

October 19, 2008
Pentecost 23

"Are You Saved by Your Love or God's Love?"

MATTHEW 22:34-46

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.

When you visit someone at Marian Hospital here in Santa Maria, you will notice a poster on the wall as you step out of the elevator. It shows a little girl in a nurse's uniform, holding her finger over her mouth and encouraging you to be quiet when you walk down the halls and enter the rooms. There are so many opportunities we have in life to show other people respect, kindness and love. You wouldn't think of talking loudly on your cell phone while others are trying to enjoy their meal in a restaurant. You wouldn't think of going to the front of the line in the post office because you are running late. And then there are all the opportunities to show kindness and love to people in your family in the way you talk to each other, and listen to each other, and show patience and respect.

Do you know that some people think that extra efforts at kindness and love will help them earn God's favor and God's love? Perhaps you have even heard people say that their religion is to follow the golden rule. The golden rule is based on Jesus' words in Matthew 7 where he said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." Did you hear what Jesus said? "In everything," do to others what you would have them do to you, not some things but everything. If I hope to earn God's favor and love by my performance then I have to measure up to his standards of perfection, and I have no hope.

In the words just read to you we see some very religious people who hated Jesus because he was always pointing out their failings and shortcomings. He wanted them to put their trust in him for eternal life not in their love that always falls short. Let's look more closely at what Jesus says as we ask the all important question, "Are You Saved by Your Love or God's Love?"

Our love always falls short

We are told that a person came to Jesus with an interesting question about keeping God's laws. "Teacher what is the greatest commandment in the law?" This was a trick

question intended to lead Jesus to say that some parts of God's Word and God's law were more important than other parts? Today we hear people say that Paul's words in the New Testament are not as important as the words of Jesus, or words about creation in Genesis are not as important as other words in the Bible.

How ironic that this religious expert in the law should ask this question of Jesus! These people were masters at elevating certain rules and regulations, even man made rules and regulations, above the basic laws of God in the Ten Commandments. Listen to what Jesus told these people in Matthew chapter 23, "You hypocrites, you give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-justice mercy and faithfulness." Jesus accused them of stealing homes from poor widows and then bragged about how they gave one tenth of their spices to the Lord. He said that they could strain at gnats and then swallow camels.

Don't we fall into the same trap of elevating certain laws of the Lord above others? You see the man over there who is so highly respected on his job. He even gets awards for how well he treats other people. But when he goes home he takes out his frustrations on his wife and children. You see those people who faithfully give their offerings to the Lord and sing his praises, but when they go out to eat for Sunday brunch they fail to show basic Christian love and kindness to those who serve them their food. Lurking inside all of us is this Pharisee that wants to pick and choose certain laws and ignore others.

Let me give you an example to illustrate the point. You have decided to hire someone to clean your house because your job has become so demanding you cannot get it done by yourself. The person comes to clean and spends a whole day cleaning one of the bathroom sinks with a small

Q- tip. What's the problem with that person's way of cleaning the house? They are so focused on one task that they totally ignore everything else that needs to be done. The person who cleaned your house expects to get paid even though they only cleaned one of the bathroom sinks with a Q tip. So it is with keeping God's law. I can give fifty dollars to feed the homeless and think that I am a really good person for that act of kindness, but then fail to treat my family members with basic love and respect. I might even brag about keeping the golden rule and think that somehow God is going to reward me for what I have done.

Jesus does not fall into the trap of elevating one commandment above all the others. Instead he replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind." He does not say part of your heart, part of your soul and part of your mind. He says "all." How many times have I not failed to put the Lord first in my thoughts and heart and soul! Every time we sin, even the smallest sin, we fail to put the Lord first. What about my neighbor? You may feel quite good about yourself when you pick up groceries for your elderly neighbor who cannot drive. Does my neighbor include the person who sits at the stop sign with a cell phone even after it turns green? Can't I yell at him and think bad thoughts about him. The Lord says we are to love people as much as we love ourselves. My friends, that means all of us fall short of God's glory.

I have brought an arrow with me this morning to help us see how much God expects of us. He doesn't just say, "Aim for the target and try your best." He demands a bull's eye, a perfect score every time. Remember the Robin Hood movie where sheriff's top archer puts an arrow in the center of the bull's eye. The match seemed over, but then Robin Hood hit the center and split the other arrow. Day in and day out, minute by minute, hour by hour, God expects us to love him perfectly and love our neighbor perfectly. If that is God's standard for love and God's requirement for eternal life, then we must confess with David, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." My love can never measure up to what God expects of us, that is why we all need the perfect love of Jesus.

Jesus love is always perfect

Because Jesus is Lord and God, he is able to take his perfect life and perfect death and make it count for me and for me, to make up for where we failed.

Notice how Jesus drew attention to himself. He turns to these religious fanatics and asks them a very important life altering question that would greatly impact their lives. "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" That was not a hard question for these religious people who knew the Old Testament. Everything they read told them that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. They even knew the prophecy that he would be born in Bethlehem, David's royal city.

Because they knew the Old Testament so well, Jesus quoted a verse from the psalms that spoke about the Messiah as their Lord and God. "How is it then, that David, speaking by the Spirit calls him, 'Lord'?" To prove his point Jesus quotes the very verse where David called the Messiah Lord: "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at mighty right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" What an amazing verse of the Bible this is. David believed that the Lord God, the heavenly Father spoke to his Son, the Messiah and called him Lord. David was not ashamed to call his future descendant his Lord. The Father proclaimed this descendant as Lord.

When you become a Christian you believe that Jesus, born in Bethlehem as the descendant of David through Mary and Joseph, is also your Lord and God. The angels announced to the world that a Savior was born who is Christ the Lord. John 1 says of Jesus that he is the Word made flesh and the Word who is God. When Thomas saw the nail marks in the hands of Jesus, he confessed openly and freely to Jesus, "My Lord and my God." Romans 10 tells us that with the heart we believe and with our mouths we confess that Jesus is Lord.

Because Jesus is our Lord and God, he is able by his power to take the perfect love that was present in his life and hand it over and credit into your account and mine, as a substitution for all the times we have failed to love the Lord with our full heart, soul and mind. He is able to transfer into your account the perfect love he had for all people. He is even able to transfer into your account and mine the perfect payment for sin at the cross. The ultimate love is seen in Jesus perfect sacrifice as we are told in Romans 5, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us." I am holding in my hands a cable that can be used to transfer pictures from a camera onto a computer. Because Jesus is God he is fully able to take the perfect love he showed and

transfer it to you as a free gift. His perfect love becomes your perfect love. Through Jesus I can say that I have loved the Lord with all my heart, all my soul and all my mind. I can also say, "I have loved my neighbor as much as I love myself." Are you saved by your love or God's love? Thank God you know the answer to this all important question. Amen.