

Title: THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT, MATTHEW 22:34-46
(Chatham, NJ; 10/23/11, AM) [D – Exposition]

Theme: Obedience to two commandments constitutes the heart and soul of discipleship.

Purpose: To explain the greatest commandments and to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah and thus has the authority from God to expect our loyalty.

Introduction:

1. My last sermon demonstrated Jesus' authority, and it explained that God wants obedience.
2. Today we jump over several discussions and find out that Matthew has grouped together a number of things that end with Mt. 22:34-46.
3. A few parables and some questions by the Jewish leaders culminate with Jesus addressing the same two issues but in reverse and with a different emphasis: God's demands, the nature of the Messiah.
4. Here is what he teaches.

I. Tension Grows between Jesus and the Leaders

A. Two Parables

1. First, the Parable of the Tenants
2. Jesus directs this at the chief priests and Pharisees (45).
3. Second, the Parable of the Wedding Feast
4. A more general audience, yet at the same time a rejection of those who were called (the Jews) in favor of the poor, the lame, and anyone who accepted the invitation.

B. The question of paying taxes

1. The leaders seek to trap him (22:15).
2. The wording of the question sought to put Jesus in an awkward position (pollsters today can do the same thing: they word the questions to get either a pre-determined answer or one that can be twisted to obtain the desired result)
3. "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?" "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "If a tree fell in the woods with no one there, would it make a sound?" (These negate logic or put you in a corner to get the answer they want.)
4. Jesus doesn't play the game.

C. The Resurrection

1. Another trap question that suggested a pre-determined response or at least sought to create a dilemma out of which Jesus could not escape.
2. Once again Jesus does not play the game.
3. He demonstrated that they didn't know what they were talking about; the premise of their argument was wrong from the very beginning.
4. They did not know Scripture and they didn't understand the power of God.
5. The crowd was astonished.

II. A Return to "What Does God Want?"

A. A scribe asked him about the great commandment

1. Jesus had already established that God demands obedience (Parable of Two Sons)
2. A scribe asked him to clarify the most important one.
3. The scribe may not have been out to test or trap him (see Mk. 12:32-34).
4. His answer helped clarify what God wants.

B. The Great Commandment

1. Love God with heart, soul, and mind; Mark adds "strength."
2. In Mark, Jesus quotes from Deut. 6:4-5, a section known as the "shema" or the Jewish profession of faith.
3. What God wants is complete devotion to him. "You shall have no other gods before me."
4. God claims exclusive rights to our loyalty.
5. We must not be swayed by empty rhetoric of worldly powers which persuade us that they can provide what only God can.
6. Nor should we be taken in by alleged signs of spiritual activity that point to some other god.
7. Furthermore this command determines the appropriate relationship to others (Paul says that love fulfills the Law when we do no harm to a neighbor, Rom. 13)
8. In only one other place does Jesus summarize the essence of the prophets and commandments: Mt. 7:12 where he speaks of the Golden Rule.
9. Even more than all that, obedience provides the trump card over all manner of ritual and sacrifice (Mk. 12:33).

III. Addendum to "Why should we believe you?" in 21:23-27 (Whereas a scribe asked the previous question(s) in chapter 22, Jesus asked the question this time.)

A. Whose son is the Christ?

1. Remember the question, "By what authority are you doing these things?"
2. This serves to answer that question.
3. The Messiah is indeed David's descendant, but he is so much more.
4. He is Lord.
5. David serves the Messiah, the Messiah doesn't serve David. He calls him Lord.
6. Although Jesus doesn't overtly identify himself in this role, he most certainly implies it.

B. Jesus is Lord

1. This would eventually be the new Shema.
2. The Pharisees feared more questions (46) because they knew that Jesus' system of thought threatened their own.
3. More revelation might embarrass them further.
4. Jesus appeals to truth; apparently this threatened them.

Conclusion:

1. Returning to my original question: what does God want? He wants us to be faithfully and wholeheartedly committed to him and his ways.
2. And the other question: why should we believe you? We should believe because he has even greater authority than David. He is Lord.
3. The silence from his critics was deafening. They had pulled out all their bag of tricks, and Jesus had exposed them.
4. All that was left was to get rid of him, but even this turned against them.
5. They killed Jesus, but that was their undoing.
6. By means of their evil plan, he destroyed their power and brought salvation to all.
7. Salvation comes by belief that Jesus is Lord and by obedience to his commands.