

**Text:**

Matthew 22.34-40

**Big Picture:**

Matthew uses three sets of three stories to set up the final entry into Jerusalem and brings to a head the conflict with the religious establishment of the Jews. These stories conclude with our passage today, a summary of the greatest commands in scripture.

**Preparing for the Lesson:**

Our passage today comes at the end of several interconnected passages demonstrating the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. The question posed by the Pharisees here is the third such similar question, and in the previous two, Jesus' opponents had been silenced. As we discover, this third question does not yield different results.

Like many religious groups, the Jews were not entirely uniform with how they interpreted and applied the laws. In general, the Pharisees were the more liberal of the Jewish leaders. Their question to Jesus, like the other two, would determine where Jesus stood in regard to his own interpretation. You wonder at what point these people give up. All throughout the Gospel of Matthew their attempts to discredit Jesus have failed, yet they continue to try.

Their question is not entirely a random question or without some merit. The Jews had extrapolated 613 laws from the Pentateuch and keeping all of them must have been a daunting task. They would not, however, have assumed one to take precedent over the remaining 612. All would have been important.

It is interesting that we find Jesus' answer to be our expected answer, versus surprising or pointing to the laws in a way not before thought of. For us, to love God and love neighbor is a customary instruction. Although certainly important to the Jews, I am not sure they used these two laws in the same way we do. That is, this was not the "go to" answer. If this is the case, then Jesus' answer was probably surprising not in that he was saying something contrary to Jewish thought, but that he summarized it in such a powerful way.

For us, the challenge is not the knowing a summary of the law, it is actually doing it. I hope you will spend some time in your group this week focusing on ways you can actually live out better loving God and living your neighbor.

**Possible Lesson Outline:**

Begin your group time by asking your group the following: Often, our parents will save awards and certificates we have received, only to give them to us later in life, so that we suddenly find ourselves in possession of childhood awards. Of those awards—or any award—what is the most significant award you have ever received? Why is this specific award the most important compared to other awards?

Ask discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

## **For the Kids:**

The children in my group recently mentioned that they would like to have more “crafts” to do, so towards that end, this week let your children draw a picture of “loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” Begin your lesson letting the children define (or hear you define) what that means, then allow them some time to draw while you continue with the discussion questions. Close your time bringing the children back together to share their pictures with the entire group.

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. The question the Sadducees ask Jesus is the third of three questions asked by the Jewish leaders and “establishment” in an effort to discredit Jesus and his teaching. Why was it so important for these groups to do this? In what ways do we try to discredit others today? Why do we do this?
2. Why would it be important for the Sadducees to have a “most important” command? Wouldn’t a good Jew simply want to follow ALL the commands?
3. Read together Deuteronomy 6.1-9. A pious Jew would have recited this “Hear, O Israel...” passage twice a day. Given the original context of these words, why would this passage have been so significant to the Jews?
4. Give specific examples of what it looks like to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
5. Read Leviticus 19.18. Here this verse speaks of seeking revenge or bearing grudges. In what ways do you sense Jesus expanding on this idea when he recites it for the Pharisees?
6. How does summarizing the Law in just two commands make following Jesus easier? How does it make following him more difficult?
7. How can we as a group help one another be focused on these two commands? How can we eliminate the distractions we sometimes face in trying to focus on following God?

## **This Week:**

It seems like as in previous weeks, we are again challenged with a passage that we know what it says, but struggle with actually doing it. Spend some time with your group sharing ways you can focus on loving God and loving your neighbor more. Try to determine some specific ways you will go about doing that this week.

## **What’s Next:**

Next week’s section is Matthew 23.1-24.35. One Groups will be looking at 23.1-12.

- Find the Old Testament references in Matthew 21-22. Read these passages in their original context. In what ways does this help you understand better the saying of Jesus in Matthew 21-22?
- Why would people have been buying sacrifices in the temple? Was it prohibited for them to do so?
- If you have not already done so, research the difference between all of the different groups of Jewish leaders mentioned in these chapters.
- How does the Parable of the Wedding Banquet follow wedding customs of the day? In what ways did it differ?
- Why was the issue of marrying widows an important aspect of Jewish culture?
- Read Deuteronomy 6.1-9. What are ways you can do the things that are listed to do here?
- Memorize the key verses for this week: Matthew 22.37-40.