

Testing questions

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[0 : 00] Hello and welcome to the evening service at Calvary Church Brighton. If you're joining us! for the first time we are a fellowship of believers in Brighton on the south coast of England! And of course normally we will be meeting together to worship God and to sing His praises and to study His word. We're not able to gather physically together and yet we gather together in spirit now as we seek to praise Him and to open His word. And so we'll be doing what we usually do, we will pray and read the scriptures, we will sing and we will study and gather around the scripture to see what the Lord has to say to us this evening. So as we start our time together let's join in prayer.

Heavenly Father we come to you at a time of distress for our nation and world yet we want to pray first that your glory might shine out in a dark time and that your name will be held in awe as the one who sets aside the plans of men and women so that your own will may be done.

Father we confess that we're not exempt from the distress around us. We know the frustrations of being shut in, the fear for our health and well-being, the separation from those we love.

We bring to you those who are suffering, who are cut off and lonely, who fear for the future. But in seeking you we find comfort in the knowledge that you are sovereign, that if we commit our cause and case to Jesus then nothing can separate us from the love of God.

And so we pray for those who lack that knowledge. We pray that in mercy you will end separation in greeting, sickness in health, poverty and prosperity, loneliness in comfort. But more than these things we ask that that all that the world trusts in is shaken. People might seek you, Heavenly Father.

[2 : 08] As you have commanded us we bring to you our politicians. They might find wisdom beyond their natural abilities to find a way forward. We pray for the scientists who are looking for a cure or vaccine.

May they have success. We pray for the safety of those who are keeping our society going. The medical staff, carers, those at all points of the food industry, the police, those who take away our rubbish and all who put their health and lives at risk to keep things going.

May they find the protection that they need and be encouraged in their work. May they find that they can find faith and comfort in you.

And finally we ask for your people everywhere in the great cities or in the small villages. If they are unable to meet together, may they be united in spirit. And so we pray for ourselves here at Calvary. Even as we are unable to gather, may we be in the spirit on the Lord's day and find food for our souls in your word. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

[3 : 20] So our passage to study this evening is taken from Matthew's Gospel in chapter 22, starting to read at verse 34. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question. Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus replied, 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. And the second is like it. Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he? The son of David, they replied. He said to them, How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him Lord?

For he says, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. If then David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?

[4 : 36] No one could say a word in reply. And from that day on, no one dared to ask him any more questions. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. We'll be turning to study God's word shortly.

But before we do that, let's sing one of the greatest of the modern hymns of praise, reminding us of who we just read about, the Lord Jesus Christ. We will sing together, In Christ alone, my hope is found.

In Christ alone, my hope is found.

He is my light, my strength, my soul. This color, this stone, this solid ground, Felt through the useless drought and storm.

[5 : 53] What bloods of love, what depths of peace, When days are stopped, let stride and cease.

My power to tell, my holy love. Here in the love of Christ, I stand.

In Christ alone, who turned on flesh, The fullness of God, He gave, This pain, this gift of love, And righteousness, This gold bundles He came to save.

To love and cross, As Jesus died, The love of God, Lost in strength, For any sin, On need of those lanes, He redeemed death of Christ, By any sin.

And in the ground his body light Light of my God this day And I stand on him on his day Out from the grave he also may end And as he stands in victory Since class has lost his grip on me But I am his and he is born Born in the precious blood of my God The hills in life, the living dead This is the power of Christ in me From last must die to the final breath

[8 : 07] Jesus commands my name to me No power of God, no scheme of man And all the law, he found his hand Till he returns to the cause before Here in the power of God And all the law, he found his hand You can hardly have missed the political and media fowly this week over Dominic Cummings, the Prime Minister's advisor and government policymaker Having caught Covid, he drove from London to Durham Over 200 miles to his parents' house As he claims, this was to ensure care for his four-year-old child But did he break the law?

The law that he himself had played a major part in setting up? The media, the police and many politicians apparently think he did Based on an obscure provision hidden away in the regulations He insists that he did not Legal issues can often come down to such technicalities But it is sometimes better to step back And ask a slightly different question Were his actions in accord with the spirit of the law?

The purpose of this law is to prevent the spread of the virus around the country And driving 200 miles would certainly appear to undermine that Surely some alternative solution could have been found Moreover, as a member of the executive, even if an unelected one Does a ruler not have a particular responsibility to uphold the law Both in letter and spirit?

These issues are hardly new Rulers and nations have always faced them The ruler is not above the law Even when they have helped frame that law On the contrary, to know the law To be an expounder of it Even a framer of it Means that you have a particular responsibility to observe it The very spirit of a nation depends on the answer to these two questions What is the founding principle of the law?

Does the ruling executive, in practice, uphold that principle? 2,000 years ago As the conflict between Jesus and the Jerusalem ruling elite reaches its climax These questions take centre stage As always in Matthew The kingdom of heaven is the matter of a debate What is the foundation principle of the law of the kingdom?

[11 : 05] Verse 34 And what is the status and nature of the Messiah? The Christ The anointed king In the passage that follows Jesus goes on to attack in detail the Pharisees For not practising what they preach But in today's passage The fundamental principles are set down It is important to realise That the two questions in verse 36 and 42 Are not knowledge tests in the sense of an examination Neither are they actual requests for information Everybody concerned knew the answers to them The teachers of the law were very familiar with the Old Testament quotations Of 37 to 39 From Deuteronomy 6.5 and Leviticus 19.18 respectively And throughout the latter part of the Old Testament We find constant reference to a new king in the line of David Who would establish the kingdom forever The Pharisees' answer in verse 42

Is of course correct The actual matter of dispute Is whether the spirit of the law is really being observed And whether the anointed king embodies that spirit In fact what we have here is a power struggle A struggle for the very soul of the kingdom of heaven And for the right of the true king to reign The founding principle of the kingdom is love Jesus points out that this was always true Right back to the time when the nation of Israel Was established by Moses It is not Jesus who is innovating But the Jewish leaders Trying to make the law into something It was never intended to be The true king is the king in the line of David One who establishes the kingdom forever In a way that David could not The one in fact who fulfills God's promise to David In 2 Samuel 7.12 and 13 When your days are over And you rest with your fathers I will raise up your offspring to succeed you Who will come from your own body And I will establish his kingdom He is the one who will build a house for my name And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever Though David's son Solomon built a temple He certainly did not establish the kingdom forever In fact a new spiritual temple needs to be built This power struggle is as relevant to us today As it was 2,000 years ago The very soul of the kingdom of heaven is at stake So let us explore these two questions The law and the king In more detail When the Beatles sang All you need is love They were in a sense right But love in English is a very broad term Covering topics from sex to patriotism What kind of love is needed? To whom is it directed? And what is the extent of this love? The very fact that this Beatles song was written Shows how these words of Jesus Have pervaded the Western mind But without properly establishing what is meant The concept soon degrades As it had for those Jewish leaders Indeed to say all you need is love Is to say almost nothing It almost empties the word of its meaning Turning it into a vague feeling of benevolence In the end you end up asking another question That Jesus was asked Who is my neighbour?

Luke 10.29 But in a few words Jesus pins the matter down What kind of love? The Greek word here is agape A love that is not based on sexual attraction Or family affection But exists in its own right A love that is giving rather than taking But that alone is not enough to make it clear A vital importance is the object of this love It must first be directed towards God Nowadays the world wants to put love for the neighbour first And love for God second if at all We'll come back to this later But first let us look at the extent of this love It is tempting to try and pick apart verse 37 To investigate heart and soul and mind separately But if you take that approach

[15 : 52] You soon get tangled up in a mess of trying to pin down precise meanings In different languages these terms have Nuanced shades of meaning Which do not necessarily match up in translation There are indeed subtle differences Even between the Greek of 22.37 And the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 6.5 The passage being quoted Add to this the further problem of translation into English And the result is likely to be confusion Which could take hours to unpick But if instead we consider the terms together The meaning is clear This love is to be all-encompassing It is to embrace everything that makes us human And so this love operates on different levels It operates at subtle levels of will and motivation Those subconscious connections in our brains That determine how we react It operates on the level of worldview

It operates on the level of worldview How do we perceive the reality around us It operates on our emotions What causes us delight or joy What causes us fear or horror And equally it operates on the level of conscious effort Of logical analysis Of understanding Any attempt to divide up mind and body and spirit and soul Can be an approximation at best Our emotions affect our bodies The state of our bodies affects our will That is why you can break someone's will By physical pain or hardship What we think certainly affects what we do And what we like doing In fact humans are immensely complicated systems Whose parts interact in subtle ways But wherever you stick in your probe What you are meant to find Is love for God

And if that was the case That would make us truly human But our real problem Is that you mostly find rebelliousness And selfishness This was true of those Jewish leaders And it's our default state too And so if we want to be citizens Of the kingdom of heaven A kingdom based on love for God We need a new guiding principle Which the Bible calls a new birth And we need a complete refurbishment A rewiring A reprogramming The Bible calls this sanctification But if you're going to have your house Redesigned and refurbished It's a good idea to check the credentials Of your architect and builder and electrician Are they competent to do the job?

But before we answer that question Let's explore the second part of Jesus' answer Love your neighbour as yourself Love for God is not an easy thing To test directly Do so and it soon degenerates Into something else For those Jewish leaders It is degenerated into a slavish

obedience To rules Or it can easily become A vague feeling of benevolence Towards the world Or it can become a joyless Loveless concern for orthodoxy In the words of the Cole Porter song Love for sale It becomes fake In the context of that song Love becomes sex And so we have the line Old love, new love Any love but true love And so the Apostle John writes If anyone says I love God Yet hates his brother He is a liar For anyone who does not love his brother Whom he has seen Cannot love God

Whom he has not seen In fact our love for God Is validated by our love For those around us James wrote a whole letter Expounding that principle But we don't have time To go into that now Instead let us note And emphasise the fact That love for our neighbours Is the secondary issue It's item 6-10 In the Ten Commandments You cannot truly love your neighbour Unless you love God first Why not?

[20 : 23] Because without God Your ultimate motivation Has to be self-gratification It might indeed make you feel good To give to charity To come to the aid of someone Suffering or in trouble You may even do it With the cleanest hands Not for the good publicity But with a genuine desire to help But in the last analysis You are doing it Because it makes you feel good So when the crunch comes Selfishness must eventually win out But for the Christian Love for those around Is not self-gratification We do it Because it is what Jesus approves So that brings us back To the second part of our passage However good our legal code is It cannot exist in the abstract It needs a judiciary And an executive A courtroom needs a judge Reprogramming of the system

Is best undertaken By a competent engineer Or you land up in a worse mess Than when you started Or to put it in the terms That Matthew uses A kingdom requires a king And so the Jews Had been promised a king A king in the line of David But the Jews at best Wanted David back They wanted a warrior Like David To free them from the Romans And establish the kingdom Of Israel forever Yet they were ignoring the fact That David had failed to do All that To establish the kingdom forever On the other hand David himself Had understood perfectly well That he was not the ultimate king As the quotation from Psalm 110 Verse 1 Makes clear In English And indeed in the Greek We miss the fact That the two lords Referred to here Are distinct Because the same word Is used for both But in the original Hebrew

There is a difference The first lord Is Yahweh The name of God himself The second Is Adonai A general term For a master Or lord God had told David That a second Greater king Was still to come A descendant Of David Certainly But one Who even David Acknowledges as lord He would be The ultimate king The final victor The one before whom Even David's achievements Pale into insignificance If these experts In the law Had really been competent They should have spotted this They should have been looking For an entirely different Class of king One who really embodies The law of love Where David Had ultimately failed But as we see From verse 46 They had not And so the enemies That this king faced Are far more fearsome Than any number Of Philistines Because they can destroy

Not only the body But the soul Also So where do we stand On this debate?

Can we honestly say That we love God With our whole being? Of course This does not mean That we never think About anything else Loving our neighbour Requires industry And planning And technical competence Humans are meant To be farmers And builders And engineers And artists Medics And scientists And philosophers Sales executives And machine operators And road sweepers And gardeners Mothers and fathers And uncles And aunts And grandparents These are all the things That make us human All these roles Require study And effort And concentration But the question is Where do they find Their true meaning And motivation?

[24 : 24] Whether you're Vacuuming a room Or mapping the cosmos This activity Is ultimately futile Unless it's underpinned By love for the creator With God at the centre Any and all Of these activities Can have ultimate significance Yet which of us Can truly say That we've fulfilled That primary commandment To love the Lord Your God With all your heart And with all your soul And with all your mind No one can All have sinned And come short Of the glory of God But there is someone Who can help There is a just And fair judge Though he can be severe When the case demands it There is a king Who can conquer The enemies inside As well as outside There is an engineer Who's competent To reprogram the heart His name is Jesus

So where do you stand Will you acknowledge And welcome King Jesus Or would you reject him As those Jewish leaders did So we'll end our time together By acknowledging The true king has come As we sing The song Hail to the Lord's Anointed Great David's Great The song Hail in the time

Appalling dead

His reign on earth begun He comes to break oppression To set the captive free To take away transgression And rule in equity He comes with help most speedy To those who suffer wrong To save the poor and needy And help the weak be strong To give them songs for sighing Their darkness turned to light Whose souls condemned and dying Are precious in His sight He shall come down

Like showers upon the fruitful earth And like joy heart like flowers String in His path to birth Before Him Before Him on the mountain Shall peace the herald know And righteousness in fountains From hill to valley flow King shall bow down And gold and incense bring All nations shall adore Him His praise all people sing To Him shall prayer unceasing And daily vows ascend

His kingdom still increasing A kingdom without end In all the world victorious He on His throne shall rest From age to age more glorious All blessed and all blessed The tide of time shall never His covenant renewed His name shall stand forever His changeless name of love