

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 22 (PART 3)

Matthew 22:34-40

This is now the third attempt in this chapter to trap Jesus in his words. After hearing that Jesus had “silenced the Sadducees” (v. 34), the Pharisees regroup. Since the Sadducees were their theological rivals, the Pharisees wouldn’t have minded seeing Jesus embarrass them—but now Jesus is their own target again.

This time the question comes from a “lawyer,” meaning a professional expert in the Law of Moses. The rabbis of Jesus’ day regularly debated which commandments were “light” and which were “weighty” (ESV Study Bible). They counted 613 total commands in the Torah, and discussions often centered on identifying the foundational ones.

Why was this a trap question? Because choosing one command as “greatest” could open Jesus to charges of minimizing or dismissing other commandments - all of which were given by God. If He elevated one, they could accuse Him of lowering another. No matter which law He named, someone could argue He chose wrong. But Jesus answers the question as the true expert in the law. Instead of selecting an isolated command, he identifies the two commands that *summarize and give shape to the entire law itself*:

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 — Yahweh is your God - Love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Leviticus 19:18 — Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus says that “*on these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets* (v.40).” What does that mean? It means every command God ever gave flows out of these two. Obey these and the rest follow naturally. Violate these, and you violate the heart of the entire Torah. And, when you look at any command of the Torah, you can understand that the command is directing God’s people to know how to love him and others. How they dealt with illness in the community, how they reacted to idolatry, how they ate, how they laid out their property boundaries - were all opportunities to love God and others - and if you didn’t have the exact directive of how to do something, asking “how can I love God and my neighbor” will point you in the right direction.

Think about how true this is in the real world:

Financial — If you love God, you won’t idolize money. If you love your neighbor, you won’t steal, cheat, exploit, or refuse generosity. You’ll think about the poor and vulnerable around you. You’ll make wise decisions for your family and future.

Relational — Love keeps you from bitterness, betrayal, gossip, and neglect. When you think about what “love” looks like, you’ll make decisions in your relationship with are not based on self but on the care of others.

Work-related — Love for God leads to integrity; love for neighbor leads to fairness, patience, and honesty. You'll pay people well, you'll keep your commitments. You'll be a blessing to your workplace. You'll honor your employer, other employees and customers.

Parenting — Love for God shapes how you guide, discipline, and teach; love for children moves you to patience, forgiveness, and sacrifice. You will make decisions that will help point your children and family towards God and His Kingdom.

Political — Love for God keeps politics from becoming an idol; love for neighbors keeps us from contempt, cruelty, and division. You will honor rulers and also put God first over humans.

Everything God asks of us is grounded in love. Jesus is not lowering any commands—He is revealing the foundation beneath them all.

Matthew 22:41-46 - Now it's time for Jesus to ask some questions!

Psalms 110 is what is referred to as a "Messianic Psalm" - a psalm that has prophecy or allusion to the expected Messiah. Messianic Psalms, along with other Messianic passages elsewhere in the Old Testament often describe the Messiah himself, give information related to the coming of the Messiah or perhaps describe the reign and rule of the Messiah when he comes. Some of these passages have dual purpose - meaning that they speak of something happening in David's (or the author's) life at the time with a secondary layer which applies to the Messiah. The most well known Psalm like this is Psalm 22 which describes a terrible time in the psalmist's life but also paints a picture of the suffering that Jesus the Messiah will undergo on the cross as we look back through the lens of the gospel.

Psalm 22:14-19 - I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me... 16 For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; 18 They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots. 19 But You, O LORD, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance.

Psalms 110 has a very different tone than Psalm 22. Psalm 110 doesn't describe suffering but victory during the reign of the Messiah.

Psalm 110:1-7 A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." 2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." 3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew.

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 5 The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. 6 He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the

chief men over a broad country. 7 He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore He will lift up His head.

Psalm 110 speaks of the Messianic king ruling with strength over his enemies and having a strong military force from amongst his people. This king will also be a priest and judge. (v. 4, 6).

Psalm 110:6-7 (NLT) - He will punish the nations and fill their lands with corpses; he will shatter heads over the whole earth. 7 But he himself will be refreshed from brooks along the way. He will be victorious.

While for some in the crowd, Jesus might have been explaining something new to their understanding, what he is certainly doing is illustrating that the great scribes and lawyers don't have all the answers they think they do.

In the ancient world, fathers did not refer to their sons as "lord." Yet David, Israel's greatest king, speaks of the Messiah as *superior* to himself. Jesus forces the religious leaders to confront a truth they had misunderstood. They know the Messiah will be the "son of David", aka a biological descendant of King David. But as Jesus quotes this Psalm, they don't understand how the Messiah can be David's son but also David's Lord. Jesus teaches that the Messiah is not on par with their great hero, but *greater than him* - for David himself calls the Messiah his master.

Here is how one commentary explains this exchange:

"In (Psalm 110:1) Yahweh, God Almighty, addresses this descendant of David as 'Lord' and offers him a share of his throne until all opposition to his rule is banished. How could this merely be David's son? If David calls him 'Lord', how (*pōs* "in what sense?") can he be his son? The Messiah is indeed David's son, but he is also David's Lord. That does not fit their notion of a merely earthly and political Messiah. Jesus is trying to open their eyes to the futility of a messianic hope which does not rise beyond the human level. 'Son of David' is not an adequate title for him. He is Son of God, whom Matthew knows to be exalted to the right hand of God, where he shares God's reign over the world. No lesser concept is big enough to embrace one who is both David's son and David's Lord." (Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today, page 238.)

Jesus is able to answer every question and test that he is presented with and yet a simple Bible question is not understood by the greatest scholars of Israel.

v. 46 - no more questions from the Jewish religious leaders. Their public strategy has failed. Jesus has silenced every challenger—not with force, but with wisdom, Scripture, and truth. Tragically, instead of humbling themselves, these leaders pivot toward a more sinister plan. The next time Jesus encounters many of these same men, it will be in the context of his arrest and trial, as they conspire to put him to death.

Some Closing Thoughts

This final passage shows how essential it is for Christians to read and understand the Hebrew Scriptures. Without the foundations of what we call the Old Testament, a passage like this becomes nearly impossible to discern. Interpreting the New Testament without the Old is like walking into the middle of a movie and expecting to follow the plot. Jesus assumes His listeners know the first part of the story so they can understand the climax. His entire argument here rests on Psalm 110, and it makes sense only if we grasp the Old Testament's categories of kingship, covenant, prophecy, and Messianic hope. Without those layers, Jesus' question feels abstract; with them, the meaning becomes clear.

So don't neglect the Old Testament. God will help you understand His word, and reading it together in community will help you see its connections to Christ more and more clearly.

This chapter also highlights the difference between being well-read and being well-led by the Spirit. The religious leaders confronting Jesus knew Scripture inside and out. They had training, status, and years of study. Yet when Jesus answers their carefully crafted traps, Matthew records:

Matthew 22:22 – “They were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.”

Matthew 22:33 – “When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.”

And earlier:

Matthew 7:28–29 - “He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

The contrast is striking. The scribes had knowledge; Jesus had authority. They had information; Jesus had revelation. They had memorized Scripture; Jesus understood the heart of God within it. And this is what he desires for his followers. Christians are not called merely to quote verses, but to be guided by the Spirit that illuminates them - to discern, apply, and live them out with wisdom and humility.

For the religious leaders, Scripture had become a tool for winning - a way to prove superiority, defend status, and trap a perceived rival. Their goal wasn't truth or obedience but victory. They knew the text, yet they didn't reflect the God behind it. Their knowledge grew, but their character did not - a sobering warning for anyone who studies Scripture without letting it transform them.

As followers of Jesus, we must guard our hearts from drifting down the same path. It is possible to study, teach, and defend the Bible and yet fail to be shaped by the God of the Bible. Knowledge without humility becomes pride; familiarity without obedience becomes hardness. Scripture is meant to form us - to soften, correct, and lead us to love God and neighbor more faithfully. So as we read and discuss God's word, may we ask not only, “*Do I understand this passage?*” but also, “*Is this passage transforming me?*” True disciples aren't merely well-informed; they are continually being formed into the likeness of Christ.