

Trinity XVIII

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[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. In our Gospel text today, we have two tests that are presented for us to understand. One of those tests is given by the Pharisees to Jesus to try and trip him up about the law.

The other test is given by Jesus to the Pharisees, since he had received so many tests from them. He decided that it was time that he test their own knowledge of the law and writings by asking about how the Christ can be both the Son of David, but also be David's Lord.

Now, at first glance, it may seem that these two episodes are not related to each other in their content. One is about the law, and the other is about the Messiah.

It would not seem like they are related to each other, but upon a closer look, they are intimately related. And let me explain why. Oftentimes, when we look at the New Testament, we think that what Jesus is going to say is going to be different than what was taught in the Old Testament.

[1 : 14] This is what a lot of Bible scholars taught in the previous century, and the impact was quite large. Most people assume that the religion of the Jews and the religion that was taught by Christ are two separate things.

The Old Testament is about the law. It's about following rules. There isn't any grace in the Old Testament. But the New Testament is filled with love, with mercy, and with hope. One particular point of support that these scholars used was the Gospel text that recorded the Pharisees' test given to Jesus, teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the law.

If Jesus only gave one answer to the question, it would support the idea that the Old Testament religion and ethics are completely separated from the New Testament. But what does he do instead?

Instead, 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 first and great commandment.

And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Not only does he provide two answers to the question, but he says that the Mosaic law, the entire Mosaic law, hangs on these two commandments.

[2 : 34] Jesus is saying that if a person faithfully loved God with all their heart, their soul, and mind, and loved their neighbor as themselves, they would be faithful in obeying the entire law.

According to the Pharisees, Jesus answered this question well. The Gospel of St. Mark also records this episode, and there is a very explicit acceptance of Jesus' answer by the scribe.

Jesus even says that the scribe is not far from the kingdom of God. Since the Pharisees are done with their questions, Jesus decides to test them the same way that he was being tested.

And the way that Jesus asked them the question was something they would have been familiar with. When teaching, Jewish teachers often propose two truths that seem to be false if they were held together, leaving the relationship between the truths needing to be solved up to those who were attempting to solve it, or those who were attempting to instruct.

In this question, the two truths are, one, that Christ is the Son of David, and two, that the Christ is greater than David. The supposed problem that Jesus is introducing is clear.

[3 : 46] How is it that Christ can be both the Son of David and the Lord of David? Jesus' quotation from the Old Testament Scriptures is Psalm 110, verse 1.

The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, Till I make your enemies your footstool. Jesus makes the note that when David said this, he said this in the Spirit.

He is drawing upon the nature of the prophetic scripture as inspired, and is therefore showing the paradox between the truths. They seemed confident enough in Jesus' original question about who the Christ is, but they were unable to answer the question about how the Son of David could also be the Lord of David.

I can imagine that their inability to answer his question was part of the reason why they didn't ask him any more questions after that. Hearing these two episodes, the first thing being the question about the law that the Pharisees asked Jesus, and the second being the question about the Christ that Jesus asked the Pharisees, it might not have answered exactly how these two episodes are related in their content.

But you see, both of these questions are ultimately about Jesus. The Pharisees asked about the greatest commandment to test the very one who made these commandments.

[5 : 10] And Jesus gives them an answer. They must love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and also as themselves. By loving Jesus, they would be fulfilling the entirety of the law, both their God and their neighbor, as the God who has become man to dwell with them.

Right after he answers the Pharisees' question, he asks them a question that is answered only by the knowledge of the Incarnation. How can the Son of David also be the Lord of David?

If the God of heaven became man in the lineage of David, being both the earthly and heavenly king united in one person? As you can see, both of these tests and answers have rich connections with Jesus, the God who became man.

While this reality is deeply theological, it has extreme practical relevance for us. For us to consider which of the commandments to be the greatest might seem like a blast from the past, an unnecessary speculation on what was given to Israel in the law, but not to us as the church.

We don't need that stuff. We have Jesus. However, it is David's Lord, our Lord, who has given the law to Israel, and therefore to us, the church who has been grafted into the tree of Israel, as is mentioned in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans.

[6 : 38] The one who gave the law gave it as a revelation of his character, and the character of our Lord does not change. Not one dot or iota will be taken away from the law, but Christ has fulfilled this law so that in our obedience to it we may grow to be like our Lord.

In our prayer of thanksgiving after we receive the Eucharist, we pray these words, and we humbly beseech thee, O Heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship and do such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.

Our Lord feeds us at his table so that we may live our lives in holiness and service to the Lord. If you've been through catechesis at St. Philip's, you know that the last section of our class is the teaching on the Ten Commandments.

We teach through this because we believe that it has real practical relevance for how we live. And living moral sacrificial lives is our way of emulating and becoming like our Lord, David's Lord.

We should have one God and keep him above all else. We should not worship graven images, but rather honor and venerate holy ones. We should not take the Lord's name in vain, but it should be on our lips to honor him and to serve him.

[8 : 05] We should rest and worship the Lord as a Sabbath day. We should not kill, but give life. We should not commit adultery, but seek the holiness of our fellow brothers and sisters.

We should not steal, but give generously. We should not slander our neighbor, but lift him up. We should not covet, but be thankful for what the Lord has given us.

We meditate on these commands, not because we believe a list of rules is going to give us salvation, but because Christ has given us the law for our benefit to make us more like him.

So when we obey the law, we are obeying the giver of the law, the one who never changes as we become more like him. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.