

*When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

*Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*

**Matthew 22:34-46**

The first half of this passage has Jesus giving an answer, which many Christians have probably memorized as the perfect summation of what it means to follow Jesus. We are called to love God with our whole selves, and to love, likewise, our neighbors. In Luke's gospel, Jesus then goes on to explain, through the parable of the Good Samaritan, who exactly is our neighbor (the answer, btw, is *everyone*).

Like much of what Jesus says in the gospels, here He is quoting from Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). The passage from Deuteronomy is also part of a Jewish prayer called the Shema (which means "hear" in Hebrew) which is said each day by faithful Jews and which Jesus himself probably recited daily as well.

But in the second half, Jesus pivots to ask his questioners who they think the Messiah is. This may seem a bit of a random question, but I don't think it is. The Pharisees here, like all Judeans of their time (including the Disciples) believed that the promised Messiah would be a warrior who would lead the people of Israel in a war of independence. Their model was King David, the warrior king who had established the only royal dynasty Israel had known, even though it had ceased to exist five hundred years before Jesus was born.

Another model was Judas Maccabee, who had led just such a revolt against Greek kings only a hundred and fifty years earlier which had resulted in an independent Judean kingdom which lasted barely a century before the Romans took over.

Why I think this matters is because, as Jesus showed and taught, that though the Law was good and useful for us, it isn't a substitute for discerning the will of God in our own lives. In fact, Jesus taught, sometimes strictly following the Law prevents us from doing what God would desire of us. Jesus showed us that there should be no barrier to our loving response to the needs of the world, not even the Mosaic Law.

By talking about who the Messiah is, Jesus was preparing them to understand that God was not interested in politics. No, God was after something much grander, the transformation and redemption of humankind and the establishment of the kingdom of God through faith. By beginning to show us that He himself is the Messiah, Jesus is establishing his authority, He is showing us why we should listen to and follow Him.

He is also showing us that as the embodiment of the Word, his words matter since they are truly God's words. This then actually reinforces the passages He quotes and gives greater meaning and importance to them and what God is calling us in them.