

Command to love and the Son of David

Matthew 22:34-45

Introduction:

We are living a time where people do not agree on almost anything. We are so divided ideologically, politically and even theologically. In general, we are thinking in terms of US vs. THEM. And of course, WE are right and THEY are wrong!

And the political climate seems to be getting worse and worse and more and more polarized. In a democracy, like ours, we value free expression without fear of the government retaliation. We pride ourselves in expressing our political opinions. I personally like to do that.

And even though we have the legal freedom to do that, we must be aware that when we exercise that freedom, there may be push back, hopefully not from the government, but the push back may come from those who disagree with what we say. People will, by and large, react and respond to whatever one says. We certainly have no control of what others will do and say in reaction to what we say. Been aware of that, we, Christians, must be careful when we express our own opinions in the public square.

We can and should be criticize ideas, ideologies, and especially policies without attacking and/or diminishing a person. This does require some self-awareness and being self-critical of our thoughts.

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It doesn't mean that we should be silent in the face of injustice, evil and discrimination, but it means that we always should have in mind that we can debate ideas and but not attack ideologue, debate the policy and not the politician. In other words, fight ideas with ideas. Policies with alternative policies and all within the framework of the law and civility.

Jesus was never silent in matters of injustice, especially when these injustices were directed against the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. When attacked, he responded with the truth and with a deep desire to have the others to repent from the wrongs that they were doing.

Jesus never threatened the physical integrity of anybody because he loved them, even his worst enemies. Yes, Jesus loved them. Even when Jesus knew that the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the experts in the law wanted to trap him in his own words to have a reason to bring up false accusations against him, Jesus never responded in kind to them, Jesus did answer their questions truthfully. Jesus never plotted against anybody.

The Law was important in the Jewish nation in the first century. This Law was supposed to form and inform the Jewish people. But they were an occupied nation and had to live under a foreign nation's laws and their desire to live under their own Law, the Law that God had given them, the Torah.

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When Jesus came, he came announcing that the Kingdom of God was near: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” he proclaimed. (Matthew 3:2)

The Jewish nation was in expectation of a Messiah. The prophecies of the coming of a Messiah were written in the Old Testament. And Matthew makes sure that the new church see how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament by repeating over and over, and by stating that so many of the acts of Jesus were to fulfill what was written by the prophets.

Unfortunately, some of the religious leaders of that time refused to see in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy. Eventually, the religious leaders, afraid of losing their influence and or position began to try to destroy Jesus. They tried to trap him unto saying something that would get either the Romans attention, in a bad way, or raise up opposition within Jewish nation.

Last Sunday, Matt spoke to us about a question that the Pharisees asked Jesus about whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. They were not sincere in that question. They just wanted to trap him. Jesus answered in such a way that they left him and went away. Then the Sadducees asked him about the resurrection, and in today’s passage, they ask him about the greatest commandment in the Law.

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Matthew tells us that Jesus had previously said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” (Matthew 5:17)

And throughout his gospel, Matthew, again, makes sure that we understand Jesus in light of the Old Testament prophecy. In Matthew 1:22-23 Matthew, speaking about the birth of Jesus, says that “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken about the Lord through the prophet; “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, God is with us”

And that was important for the early church to understand. When Jesus engaged with the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the experts in the Law, Jesus demonstrated that He had a better understanding of Scriptures, and I say, no wonder, he is our Emanuel, in him, God was there, in their midst.

The greatest commandment

So, after Jesus defeated the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Pharisees get together one again and a lawyer of the law, came to test him. Matthew uses this word in a bad sense, this word means something like “put someone to the test.” Something like Satan, or what the tempter did to Jesus when he came to Jesus and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matthew 4:3) So, there was a lot riding on the answer to this

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question. And the answer was all important to this lawyer, to Matthew and to the church.

How much regard does Jesus have for the law? Does he know it? What does the Law mean to Jesus?

And the lawyer asks the question. And he says, Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? And Jesus answers 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 greatest and first commandment. And the second is LIKE it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40)

Loving God

Jesus goes back to the Torah or the Law of Moses and prioritize the commandment in first and second order, but by using the word LIKE (In the original “of equal power or just as great) he makes the second commandment as important as the first one. Matthew does not tell us what happened to the lawyer after Jesus answers, but that is not important to Matthew.

Matthew is showing to the church that Jesus goes back to the Torah in his answer concerning the greatest commandment. Again, Jesus, knowing the Law and the Prophets, came to fulfill it not to abolish.

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In Jesus the Messiah, God revealed himself to the people. Jesus is the Son of God, the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased (Matthew 3:17). It pleases God that his Son reveals who He is and in Jesus God reveals his love for the world. His disciples testified to this love revealed to them in Jesus. John said, “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16)

So, in response to this love now revealed in Christ we are commanded to love God back. 1 John 4:19 says “we love him because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar” God commands us to love him with all our heart, soul and mind. In other words, with all that we have. And why does God require that? Because that is how he loved us.

God loves us the same way he loved Israel in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 7:7 Moses says to Israel “The Lord did not set his affection on you because you were more numerous than other peoples.” God just loved you because he wanted to love Israel. And God had a purpose in mind too.

That through his people’s knowledge of him and through the way they would show their love for God, they would be shaped in such a way that the love of God towards them would be so evident, and that, in light of this relationship, other peoples would come to the knowledge of God. But Israel was unfaithful. Israel didn’t love

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God the way God loved them. And that is one of the points of Matthew.

But the Messiah, the Christ had come and he was there, in the person of Jesus, and still so many failed to recognize Him. But thanks God that some of them did recognized him and became his disciples. One of them Matthew and now the church that was following on his footsteps had come to know God in Jesus, the Messiah.

Loving the neighbor as yourself

And the second commandment is like the first one, so, the two become one with the same priority. It is impossible to love God and to hate our brothers and sisters. We can't. If we say that we love God, we must show it by the way we love our brother and/or our sister. There is no way around that. And we may have thought that if we love God, we are ok even if we hate others. The Bible is clear, this cannot be so. Again, the way we demonstrate that we love God is by loving others.

We may be thinking about that person that we just can't stand. And sometimes we have those feelings. Now loving is not an emotion even though sometimes, love can and does trigger strong and positive emotions in us. But the emotion part of it is not required.

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The original word for love here means “love, especially as an attitude of appreciation resulting from a conscious evaluation and choice” and this word can be used of divine love but also human love. It is desiring someone well-being and if able to, help that neighbor experience well-being. So, we can choose to love or to hate. When we understand God’s love for us, we are empowered through the Holy Spirit to love others the way He has loved us.

This is the love that we are commanded to have for God and for our neighbor. In the gospel of Mark, we read about this young lawyer who asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor? And Jesus answered with the parable known as the parable of the good Samaritan.

The good Samaritan helped an enemy who was in need. Jews and Samaritans did not like each other. Jesus’s definition of neighbor is even that person who hates us. We love to do things for those we love, and that is a great thing, however, Jesus calls us to do good things for those who hate us and desire evil against us.

Matthew ends abruptly this conversation and doesn’t tell us what the lawyer’s answer was. This narrative has fulfilled its purpose.

As an Israelite, this lawyer and the Pharisees were familiar with what is known as the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the

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Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” Read the whole chapter 6 when you have a minute this week.

In that passage Israel is reminded that God loved them. How did God love them? He showed his love for them by bringing them out of bondage from Egypt with mighty hand. And they are supposed to teach this to their children. I hope that we are doing a good job of teaching our children about the love of God.

And Jesus tells them about the second commandment, which is LIKE the first one, this one is found in Leviticus 19. Read it in its entirety sometime this week if you could. Jesus cites the second part of verse 18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” The entire chapter though, contains commandments in the negatives, of the things that we should not do to the neighbor.

Love is action, not necessarily an emotion or a feeling. Although love can generate emotions and feelings within us.

And on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The son of David question

The Pharisees gathered together again, and this time Jesus asked them a question:

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What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son, is he? The Pharisees promptly answered him, “The son of David they said to him.”

How so?

Then Jesus followed it up with another question: How is it then that David by 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 David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

Jesus was talking about Psalm 110:1. And the Pharisees knew it. The Jewish people were expecting a human being, not a divine Messiah. In the original text, the second Lord is Adonai. Psalms uses that word to refer to God in other Psalms. So, how can this Lord be his son, if David calls him Lord? and remember that according to the gospel of John Chapter 8 verse 58 Jesus told the Pharisees “very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am” The Pharisees couldn’t believe their ears, but the only response they had was to try to stone him.

No answer

As in in that occasion, the Pharisees didn’t have an answer. Matthew says, “No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions”

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By not answering, the Pharisees admitted that they didn't know. This is important to the church of Matthew. The Pharisees didn't not know or didn't understand all Scripture. On the other hand, if they had admitted, they had to have recognized that this prophetic passage was a reference, not to Solomon, or a physical son of David, but to someone else. The Messiah would be God himself. The church needed to hear that and have the confidence that in Jesus they know God. The same is true for us. In Jesus, we know God. He is our Lord, He is our Emanuel.

Jesus and the Torah and the Prophets

Jesus, by his use of the Torah to answer the questions that the Pharisees had, demonstrated that He is the teacher the church needs to listen to and not the Pharisees. The Pharisees would be false teachers and Jesus refers to them in that way extensively in Matthew. The Torah was important to this early church for it was in the Torah and the Old Testament that the coming of Jesus was prophesized. In Jesus, Matthew and the early church saw the fulfilling of the Old Testament prophecy.

Jesus and the Church

The teachings of Jesus, first proclaimed orally and later in the written gospels and then the rest of the New Testament became the Scripture that shaped a new people for God. A people made into

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one from two: Jews and gentiles. Paul writes about this in Ephesians 2:15-16 “¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

No longer shaped by ethnicity, land and nationality, but shaped by Jesus: his birth, his life, his teachings, his suffering, death and resurrection. In Jesus, the divine Messiah, and the son of David in the flesh, we are one people for God.

Final thoughts

- I believe that it will be on the other side of resurrection that we will experience what true love is like. Matt spoke to us about resurrection last Sunday and the words of Jesus make one wonder whether we will be able to recognize our earthly relatives and friends in heaven. I think we will, but we will be surrounded by so much love, from God and from others, and we will also be able to love in a perfect way, without the pull of sin, that our love for our relatives and friends will be as great as our love for others. That is not to say that we should make excuses here and now in our practice of love for the neighbor.
- Jesus is the Lord and it is in him that we have found the truth. Let's learn from him more and more. Let us follow him and in

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our daily walk, show our love for him as we love our neighbor, especially the poor, the sick and the oppressed.

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