

Matthew 22:34-46 *Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Jesus replied: ““Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” ⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” “The son of David,” they replied. ⁴³He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, ⁴⁴“The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ ⁴⁵ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

100%, whole-hearted devotion. All out, all the time. Undivided love for him shown in love for your neighbor. That's what God wants of you as one of his followers. God not only wants you to confess your love for him here when you gather in his house for worship, he wants you to live your love for him in all things and at all times. He wants all the faculties and powers which He has given to you along with all the time, energy and resources which you have to fully, completely and wholly serve him in undivided love. It's not enough to know him as your Savior and believe and trust in him as your Savior, he wants every minute of your life lived in honor and to the glory of him as your Savior. That means denying your selfish desires and putting aside those things that your flesh wants so that you can live as God wants of you. That means recognizing that being a disciple of God means you are constantly at work making disciples for God. That means setting your needs and wants fully aside to focus your attention on the full gamut of needs which your neighbor has. That means giving of your resources to carry out the work God has given us here on this earth. This means being fully dedicated not only to being in God's house for worship, but reading God's word at home daily and regularly. That means carrying the crosses God asks you to bear patiently and without complaining. That means trusting that God is in control when things seem out of control and is still working through bad things for your good even though you can't possibly see how. That means giving of your time to work with your fellow Christians in strengthening the faith of one another and reaching out to witness to our community of God's love for them. That means seeing all that you are and all that you have and all that you do as completely dedicated to serving God. God wants every part of your life lived in 100%, whole-hearted devotion to him.

Now, you might be saying to yourself: “Hold up there, Pastor. That's a little hard core. What you're laying before us seems like the ideal. That's a little more than what I signed up for! That's a lot to expect out of us. How can you stand there demanding this whole-hearted devotion when you know we can't possibly do it?” I hear you. My sinful nature revolts at hearing these same demands. My new man created at my baptism cringes when I hear these demands and realize how far short I fall of the 100% devotion and love God wants of me. But that doesn't change God's expectations. This isn't me telling you that this is what God wants. Read the passage before us. This is God telling us that's what he wants. “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” and “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” Even the Pharisees didn't disagree that this is what God wants and expects of his people. That's pretty mind blowing when you stop to really think what God wants and expects of us. The questions that press us as we hear this is are How? and Why? How in the world could we possibly do this? Why in the world would we want to give all that we have and all that we have to whole-hearted complete devotion and service to God?

The answer to this question comes from the question which Jesus asked of the Pharisees: “*What do you think about the Messiah?*” That's the same question he asks of us today. What do you think about the Messiah? How you see Jesus will affect the life that you live. What you think about the Messiah will determine how you live your life. What you think about Jesus will guide the decisions that you make about how you spent your time and energy and resources. Your perspective about who Jesus really is will determine what is important to you and how you are going to go about your life. So it's important then that we are able to correctly answer this question: ***What do you think about the Messiah?***

The Pharisees thought very highly of the Messiah. They, however, thought very little of Jesus. They thought little of Jesus because he didn't fit their expectations of who the Messiah would be. Like the Jews still today, they looked for the Messiah to be the son of David. That means they expected him to be an earthly king who would restore the kingdom of David. He would be a great political leader who would be descended from David and well versed in Jewish law and observant of the commandments. He would be a charismatic leader who would inspire others to follow his example. He would be a great military leader who would restore the fortunes of Israel, liberate them from foreign oppression and extend his rule over Gentile nations. He would be a great judge who would make the right decisions. But above all he would be a human being, not a god, demi-god or supernatural being. Jesus did not fit these qualifications.

Their low opinion of Jesus affected their actions toward him. This account takes place on Tuesday of Holy Week and the Pharisees and Sadducees were trying to see who could trip Jesus up. They were testing him with questions. Asking questions to gain understanding is a good thing. This wasn't the intent of these religious leaders. They were asking questions to trap him, discredit him or to give them a reason to get rid of him. They were trying to show their superiority over him so they could silence him. This question about which was the greatest commandment was long discussed as one of the great problems of the day. The Pharisees boasted of 613 commandments. They had hoped to dive into a deep discussion in which they could demonstrate their superiority over him and weaken his influence among the people. They also hoped they might elicit an answer which would justify a complaint against him as one who spoke disparagingly about certain commandments of the Law. Yet Jesus answered their question so eloquently that they couldn't say anything about his answer. Then Jesus posed a serious question to these leaders in which an honest answer would bring them to a correct understanding of whom they were opposing.

What do you think of the Messiah? How you answer that will affect the way you live your life. Many people think many different things about the Messiah. Unfortunately, they, like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, have wrong expectations about the Messiah. Many are looking for a Messiah who will protect them when they need it but who doesn't ask for anything in return. They want a Messiah who will be at their beck and call to answer their every need and take care of every obstacle they face but let them live however they want. They want a Messiah who will feed them and provide for every need but leave them alone otherwise. They want a Messiah who will be a miracle healer when sickness and illness come and lead them to a life of luxury, ease and glory here on this earth. Yet all of these are wrong expectations for who the Messiah is. When that's your view of the Messiah, no wonder you balk at the command to love him with 100% whole hearted devotion.

What do you think of the Messiah? What we are talking about today is discipleship. A disciple is one who follows. What God is asking us to consider is what do you think of the one that you follow? Why do you follow him and why would you do so with whole-hearted, undivided devotion? We had the opportunity to consider this same thought at our conference last week. This question was put to us in the form of 5 questions. These 5 questions really put into perspective just who Jesus is, what he has done for us, why we follow him and why we would do so with undivided love and devotion.

First: do you believe hell is incomprehensibly horrible? That's a fair question to ponder. Many today have convinced themselves that either hell isn't real or it isn't really that bad. They reason they've experienced hell here on this earth so whatever might come can't be that bad. That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says that those who are in hell are loathsome. Hell is the unending, eternal torture and pain of being separated completely from God and his love. However bad you think hell is, multiply that by a million and you haven't even begun to understand how incomprehensibly horrible hell is.

Second: do you believe that you deserve to go there? This is a question we have to come to grips with. Though we try our best, though we work hard at it, though we generally try to be good people, we don't match the perfection God demands of us. We haven't loved God with all our heart and soul and mind and we don't always show love for our neighbors. We fall short of the glory which God expects and therefore deserve to spend our eternity in the incomprehensibly horrible terror of hell. If we truly believe that hell is incomprehensibly horrible and that we deserve fully to go there, this will affect our view of Jesus.

Third: do you believe that heaven is unfathomably wonderful? Just like people try to make hell less than what it is, they also make heaven less than it is. We might think of the quiet country club that is clean and has soft music playing as a picture of heaven. Or we might think it is a place that is a little stuffy and full of goody goodies kissing up to God. We lose sight of the way which the Bible describes it. It is a place of no sin and therefore no effects or consequences of sin. No pain, no problems, no heartaches, no hurts. It's a place to live in eternal joy in the presence of almighty God. It's a place of victory and joy as the inhabitants worship almighty God in praise and celebration. It will shine with the glory of God, and its brilliance will like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. To help us understand it we're told the streets are paved with gold and the gates are made of pearls. In other words—is so much more wonderful than we could even possibly imagine! As hell is more than a million times worse than we could imagine, heaven is more than a million times wonderful than we can imagine.

Fourth: Do you believe that a staggeringly high price was paid that you might avoid hell and obtain heaven? This is where our view of Jesus really crystalizes and comes into perspective. We're tempted to very easily say, "Jesus died for me." But do we understand the price he paid? He endured not only physical suffering and pain at the hands of Pilate and the Roman soldiers—that was bad enough—but the torment of hell. Think about it this way: there's pain when you lose a friend, either to death or because they were no longer interested in being your friend. That hurts, but it's not the same as the pain of losing a spouse or a child. You've spent more time together. You're more invested in a spouse or a child. The pain is unimaginable. Now imagine you've been together for all eternity. That's what happened when the Father abandoned his Son on Calvary. Jesus couldn't even call him Father. He yelled, "My God My God, why have you forsaken me?" Do we understand and believe in the staggeringly high price Jesus paid so we could avoid hell and obtain heaven? This is going to affect the way that we live!

Finally, do you believe that God knows everything about you, yet loves you, personally and deeply? God knows your flaws. He knows your weaknesses. He knows your thoughts. He knows your shortcomings. He knows your sins. Yet he loves you anyway! He knows how you continually sin against him even though you promise him you won't. He knows the things you have done that no one else knows about. Yet he loves you anyway—deeply and personally. These are the references to which Jesus was pointing when he used the names "Lord" and "God". The Lord was the name God used to reveal himself and his mighty acts of deliverance for his people. God's name proclaims his good news to us. He is the never changing God who drew us into a covenant relationship with him through Jesus. The name "God" points to him as the God of power and mighty who employs that power on our behalf and for our good. Both names denote his love and grace toward us. Before we could possibly understand what it means to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, he had to love us first. He did that with the unconditional love he displayed to us in Jesus when he called us out of the darkness of sin and unbelief to the light of salvation he offers in the Gospel.

Our Messiah is our God who loved us enough to rescue us from the unimaginable horror of hell and give us the unfathomably wonderful gift of eternal life in heaven even though we don't deserve it. That perspective of our Messiah affects how we live. Seeing who Jesus is gives us the desire and strength to love God and our neighbor and do what God wants us to do as we live out our lives. This is why we show our love for God by coming regularly to worship. How could we not want to gather and worship a God who has loved us so unconditionally? This leads us to show our love for God by seeing our lives as a perpetual witness to his love and grace. This leads us to love God and our neighbor by using our time and energy and resources to share God's love with them. This perception of Jesus is what leads us to see our entire life as an offering and sacrifice to God. This is discipleship! This is our lives as God's people as we live on this earth.

God asks a lot of us. God has high expectations for our lives as we continue to live on this earth. The only way we could possibly work towards meeting those expectations comes from having the proper expectation of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Many people have many different expectations for who the Messiah is. God has revealed to you the truth. It's good then that God asks us the question: What do you think of the Messiah? Amen.