

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, A²D 2010

Matthew 22:34-46

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

1 Perhaps the Pharisees get an undeserved bad reputation. They seem to be good enough guys. When people naively suppose that good people go to heaven, they kind of good people they imagine aren't even as good and pious as the Pharisees. Their desire to keep the Law is laudable. You would do well to emulate them. But their supposition that they could keep the Law is laughable.

2 The Pharisees want to reduce God's Law to something manageable, something easy enough to keep. "What is the greatest commandment?" But Jesus won't get caught in their game. Instead of picking on or two of the commandments, He picks them all. Summarizing the first three commandments—You shall have no other gods; you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God; and remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy—Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment." Then, summarizing the remaining seven commandments—honor your father and mother; you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor; you shall not covet your neighbor's house; and you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor—Jesus adds, "And a second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

3 If you thought good people go to heaven, this kind of preaching from Jesus will disappoint you. It's not the kind of preaching your itching ears were hoping for. It doesn't give practical tips on how to live a better, more successful life. It doesn't teach them how to be better parents, better lovers, or more profitable businessmen. It doesn't dazzle with its rhetoric. It would be completely out of place in a television pulpit. It is not inspiring or uplifting. It pulls no punches but delivers the full Law. You must love God completely and perfectly, with an undivided, undistracted heart and mind. Your whole self must be devoted to Him. And you must love your neighbor equally perfectly, with equal devotion.

4 And yet don't you desire to be like the Pharisees? Respected by your peers as a good guy, a religious girl, a pious Christian? So if you can pare the Law down to manageable platitudes, you can convince your neighbors and—perhaps more importantly—yourself that you are a good enough person. If you use God's name carelessly from time to time, with a few OMGs to season your conversation, what does it matter, as long as you also occasionally call upon His name in prayer? If you let a Sunday morning pass, preferring the gifts of a vacation, a hunting trip, a soccer game, or some self-indulgent sleeping in over the gifts God offers from his pulpit and altar, as long as you make it a point to be in church a couple times a month, could God really care? Can it really be gossip if you speak the truth and if you include the admonition to pray? What harm can a little lustful fantasy do? These excuses won't do. Perfect love toward God and toward your neighbor is what's required. If even a portion of your heart, soul, or mind is withheld from the Lord, you don't love Him. If there is even one thing you would do for yourself but not for your neighbor, or have done for yourself but denied to your neighbor, you love neither neighbor nor Lord. Repent.

5 Then Jesus asks the Pharisees a question. They asked Him a Law question, and He responds by asking them a Gospel question. "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" On this question hang all the Law and Prophets. The Pharisees had their answer: "David's son." As Scripture promised, the Messiah would be a descendant of David. But they also knew the One asking the question to be a descendant of David. His Virgin Mother was a direct descendant of David; so, for that matter, was the man who raised Him as His father, Joseph. But their answer is incomplete. No mere

son of David can be the Christ, promised to deliver His people from their bondage to sin and death. “The son of David.” Here, the Pharisees understanding of the Law shows through in their understanding of the Savior, as well. If their sins are small and manageable, then their savior need only be small and manageable, as well.

6 If Jesus is only David’s son, how does David call Him Lord? And they could not answer Him a word. He is David’s son, to be sure, a direct descendant of the Israelite king, the long-awaited Deliverer of His people. But He is more than that. Jesus is a good teacher as many people like to assert—in fact, the Good Teacher—but He is so much more than that. He is a good example to follow as many want to believe—in fact, the only Good Example of righteousness—but He is so much more than that.

7 All the Law and Prophets hang on this: Jesus came to fulfill the Law for you, in your place. “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14). All the Law and Prophets, with their accusation, the truth they know about you, all their crushing weight, hang upon Him. And with Jesus were nailed to the cross. On the cross, Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God fulfilled these two commandments perfectly. His love for God is what brought about His obedience to His Father. And His perfect love for you, His neighbor, is what led Him to die in your place. “This is how we know what love is; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10). Your love has failed, but His has succeeded.

8 If Jesus were just a man, merely the son of David, He could not save you from the magnitude of your sins, from the power of your sinful flesh, from the threat of death and hell. You have big sins; you need a big Savior. David called Him Lord. And so may you. Jesus Christ, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and born of the Virgin Mary, is your Lord, who has redeemed you...purchased and won you from sin, death, and the power of the devil...with His precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. Because Jesus is God, His death is more than enough. Jesus’ life is of unlimited value, and yet He gave it up for you. Each drop of His divine-human blood is worth more than all the gold and silver in the world, yet He shed it for you.

9 And He gives it to you to drink at His altar. All His enemies have been put under His feet. Below the feet of Jesus, hung on the cross to die, flow blood and water from His pierced side. Under the feet of Jesus, His enemies become His neighbors. The lawless become the righteous. The blood and water that flowed, that marked His death, flow to you and mark your life. They give you life. From the water of the font, you have been given new life, Jesus’ life, joined into both His death and His resurrection. And from the chalice, you drink the blood He shed to forgive your sins, the Blood that today delivers to you that forgiveness. You are not saved by your answer to the question what is the greatest commandment? You broke them all. You are saved by the gift of faith, by the answer to the second question: Who is the Christ? David’s Son, the Son of God, is your Savior. His love for you is perfect.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer