

# Matthew 22:34-40

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Date: 16 February 2020

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[ 0 : 00 ] So Matthew 22, it's conflict isn't it? A conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day.! We're not sure in verse 33 whether it's the same day as the previous section or whether it happened in one or two days.

But it's pretty soon after. The Pharisees, those religious leaders, they come to Jesus with questions and their questions are designed to trap him. And that's the aim in these questions. And they want to find a charge against him, to arrest him and have him crucified.

And so within this week of Passover, eventually we're going to see that they managed to do it. But in this section, Matthew 22, we've seen three areas where they've come and they've tried to set their traps.

They've come with their questions. Sometimes they've come or they've sent their Sadducees to come or they've sent their disciples to come. But the three questions, the first was political. I do remember it. It concerned, do we pay our taxes for Caesar or not?

The second question was theological to do with God. What about the resurrection, Jesus, that you've been speaking about? What about people getting married in the resurrection? Isn't that a silly idea?

[ 1 : 23 ] And the third question is a biblical question. And it deals with the whole question of the law. The law of God. Do you remember the Pharisees? They were experts. They were students of God's law.

And the man that they now called upon to be the questioner of Jesus was undoubtedly a skilled Old Testament lawyer.

He was a lawyer. He was somebody who knew the law of God thoroughly. He was a man of some intellectual substance. And the question that he asked Jesus at this point was not really one of those great intellectual questions.

It was an old chestnut. And for the question he asked Jesus was one that was trundled out again and again in the Sunday schools of the day, the rabbinic schools. They looked upon the laws of God as being able to be differentiated.

They can be. The law of God, some laws are weighty. Others of them are lighter. And so in chapter 23 and verses 23, he says to the Pharisees, You have neglected some weightier matters of the law.

[ 2 : 36 ] I think it's quite important to see that there are certain laws of God which are more weighty than others. That's how they thought. Some of the laws weighed more heavily.

Some of them were lighter. Some of them were more important. Some of them were less important. And so they come to Jesus and they say to Jesus, What is the most important?

And they hoped, of course, that he would give an unorthodox answer. And that they would be able to trap him. They'd be able to take him to the Sanhedrin. And they would say to him, Here is somebody who's teaching heresy.

He's not orthodox. Now they were in the midst of this. When Jesus replied without hesitation. And his reply is one that no one could take exception to it.

In fact, Mark tells us in his account, He responded and said, Master, you have answered well. Bravo. Good answer. He congratulates Jesus.

[ 3 : 39 ] And the answer is in verses 37 to 40. Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. And on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Now the words come from what is undoubtedly one of the most familiar parts of the Old Testament to Jews.

Deuteronomy 6, when they got up in the morning, they would have talked about it. They were among the most copied words in the whole of the Old Testament.

They were among the most frequently spoken words. Because every single Jew had to repeat these words twice every day. Not only so, but they would write them on tiny little pieces of paper. Tiny little post-it notes. They would put them into a little container. And they would bind the container around their left wrist. And then they would get another little container. And they would have written it down.

[ 4 : 46 ] And they would put the piece of paper in that little container. And then they would bind the container to their foreheads. They were called phylacteries. And you remember Jesus mocked them about this. He said you go around with these large phylacteries, large containers over your head, or your arm, and yet you ignore the very words.

I've never spoken in them. I've written on this little post-it note, this little parchment, were these words of great significance. The Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God.

And 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 neighbour as yourself.

And so Jesus is setting out these words as the answer to the question. What is the greatest commandment? And then he says these words. These words which have prior claim on every man and woman and boy and girl.

Love the Lord your God. It's the first and the greatest commandment. So clearly this morning, if these are, the great summary, if this is, the great and most important words that God speaks for his people, we've got to ask, what does it mean?

[ 6 : 07 ] And I want to say, you mustn't imagine that you will jump immediately to the right meaning. When God speaks about loving him, don't think that you jump to the right conclusion.

Because as we think about how the word love is used, it is used, isn't it, in the most extraordinarily wide way in our time. So we say to somebody about a TV programme, I love it.

We see that somebody after church has got new shoes. And we say to them, I love your shoes. You go to someone's house for dinner and they're having roast beef and you say, I love roast beef.

We use the word in the most extraordinary way, don't we? And so the word love can be on the lips of somebody who is about to commit grave sin in the eyes of God.

And they will say, I love you. And yet what they're about to do is sinful. And when they say, I love you, what they mean is, I love me and I want you.

[ 7 : 17 ] And it's possible to distort the language that God gives you in a frightening way. And love in our culture is used, isn't it, for the most sublime and the most beautiful of things in our society, but also some of the most appalling things.

And some of the most degrading things. And some of the most damaging things and hurtful things. And so five things I want us to see about this important passage. I want you to know, first of all, that it's a commanded love.

Isn't that interesting? A commanded love. Did you notice that? Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

So it's a commanded love. It's in the imperative. Jesus is urging a duty upon you. And of course, our reaction to that is, is this, isn't it?

How on earth can you command anybody to love? How can you command someone to either love God or our neighbour?

[ 8 : 23 ] And the reason that we think it's really odd, isn't it, is quite simply because we immediately associate the idea of love with a romantic feeling or an emotional experience.

Some people occasionally come to see me when their marriage is in difficulty and they will say, I just don't feel like I love her anymore.

What's our answer to that? Our answer to that is what is that going to do with it? Because love is not an emotional experience or a romantic feeling.

What does the Bible teach us about love? The Bible teaches the biblical emphasis on love is not the way we feel but on the way that we live. On how we relate to God and to other people and who is first in our lives and how we treat people in the light of that.

It's rather a way of living and it's a question of whom you are living for. Who is indisputably first in your life?

[ 9 : 31 ] And when the Bible says you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul it is really simply saying God must be first. He must be first in your life and in all your actions and in all your thinking and in all your motivation and in all your planning everything.

God first. That is what love for the Lord your God really means. With all your heart and soul and mind. And when the Bible speaks of loving God that is why it can be commanded.

I cannot be commanded to have a certain emotional feeling for you. Can I? Although I will have it undoubtedly but I can't be commanded to produce it.

But what I can be commanded to do is I can be commanded to put you before me. To think about you before I think about myself. To live for you before I live for me.

I can be commanded therefore to be what Paul calls in 2 Timothy chapter 3 a lover of God rather than a lover of self. And it's this duty that Jesus is quoting from in the Old Testament Scripture.

[ 10 : 50 ] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. So it's a commanded love.

This is the first and the greatest commandment. Now notice in the second place it's a committed love. It's a committed love. Loving the Lord your God the whole of the Bible is set within the context of something like a marriage proposal from God.

That God makes to men and women and boys and girls. What God does according to the Bible is He comes to you and He says to you this morning I want you to be mine.

I want to be your God. And I want you to be my people. And this is the God of covenant love. He comes to us and He makes His proposal to us and what He wants to say to us is He wants to say to us I want to commit myself absolutely for eternity to you.

For richer, for poorer, poorer in sickness and in health. and I want you to commit yourself for eternity to me.

[ 12 : 16 ] It's the love of commitment. That's Christianity. It's the thing on which marriage relationships are modelled on. And that is why Paul is able to say it's the love your wives husbands as Christ loved the church.

So how did Christ love His church? Think about that. did He feel emotional about the church? I'm sure He did.

But what's the primary evidence of Jesus loving the church? The primary evidence of Jesus loving the church is that He denied Himself and He offered Himself up on the cross to purchase a people for God.

He loved the church. What does it mean by that? That He had warm feelings towards the church? Well, yes. But that's a small part of it, isn't it?

He loved the church by sacrificing Himself for them. It's a love of commitment. And there never has been a commitment like the commitment that Jesus showed when He loved the church.

[ 13 : 29 ] There is, isn't there, in our culture, a love that stops short of commitment. And so commitment is not very popular. Lots of people want to step back from commitment.

I want a relationship but no commitment. A lot of people are saying that then. They're saying, aren't they, that I want the benefits of a relationship without commitment.

The commitment is a price too high to pay. I'm not ready for commitment. Some people say, isn't it, sometimes I'm in a relationship but I don't want anything serious.

I just want us to be good friends. Have you heard that? Maybe you've experienced that. There are people in churches this morning and they come to Jesus Christ like that. It's just possible that that's you this morning.

And you've been living like that for many, many years. And what you're saying to the Lord Jesus is, well listen, I'm happy to come to church but I don't want anything serious.

[ 14 : 43 ] I just want us to be good friends. Jesus says to you this morning, look away to the cross and you see how I gave myself for sinners.

And you will see that I just don't want to be your good friend, I want to be your saviour. I want to be the Lord and master of your life. I want to be everything to you. All that I have am I give to you.

All that I have I share with you. This love is a commanded love but it's a committed love. And God is wanting you to say to him this morning, you are my everything.

You rule in every part of my life. It's a commanded love, it's a committed love. Notice in verse 37 it's a comprehensive love. It's a comprehensive love.

And so what could Jesus have said? He could have said couldn't he, when he comes to the Old Testament, he could have said love the Lord your God. And he didn't just say that.

[ 15 : 52 ] Nor does he say love the Lord your God with all your heart. He could have said that. We say that, don't you? I love you with all my heart. What the Bible says and what Jesus quotes and singles out as the most important commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your minds.

Just notice how the phrase, the whole phrase is repeated each time. Nothing could be more comprehensive. So one of the illustrations that I think we can use is that of an insurance policy if you've insured a car.

And there's loads of different insurance policies out there. But in my mind, my simple mind, there seems to me there are two options for insurance. There's one which is third party fire and theft, isn't there?

And that is limited. You know that if an accident happens, well, you're not insured because all you're insured are for is third party fire and theft. It's limited.

But the other form of insurance is what? It is fully comprehensive, isn't it? And the fully comprehensive covers everything, or at least it should.

[ 17 : 05 ] That's the difference, isn't it? One is limited. One covers everything. At this level, what Jesus is speaking is fully comprehensive.

He's saying there is absolutely no area of your life that may be excluded from it. And so your personal and private life, your thought world, your actions, your motives, your internet browsing, your relationships, your business, your professional life, those things that are said in secret, those things that are said in public, your sex life, every area of your life.

You will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And again, Bible words have final meaning.

So we think, how does the Bible use these words? What is the heart? In the Bible, it is not primarily the seat of emotions.

We say, you've broken my heart. What is that? It's kind of feelings of kind of broken emotions. It's much more than that in the Bible. So we use the phrase, get into the heart of the matter.

[ 18 : 31 ] I think that's helpful. It's this core of everything. It's the core of someone's life and being and personality. It refers to the will and to the motivation.

So we do use it in this way. We say his heart is not in it. And so they're not wholehearted. It's the core.

It's the citadel of someone's being. It includes their will. Soul. It's probably nearest in the Bible's terms to the emotions we feel.

It's concerned with those areas with how we perceive things and how we understand things with feelings. So do you remember how Jesus used the word? He says in the garden of Gethsemane, he says my soul is deeply troubled to the point of death.

And it's in that sense that this word is used. The mind is used to convey intellectual life and the strength of conviction which put thoughts into action.

[ 19 : 39 ] And so when you say, I've made up my mind, that's what I'm going to do, that's biblical. It's thoughts into action. So do you see what Jesus is saying?

There is no area of life that is untouched by this love. It covers everything.

This love is not only a commanded love, a committed love, a comprehensive love, but there's two other things that we need to note about it. They've both got C's in them but they're not as good.

Alright, so the first is this, this love has a criteria. And the second is if any question, the question doesn't begin with C. But it sounds the same.

What's the criteria of this love, fourthly? There's a criteria of this love which can tell you whether your love for God is genuine or not.

[ 20 : 40 ] How do you know this love for God which you have sung about this morning and which you have professed, how can you tell that it's real? The criteria is in verse 39.

It's the second commandment that goes along with it. It is to love your neighbour as yourself. In other words, Jesus is saying there is a sign and there is a proof of whether you really love God.

And it's this, will you love your neighbour as yourself? Let me clarify this for you. There's one commandment there, not two.

Jesus does not say the second commandment is love your neighbour and the third commandment is love yourself. It's a comparison, that's what Jesus is doing. It's obvious. And he's saying we all know what it is like to love ourselves.

No one needs to teach us what self-love looks like. No one needs to teach you, whether you're willing to admit it or not, what self-interest is like.

[ 21 : 45 ] Where you put yourself first in your sense of priorities. That is something that is ours by reason of our fallen nature.

But Jesus says the difference between biblical love and that kind of love is that I replace myself with my neighbour. And that I love my neighbour rather than loving myself.

Jesus is saying you need to look at the basic tendency of your own heart to love yourself and to serve yourself and live under your self-interest and your self-absorption. And you want to take that tendency and you want to fit it in to the whole realm of your attitude to your neighbour.

The thing I will do for my neighbour, the way that I will react to him, the place that I will put him or her in is the place that I used to keep for myself. And so if you think that your tendency is not to put yourself first, let me tell you, you've not even begun to understand yourself.

You've not even begun to understand yourself. The Bible is not telling you, don't misunderstand this, the Bible is not telling you to despise yourself. What it's speaking about is the place that we give to ourselves.

[ 23 : 12 ] And that, says Jesus, has to be changed around. And as we love ourselves, so we will love our neighbour. And that would be the criteria of our loving God.

Let me read you these words from 1 John 4 verse 19. Where it says this, we love because he first loved us. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother and sister. It's really, really simple logic. You can understand it. I've not seen God, have I? Neither have you. But I have seen my brother. How can I say I love God whom I've not seen, but I don't love my brother whom I have seen?

So can you see it? It's really simple isn't it? How brotherly love and sisterly love is the criteria of love for God. And so that's the criteria given to us by Jesus in the second commandment.

[ 24 : 34 ] Love your neighbour as you love yourself. And so finally let's finish with a question. And the question is this. How on earth can I do it?

How on earth can I do it? And how can anyone do this? How can I love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength?

And how can I love my neighbour as myself? How can anyone live like this? Because it's not native to me, is it? Or to you. It's not natural for me to love God with every fibre of my being.

And to put him unreservedly first in every area of my life. Because I want to be first in my life. You know that battle don't you? I've had this discussion many times.

You discuss with somebody the demands of the Lord Jesus Christ and what does it come down to? For some of you this morning, what is stopping you from committing to the Lord Jesus Christ?

[ 25 : 33 ] It's really simple isn't it? You want to be in charge of your own life. And that is a natural response. And so how can we love, how can we live this way?

How can we love this way? Well there's two answers to that question. And this Pharisee, this lawyer who asked Jesus the question didn't see any of them, either of them. The first is this, that the Pharisee who didn't ask, even ask, how can this happen?

He needed to look at his own soul. And he needed to see that his natural tendency was to love and serve and worship and honour himself rather than God.

There are a hundred different areas, aren't there, where I want to exclude him. And this comprehensive love for God is something that even when I try to do it, I cannot do it.

But you see, had he just listened to Jesus, this is precisely why Jesus was standing in front of him, isn't it? this is why the Lord Jesus had come into the world, in order to take hard hearts like that, hard, cynical, pharisaical, religious hearts and break into them, and bring into those hearts an altogether new dimension of life which was recreated by Jesus Christ.

[ 26 : 57 ] that would enable him to live for God. Paul caught it when he said to the Corinthians, he died, that is the Lord Jesus, for all, that they who live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.

He needed a new heart. He needed a new nature, that man. And he stares, he says to Jesus, do you remember, Mark? Good answer. Bravo, Jesus, well done.

If he had been nearer, he'd have patted him on the back and said, well spoken. And it's possible for you to do that this morning, it's possible in 2020 for you to say to Jesus, very good, excellent teacher, we need more of this kind of thing.

Well spoken, Lord. And inwardly say, I will not be moved. And the revolution that Jesus Christ was waiting to break into that man's life, as far as we know, never happened.

And what he needed to do, and only God knows whether he ever actually did it, was to go to the cross and learn something about that love, which is prior.

[ 28 : 11 ] The love of Jesus Christ for him, the love of God in giving and not withholding his son. The love that caused him to come down into this world, to take upon him the immense and immeasurable burden of our sin.

And to bear it in his body by dying on the tree. Because the testimony of the New Testament and the testimony of this church is that we love him. We love him.

Are you able to say that this morning? We love him. We love God. But why do we love him? Why do we love God this morning, those of us who do?

How did that happen? How did it come about? Well, you know, don't you, we love him because he first loved us.

And it is when you gaze on the dying love of God in Jesus Christ that that love for him and for others is born.

[ 29 : 25 ] Let's pray.