

Everything Depends on This

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

October 8, 2023

Matthew 22:34–46

When you are in school you are tested. Taking tests is one of the ways of gauging your understanding of the material. You have to study and prepare and hope you do well on the test. You are graded on your performance on the test. But there is another kind of test that comes in the form of trapping someone, trying to trip them up. This is what the Pharisees were doing in the Gospel reading today. Right before this the Sadducees had been trying to get Jesus to say something that contradicted the Bible and they would be able to say, “See, you aren’t really the Messiah after all, are You?” But Jesus silenced them by showing that they actually were the ones who weren’t being faithful to the Scriptures.

Our Gospel reading shows what happened next. Now the Pharisees tried to trip Him up. Where the Sadducees had failed maybe they could succeed. Did Jesus pass the test? Was He once again successful in staving off the entrapments of these religious leaders? They asked Him a question: “Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?” Jesus gives this answer: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. But there is also a second which is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus passed the test. There are hundreds of commandments in the Bible. Which one would He choose? If He chose the wrong one He would prove that He was not the Messiah. He answered with the two that sum up all of them. Love God and love others.

Today’s Old Testament reading shows one of the places where the command to love God with all your heart and soul is found. Moses is speaking to the Israelites as they are in the wilderness and will soon enter into the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to them. Will they remain faithful to Him? Will they continue to follow His ways and His commands? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” This is the primary command to them as they enter into the land God has prepared for them.

Jesus answered the Pharisees’ question. But He also has an assessment of it: all the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments. The Law and the Prophets was one of the ways of referring to the written Word of God, what we now call the Old Testament since the New Testament had not been written at that point. Jesus is saying that the entire Bible depends on these two commandments. Without these two commandments the entire Word of God falls apart. Without the keeping of these two commandments the entire Word of God has no lasting value. It all comes down to this.

So there you go. We need to keep these commandments. We need to love God and we need to love others. Without that we may as well not have the Bible. But you can begin to see the problem. The Old Testament gives these commands and yet that very Old Testament is filled with examples of God’s people not keeping them. We see this in the New Testament as well. We in our own lives are no different. These two commandments tell us what we should do. But they end up functioning as a way of showing us how we so often fail to do them. Jesus says that the

entire Word of God depends on these two commandments. But how can that be when we do not keep them?

In saying this Jesus is teaching that the entire Word of God depends on Him. He loves God with all His heart, soul, and mind. He alone loves others as Himself. We have not and we still fall short every day. But we shouldn't just despair that we are unable to keep God's commandments. What would be the point of God commanding us to do something that we are unable to do? We in fact are able to do this, it's just that we cannot do it by our own ability or will. We are only able to love God and others because we are in Christ. Everything, after all, depends on Him.

Look how He then shows us this. They have given Him a test, He is going to give them a riddle. He asks them what they think of the Messiah. Whose son is He? They answer correctly, "He is the Son of David." But Jesus wants to have a little fun with them so He asks them how the Messiah can be David's son when David inspired by the Holy Spirit calls Him Lord? He quotes the passage where David says this, Psalm 110: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies your footstool.'" Then Jesus says, "If David calls Him Lord, how can He be his son?"

We often think of Jesus as being so serious. After all, He is engaged in ministry. He is teaching, He is preaching, He is healing people. He knows who He is and why He has come. He knows what eventually is ahead of Him, that He will be going to the cross. He is on the mission of salvation. It's deadly serious business. But He also had fun. He enjoyed life. Here He is having some fun even as He is still being very serious. "The Lord said to my Lord," that is, "God the Father said to the Messiah." The Messiah is David's Lord. David is prophesying here of the Messiah who is to come even as the Messiah will come from his own lineage, that is, He will be the Son of David.

Everything depends on the two commandments, Love God and Love others. Everything depends on the Son of David, the Messiah. With these two commandments and through a riddle, Jesus is making it clear that it is all about Him. Everything depends on Him. He is the Messiah who was to come, He is the one who has kept the entire law of God. And He is the one who at the time knew that He would be making His way to the cross.

We now know that He has done this. Having risen from the grave and ascended into heaven He sits at the Father's right hand and His enemies of sin, death, and the devil are reduced to being a footstool for His feet. He has done this for you. He has done this to make it possible for you to do what God commands of you, to love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind—with all your being: with all that you have and with all who you are. Christ makes it possible to love your neighbor as yourself, to think of them and do for them what you do for yourself and how you think of yourself.

When He commands you He is not saying it all depends on you. He commands you knowing it all depends on Him. This why He has given you Baptism, because it all depends on Him, not you. Your life is not your own, it is in Christ. It is why He gives you His own body and blood in

His Sacrament, because it depends on Him, not you. His command to you to love God and love others is what He has already accomplished and what He accomplishes in you. Amen.

SDG

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