

Sermon for Trinity 18 – Matthew 22:34-46

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

He finally did it. It took that unconventional Galilean preacher to finally put those Sadducees in their place. It was the Sadducees, you may recall, who were the Jewish elitists that denied the existence of angels and the possibility of the resurrection from the dead. “You are wrong,” Christ boomed, “because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” What joy, what bliss, were those words to the Pharisees standing by! It was the Pharisees, you may recall, who were the other Jewish first century elites that were rivals with the Sadducees. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees affirmed the resurrection. For the Pharisees this was it! The Sadducees were silenced! It was time to put the proverbial nail in the coffin and take out the only obstacle in the way of Pharisaic dominance: Jesus.

How will they do it? Let’s put Christ to the test. Let’s get our brightest and best to ask a question in which He’ll have to praise us. How about the Law? How else does one earn favor with God and put himself above everyone else? “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Boil it down for us: what is going to earn me the most favor with God and the most merits for heaven?

Oh those silly Pharisees! What wrong-headed thinking! They knew the law and thought they would be saved by keeping it. How senseless! And of course, you could never be compared to the Pharisees, after all, they knew the law. Do you?

What is the 1st commandment? What is the 5th commandment? What is the 6th commandment? What is the 7th commandment? What’s that? You don’t know the Law? “Come on, pastor, I’ve not worshipped false gods, killed anybody, committed adultery or stolen anything.” What about seeking your highest good from other sources? What about passing up the opportunity to do good for your neighbor? What about when you looked at that picture with indecency and lust? What about when you were discontent with what God had given you? Are all these not equally as condemnable by God as other sins? The problem with not knowing God’s Law is that we’re great at inserting our own law, our own code, into our lives. We water down our homemade law for ourselves, but make others toe the line. We look out for ourselves more than God and our neighbor.

And that’s why our Lord responded the way He did to the treacherous Pharisaic inquisition. Christ answers the Pharisees; Christ answers us: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ...” and “... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It’s as if the Lord said, He who possesses faith in God and love toward his neighbor has all things and therefore fulfills the law. The Law really boils down to these two questions: How much do I trust in God and how much do I love my neighbor: with everything or not? In other words, which is more important when I make my daily decisions: God and my neighbor or myself?

But the Lord doesn't just leave us here with a bad conscience: He has a question of His own up His Holy sleeve for the Pharisees and for us. It's not aimed at our self-glorification through God's Law, but God's glorifying us through Christ. Listen again to what our Lord asks: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" How do the Pharisees respond? It was perfect: "The Son of David."

Who was David? Only one of the greatest kings in Israel's history! He defeated Goliath along with tens of thousands of other Philistines. He acquired great wealth. He put Israel on the map in 1,000 BC. But what made David great? God's great mercy. David sinned grievously against God. Adultery, murder, deceit, and that was in just a short time! But David trusted the Lord. He repented and received God's merciful forgiveness through the mouth of the prophet Nathan. David's greatness was in God's forgiveness. And so it is with your greatness.

"Jesus said to them, 'How is it then that David, in 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 is he his son?'" The Christ was greater than David. Jesus lived a perfect life. In His body He committed no adultery, His hands never murdered, and He kept His tongue from speaking deceit. Perfectly. And He did it for David.

But He also did it for you: He sought His highest good only from God. He never failed to help His neighbor. His eyes were free from lust. His heart was free from discontent. He kept the entire law perfectly: He loved God with all His heart, soul, and mind; He loved His neighbor as Himself; He submitted His will to the will of His Father. He fulfilled the Law in every respect. And He did it in your place. He died in your place and took all your sins upon Himself. Jesus Christ became man for this purpose; He stepped forth from His kingly hall for this reason: to save you from sin, death, and the devil. In His word of Absolution, Jesus declares His forgiveness to you. In Baptism, He washed you clean. In the Sacrament of the Altar, He feeds you forgiveness and eternal life again!

And this is an eternal life that doesn't start at death, but has started in your life already! Through the gift of forgiveness won in Christ's death, He's given you the Holy Spirit to fulfill the law in you. He's made a new man in you, who does with true joy and love everything the law requires! Everything God commands is sweet, lovely, and agreeable, not in your own strength, but by the strength of Jesus who lives in you. Go forth from here today and trust God. Go forth from here today and love your neighbor by helping him in his needs. And all praise to the Son of David, who lives in you.

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