

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixth Sunday After Trinity, July 19, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 13 (38:4) 377:1-4, 377:5-9, 377:10

Lessons: Zechariah 7:4-10; 1 Peter 2:1-10; Matthew 22:23-46.

Sermon Text: Mark 12:28-37

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

There were various religious parties among the Jews who were enemies of Jesus – the Pharisees, the scribes (teachers of the law), and the Sadducees. These enemies of Jesus delighted in trying to trick him into saying something they could use against him. Their purpose was to find fault with Jesus whom they did not accept as the promised Messiah.

These trick questions were addressed to Jesus quite often. In this Gospel of Mark from which our text is taken, twelve occasions of this are recorded. On at least three of these occasions, Jesus also asked a question of his enemies. Our text is one of these occasions. We want to consider that

JESUS ANSWERED HIS ENEMIES' QUESTIONS AND ALSO ASKED THEM A QUESTION.

- 1. The purpose of each question;**
- 2. The importance of each answer.**

Before our text we are told of how the Sadducees made up a foolish story about seven brothers who had all married the same woman, one after another, as one after the other had died. They wanted to know, *“At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”* Mark 12:23. We have to understand that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus first told them, *“When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven,”* v. 25. Then Jesus explained to them that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

This is the background for the question in our text asked by one of the teachers of the law. *“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’”* The enemies of Jesus competed with one another to see who could ask a question that Jesus could not answer. They thought they were very clever in making up these questions. The purpose, then, of this question by the teachers of the law was to get Jesus to say something that they might use against him. Their purpose was never that they might learn something.

We should always remember the purpose of what is written in the Bible. God wants us to learn the way to salvation. Speaking of the purpose of having Jesus' miracles recorded in the Bible, John says, *“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name,”* John 20:31. Therefore we should treat the Word of God with great respect. We should not ask questions simply to satisfy our curiosity and we should certainly not make jokes of something in the Bible. We should be most earnest in studying the Scriptures so that our faith may be strengthened.

The second question in our text was asked by Jesus. *“How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David?”* Jesus did not have an evil purpose in mind in asking this question. He never had a

hidden motive in asking a question. Jesus' purpose was to help his enemies. Matthew's Gospel says, "***No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions,***" Matthew 22:46. Jesus always had in mind to lead the people to a knowledge of the truth so they might be saved. He showed his great loving kindness in wanting also his enemies to be saved. Jesus our one and only Mediator wanted the same thing that his heavenly Father wanted. "***God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,***" 1 Timothy 2:4.

Let us now learn how Jesus answered the question of one of the teachers of the law concerning which was the greatest of all commandments. Here we can learn **the importance of each answer of Jesus.**

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"The most important one," answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." In answering the teacher of the law, Jesus first of all emphasized that there is only one true God. It is not Allah of the religion of Islam, nor is it any other heathen god. The Bible reveals that the one true God is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. Jesus confirmed the truth recorded in the Scriptures, "***Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,***" Deuteronomy 6:4.

Another reason why we should emphasize the importance of Jesus' answer is that it reveals what the Law of God demands of us, namely perfect love for God and our fellowman. There are several words in the Greek language for love. One (phileo) denotes a liking or mere affection. The more powerful is the word (agapao) which is a higher form of love. This is the word Jesus uses in our text. He speaks of loving God with a definite purpose, with the whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. God wants us to love him perfectly, without any flaws. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,***" Matthew 5:48.

Even the teacher of the law agreed with what Jesus said, "***Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'***" The love that God demands of us is a love that embraces all we say, think and do. Also, it does not only pertain to our love for God, but also our love for our fellowman, for all those with whom we come into contact. This is the love Jesus speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount in what we refer to as the Golden Rule. "***In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets,***" Matthew 7:12.

But as soon as we hear the Golden Rule mentioned we are reminded of the work-righteousness religion of the majority of people. Such will say, "I believe in living according to the Golden Rule." The Golden Rule is their favorite Bible passage. As we hear such people talk we soon get the distinct impression that they hope to get to heaven by their works. The answer of Jesus to the teacher of the law is important just for this reason that it is to show us that we cannot possibly get to heaven by our works. If we understand the terribly exacting requirements of God in his holy law, then we will also understand that there is no human being that can fulfill these requirements of the law. The Bible teaches, "***Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin,***" Romans 3:20. The poet writes in the hymn we are singing today,

"It was a false, misleading dream that God His Law had given

That sinners could themselves redeem and by their works gain heaven," The Lutheran Hymnal, 377:3.

Let us never forget that the purpose of the law of God with all its demands is, first and foremost, to show us our sin and the need of a Savior. This is so important to know and think about. Every Sunday we are reminded of our transgressions of the law as we go through our liturgy. The pastor says, *“Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed.”* After the confession of our sins, the pastor comforts us with the words, *“Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy on us and has given His only son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins.”* So it is that we place our trust in Jesus Christ and not in our own works.

When the teacher of the law had heard Jesus’ answer to his question, he agreed that the law of God indeed demands perfect love of God and our fellowman. We are told, *“When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’”* The man showed a good knowledge of the law, but one essential thing he lacked yet, and that was faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Savior of the world. This leads us to consider the importance of the question and answer in our text regarding the person of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel states it this way, *“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”* Matthew 22:42. Our text says, *“How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David?”* In answering this question, Jesus quoted David in the psalms, *“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’”* *David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”* David himself believed that the Messiah was to be one of his descendants and yet was also the Lord. It was the Holy Spirit who revealed this to David and moved him to write about this. God the Father said to his Son, Jesus, to sit at his right hand, that is, to have dominion over all things, to have all power in heaven and on earth, until the Father had made all his enemies subject to him.

Jesus’ enemies stumbled at the thought that Jesus was both David’s son and David’s Lord. But we ought to realize for ourselves how important it is to know this fact. If we believe as the teachers of the law and the Pharisees did, that Jesus was just a man from Nazareth, we shall perish in hell. There are millions of people on earth who do not believe in Jesus as God’s Son and the Savior of the world. The religion of Islam teaches millions of people all over the world that God has no son, that Jesus was merely a great prophet like Moses. All who believe this will perish in hell.

If we believe in Jesus as the Son of God as well as the descendant of David and the promised Savior, then we by the grace of God will be saved in heaven in eternity. The Scriptures abundantly testify to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. *“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons,”* Galatians 4:4-5. *“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins,”* 1 John 4:10. *“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin,”* 1 John 1:7. If this is our faith, then we shall dwell with God in eternity and see our Savior Jesus Christ face to face. God, grant us this blessing. Amen.

(Revised Ministry By Mail sermon from September 10, 2006)