

Sermon for Trinity 18 – Matthew 22:34-46

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Gospel for the 18th Sunday after Trinity could hardly be more Lutheran. What do I mean by that? Those 2 great teachings of the Bible, and the lens through which we view the Scriptures are presented before us in no uncertain terms today. Those 2 teachings we know well: first, the Law and second, the Gospel. The Law shows us our sin and that we need a Savior – that we can't do it on our own. The Gospel shows us our Savior, that in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and that He has done it for us. The task before us today should be an easy one ... or is it?

The Law and the Gospel today are presented in 2 questions: The first is posed by the Pharisees: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" To give a little background, this question by the Pharisees is indeed loaded. I mean, come on, the Pharisees are the supposed keepers of the law to the nth degree. But this Jesus has really stirred things up. His disciples don't follow the Pharisee's ceremonial law, they grind wheat on the Sabbath, among other "lawbreaking." Even Jesus Himself breaks the Sabbath by working and healing a man with dropsy.

So zealous for the Law the Pharisees were that they enshrined the law in their own made-up laws. The 10 commandments had to be protected by another fence. And if you broke those fabricated laws, you might as well as broken the commandment itself. Take the 3rd commandment for example – "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it Holy." Number of steps and lists and lists of chores that were and weren't allowable were just a couple made up laws added to the Sabbath day. That law is doable. But Luther surely put it back on track in explaining the 3rd commandment and getting to the heart of the matter – "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." Forget the chores and the steps – who could keep that law!?

We have the most perfect and pure rules for humans ever written: the 10 Commandments. God had delivered to us the ultimate order, the true definition of love, the epic presentation of what human life really could look like in a perfect world. Why would God give us this perfect picture if we can't live up to it? The 10 commandments are so pure and perfect that if we should try to live up to them, even for one day, we find ourselves not a little ashamed.

So what do we do with the 10 Commandments? We abridge them. Truth be told, those Pharisees also live in us. "Do the best you can and that will be enough ... What matters is that you try ..." Add a few exceptions for our hardness of heart: "It's just a white lie ... It's not adultery if I love her ... It's not lust since God hasn't provided me with what I need ... Surely God wants me to be happy ... Surely, God wouldn't expect

me to suffer *that*." So we chip away at Mt. Sinai, hoping to make it a sand pile to be jumped over. However, the law remains a mountain that justly condemns.

But another question then comes. This time it is asked by Jesus. "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" Concerned about the Law, are we? What about the Christ? What about the Gospel? What about the Savior fulfilling the Law in my place? Who is the Christ?

How do the Pharisees respond? "The Christ is the Son of David." Now David was foremost among men. God made a great covenant with him as He did with Abraham. But even David, this great king, must humble himself. He must fall on his knees before his Descendent. He must confess that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is a man. This is true. As a man, He can suffer, die, and take our place. But the Christ is also more than that, as He clearly says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." He is the Son of David and the Lord of David. As the Lord of David, He is far above and beyond all the greatest figures in history. As the Son of God He is the only ransom that could pay our debt of sin. He is the Son of God who has come to die for us. God's Son has come from heaven, become man, and with His death and blood paid for our sins. He has trampled our enemies: sin, death, and the devil under His feet. He kept the 10 Commandments – He loved God with all His heart, soul, and mind and loved His neighbor as Himself, loving us to His death.

Let the Law be the Law. Acknowledge what God demands. Don't think that you can lower the requirement of the commandments. Don't think that the Law's judgment is an empty threat. Acknowledge that there is no escape. Give up. Say: "I cannot become what God's Law requires, I can never fulfill its demands."

But then hear the Gospel that says to you: "Fear Not! God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus came to save what was lost. That's us. He carried your sins. He suffered the chastisement of your guilt. He died in your place. In Him you have perfect salvation. In Holy baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion, He gives salvation to you.

So you also, when the question is asked you: What do you think about the Christ – Whose Son is He? You'll say not only "He is the Son of David and Son of God," but also, "He is my Savior, my Hope, my Treasure, my Eternal Life, and my All." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠