellectual activity takes place in the heart.

So this is likely why both New Testament accounts add the word mind. The Greeks had a concept of the mind somewhat separate from the heart while the Hebrew language did not.

[11 : 30] And I was curious about this because I had heard this claim and so I went through my little Blue Letter Bible app and was looking for the Old Testament references to mind and I couldn't find any where the actual Hebrew language used the word mind.

oftentimes it would have been more literally translated as some other part of the body or sometimes a better translation might have been heart in that case.

So this means that we can know something with our hearts. As the book of Proverbs says, wisdom and discernment come from the heart and we know that it's the source of our choices and desires in the biblical context.

Like the phrases that we desire something in our heart or we had it in our heart to make this or that choice as we see in scripture. So we can understand the heart as the all-encompassing essence of our inner being.

The source of our physical life, our emotions, our desires, our choices and our thoughts. So to love God with our heart is much more than just our feelings and affections but our entire inner being.

[12 : 42] So next let's look at the word soul. Again, when we think of the word soul we tend to think a little bit differently than how the Hebrew authors would have written it and thought about it.

Typically, we kind of defer back to the Greek philosophical concept of the soul which is like this non-physical essence which will be released from its imprisonment in our body upon our death.

Now this is not what the word means in Hebrew and it's not what the Hebrew authors how they would have put it in Shema. Literally, this word the Hebrew is nefesh and it means throat but just like the concept of the heart has both physical and deeper metaphorical meaning.

It can refer to the person as a whole. Both humans and animals are spoken of as living nefesh or souls and once something dies it is a dead nefesh which we don't really have the concept of a dead soul in the American mind.

So we don't have a nefesh or a soul rather we are a soul a physical being so to love God with all our soul in the sense is to do so with all of our being all of our body our personhood or our essence.

[13:59] So next let's look at the word strength. Of the three this is probably the worst translated into English. So in the Hebrew this word is *miod* literally it means very or much it's an adverb specifically an intensifier so it makes another word mean more of itself like very big.

So a better translation might be with all of our *umph* our power *gumption* *fervency* or *zealousness* but again Tim Mackey prefers with all of our *muchness*. He says this final thing that you used to love God isn't a thing at all it's everything devoting every opportunity possibility and capacity that you have to honoring God.

This word again is all encompassing and implies that every single part of our life gives us an opportunity to demonstrate love to God or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do all to the glory of God.

So to sum this up I'd like to read a Matthew Henry quote which again sums up this idea of loving God with all of these things. He says we must highly esteem him be well pleased that there is such a being well pleased in his attributes his relations to us our desire must be towards him our delight in him our dependence upon him and to him we must be entirely devoted.

It must be a constant pleasure to us to think of him to hear from him to speak to him and to serve him we must love him. Secondly I'd like to look at another aspect of the Shema the concept of unity.

[15:42] So while it may not appear glaringly on the surface the concept of unity is in the center of this command. So listen to the words from Deuteronomy which are included in our text that are found in Mark's rendering.

Before this command that Jesus refers to we have this preface of these words before hear O Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is one.

While in isolation this oneness or unity in the person of God may seem like it's insignificant. But once we place this next to our disunity or disintegration of the self it takes on a new meaning.

So I'd like to look at a couple of passages that demonstrate this. Firstly James chapter three. You can turn there if you want to but you can just listen. James three it says verse eight no human being can tame the tongue it is a restless evil full of deadly poison with it we bless our Lord and father and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God from the same mouth come blessing and cursing my brothers these things ought not to be so we have a division in ourselves between what we say at one time and what we say at another time and then Romans 7 is the classic passage on this topic Romans 7 15 Paul writing I do not understand my own actions for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing that I hate for I have the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out for I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing so again there's a disconnect between our desires and then what our actions actually manifest and then in

Jeremiah 17 classic text verse 9 the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick so even as believers our affections desires words choices intentions actions feelings and thoughts can be fickle and fleeting they can contradict one another and they can wax and wane and furbously and in fact in my experience this is the main problem of the Christian life what we know to be true and what we're able to put into practice are so often disjointed but as Psalm 115 proclaims our Lord is in the heavens he does all that he pleases God is perfectly effective in every action we are woefully disparate and disjointed but the Lord is one so this adds yet another layer of meaning to the great command be united as the Lord is love him with all of your heart not part of your heart here and part of your heart somewhere else all of your soul and all of your *muchness* be complete united in all of your being to the singular purpose of loving the

[18:42] Lord so how do we show love to God our next sub point sub point C for taking notes how do we love God it can seem overwhelming at times to feel the need to reciprocate the love that God has shown to us with a deep emotionality and close connection with him these intense feelings should be there to some degree and sometimes but the biblical writers certainly didn't feel this all the time and needed to remind themselves of the truth we can never show the same love for God as he has demonstrated to us he requires something much simpler of us it's not incredibly complex very hard to carry out but simple in concept Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 12 the end of the matter all has been heard fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man or as John writes in 1st John 5 3 this is the love of

God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome or as Jesus says simply in John 14 15 if you love me you will keep my commandments now this phrase is repeated in one form or 15 of John's gospel alone so loving God means keeping his

commandments now it's not just this outward thing but it's the outward manifestation of the love that's occurring on the inside this by itself may seem like it's a plea for a dry piety a legalistic or robotic type of living however in the context of what we have observed in the Shema consider what it means for us to obey God's commands every last one with all of our heart our soul and our muchness all our affections emotions desires choices physical body mental energy essence and fervency united together to keep his commands since they are the desired expression of our love for

God first John the passage that we just read earlier said that these commands would not be burdensome and Jesus says here in John 15 in the same chunk of teaching if you keep my commands you will abide in my love these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full so this is not dry root obedience to avoid punishment like when you're watching TV or playing outside as a child and your mom tells you to clean your room rather this is purpose fulfilling satisfying joy giving action rooted in deep trust in the rule giver that he has designed us and therefore he knows what's best for us he has commanded that which will give us the most joy and satisfaction so this concept is the reason for David's epic psalm 119 which over and over demonstrate his deep desire to know and obey the commands of God now I could have chosen any stanza to read from in psalm 119 but this one stuck out as I was beginning to read through it this would be in verses 9 through 16 this is again just an example of this connection between loving

God and loving his word and his commands and his statutes all synonyms for the same thing so it reads how can a young man keep his way pure by guarding it according to your word with my whole heart I seek you let me not wonder from your commandments I've stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you blessed are you O Lord teach me your statutes with my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth and fix my eyes on your ways I will delight in your statutes I will not forget your word some of us seriously need to question whether we believe what David believed about God's commands or if our understanding is more like a child being required to clean his or her room so let's look at this second great command love your neighbor it'll be a bit shorter in response to the question on which do all the other commands rely

Jesus answers with two the second love your neighbor as yourself is cited from again the Torah Leviticus 19 18 and is placed in the same category as the Shema by Jesus like the Shema in that many other commands are summed up in these words all commands falling into one of these two categories so if we're able to fulfill the command love your neighbor as yourself we'll be fulfilling every command that involves relationship with one another Paul writes in Romans 13 the commandments you shall not commit adultery you shall not murder you shall not steal you shall not covet and any other commandment are summed up in this word love your neighbor as yourself so what does this command mean many have used it to say that we can't truly love others until we first love ourselves the thinking goes like this our capacity to love others is increased as our capacity to love ourselves is and

[24 : 04] I hope that this backwards and worldly way of thinking is as obvious to you as it is to me the assumption of the Hebrew thinkers was that we already knew how to love ourselves to meet our needs first and then to take care of others the ideas of liking who you are or treating yourself or the apparent importance of self esteem are relatively new ideas that only seem to be relevant in extremely affluent and privileged societies like ours poverty and struggle to make ends meet has been the norm not the exception throughout history when you're worried about getting food on the table you don't really have the luxury about whether or not you're fond of your personality on the contrary the high calling of the Christian life is one of self sacrificial love and this is demonstrated to us in the person of Christ we read in 1 John 3 verse 16 and 8 through 18 by this we know love that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him how does

God's love abide in him little children let us not love in word or in talk but in deed and in truth in John's mind closing your heart against a brother has been equated with seeing a need that you can fulfill and not taking action what is on the inside is reflected on the outside Paul describes this idea more specifically in Philippians 2 that we ought to count one another more significant than ourselves looking after other people's interests having the mind of Christ who gave up his right to maintain the full expression of his deity by veiling his attributes appearing as a creature rather than the creator and even lowering himself to be served and killed by his very creation and this is the

model for our own love to love the neighbor as the self is to give up our interests our desires for the sake of others God simply loves us it's in his nature he's the originator of this everlasting and unconditional love as Romans 5 says

God demonstrates his own love for us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us so let us then die to the secular concept that we must love ourselves first before we can love others God has loved us enough to satisfy and this love as we abide in it is to overflow abundantly into the lives of others so how can we actually do this a big part of it is understanding the connection between these two commands so let's look at our last point together the connection between the commands so according to one commentator Jesus was the first to place these two commands from the Torah together however the New Testament offers differed greatly with this prior tradition continuing Jesus' teaching on the inseparable nature of the two commands Paul writes Romans 13 again love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfilling of the law and in Galatians 6 2 Paul writes again bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ so how is this possible that a Pharisee says that one command to love the neighbor as itself is the fulfillment of the law again he would have said the Shema multiple times per day and literally had it written on his forehead in the phylactery so here lies the connection between the two commands and understanding them is essential to obedience you cannot love God without loving your neighbor nor can you love your neighbor in the way that Christ our standard loved us without loving God in creating us in his image God has tethered himself to humanity in an amazing and glorious way such that an offense against a man is an offense against God as Matthew records in chapter 25 truly I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers you did it to me similarly in James chapter 3 we reflected on this passage earlier blessing God and cursing those made in his likeness was given as an example of the tongue being a restless evil demonstrating the deep division in the human heart which ought not be so so

James sees it as a contradiction to bless God and to curse man with the same tongue this link is shown most clearly in 1st John chapter 4 so I'd like us to turn there so 1st John chapter 4 starting in verse 19 1st John 4 verse 19 says we love because he first loved us if anyone says I love God and hates his brother he is a liar for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen in this commandment we have from him whoever loves God must also love his brother everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him by this we know the love that we love the children of God when we love

[29 : 34] God and obey his commandments for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome! which is to love what he loves namely his children each of these three are wound together so tightly that if one is missing according to John all three cannot exist we cannot love others as Christ loved us until we have experienced the great love of Christ and contemplated the necessary sacrifice to lay down one's life for an enemy we can't love God unless we know him and begin to unite our own desires with his desires loving what he loves so what does this mean for us if we find ourselves lacking in any of these three areas zeal or love for God a love for others or an obedience to God's commands we can examine our attitude towards all three it's a package deal so do you ever wonder whether you love

God as you ought or whether or what else you can then fall in love once again with the one who has loved your soul begin to love those around you in a sacrificial way and feel the great need you have to be poured into before you can pour out so while the gospel message in these verses is not particularly glaring a brief peek beneath the surface displays two commands that are wrought with deep gospel implications and hope for what hope we have of fulfilling these two commands reorienting our entire essence life intellect desire and fervency off of ourselves and onto God apart from the work of the spirit and how can we have access to God's very spirit without being utterly destroyed like those of the Old Testament temple without the perfect substitutionary sacrifice of Christ who has fulfilled these two commands perfectly at every point he did nothing apart from the will of the father he was unified in his intellect his will and his affection towards the father's glory and therefore towards the love of humanity and his and his and his and his and his and his! His sin and his deserving wrath imputed to him that day as he yielded up his spirit to be crushed by the father lifted up was he to die it is finished was his cry now in heaven exalted high hallelujah what a savior!