

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

The Pharisees attempt to outdo the Sadducees after the Sadducees have been silenced. They do it by standing up and asking Jesus a question to test him, a question that they likely do not expect him to be able to answer. He answers, of course, with the great Shema, Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 4, and then also with the passage from Leviticus.

Love God perfectly and love neighbor as yourself. In the description of what is the perfect love of God, he says, heart, soul, and mind, although in another place Christ adds we are to love God with all our strength. That is that we are to be talking about God constantly. When you sit down, when you get up, when you go to the gates with your children, on the walls, everywhere you go, all the time, you're to be thinking about the reality that you're to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength. This is then really what informs our understanding of what it is to be a human being.

To be a human being was to be created in this fourfold reality. That we are not simply intellect. That is why we can't simply replace worship with online worship. You all saw or experienced this during Covid, even the best attempts at replacing human interaction with screens is incomplete. Because we cannot be reduced simply to images and sounds that are transferred through the internet.

We are physical beings, we live in space, and we live in time in the presence of other people.

But we're also emotion, so also the heart is named. We are called upon to love God. We are called upon to revere the things that are sublime. We are called upon to be angry at things that are unjust and outrageous and the like.

And then at last we are also soul. We are also spiritual. But none of those things can be divided from the other. When one is stripped away from the other three, or one is just stripped away by itself, and we only have three, we are flattened into less than full human beings. God demands and expects all of us, heart, mind, soul, and strength, to be engaged in the worship of him and in loving him. And then that also goes for our neighbors. So Jesus doesn't say love your neighbor with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. He simply says love him as yourself. Recognize him also as a human being created in the image of God and therefore having dominion over the earth and being worthy of this particular honor.

And God calls for all of this to be brought into the love of God and neighbor. So the law exposes and shows what we need to be. That's great. It's beautiful. We can all rejoice in it. At the same time, of course, we have this problem of lacking the fulfillment of it. That we ourselves do

not live up to this standard. We don't act as full human beings. We do not bring everything that we are, the full reality, to worship God and to love neighbor. But in fact, we act in ways that are quite selfish and outrageous.

I think perhaps, just to quickly remember how really disgusting we are in our fallen flesh, is to consider envy, and the delight of man at another's sadness. They are purely human responses, and they are human beings in some sense at our ugliest.

Envy is to be sad because someone else is happy. That is to say, someone else achieves something that costs me absolutely nothing, but I don't like him, and I'm jealous, I'm envious, and now I'm sad because he has something good happen to him. That is not worthy of your calling. That is subhuman to act in such a way, to respond.

But we also rejoice and delight in the suffering of others! We are not content to just be upset when good things happen to others, but we must also rejoice when bad things occur. It is not enough for man to have the good removed, but we want evil to come upon our neighbor!

Those are gross, disgusting emotions that we should not know, and every one of us do, that just demonstrates that at our base, we don't love our neighbors as ourselves.

And of course then, this sort of preaching of the law does silence the Pharisees. How are they going to respond to this? How can they possibly fulfill the law interpreted so broadly that they would inherit eternal life? And they can't. But that's not the final word, because Jesus has a question of his own. What do you think of the Christ?

This is the final question, the real question, the ultimate reality that defines all others. This is the real purpose of theology in the end, not to dissect the law and to figure out all the ethical dimensions. That's important, it is the necessary first step, and there's great beauty and joy in it. At the same time, it always, on this side of glory, ends up accusing us because we fall short.

The real question that we want to get to, the real thing that God wants to reveal to us, apart from the law, is his righteousness, and that is found in the Messiah. What do you think of the Christ is? What do you think of the Messiah? And then Jesus leads them right down the path. Particularly, what do you think about the two natures?

So he doesn't just say, what do you think of the Christ? What's he going to do? What do you think of the Christ? Where will he be born? What do you think of the Christ? You know, what sort of miracles will he perform? Whose son is he? Well, the son of David. Great. He's a human, right? He's a descendant of David. He's a human being.

Ah. But if he's a human being, how can the Lord himself call him Lord? The word Lord here is the name that God gives to Moses from the burning bush. It's the personal name, Yahweh.

So this is to say, if God calls someone else God... What's going on here? I thought there was only one God, and how can a descendant of David be God? And all of this is meant to lead the Pharisees and all of us to contemplate the greatest and most important mystery of reality, the Incarnation. That God becomes a man, perfectly equal to the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which of course both of them are interrelated and connected and our salvation hangs completely upon them.

Why is it necessary that the Messiah be a man? It is necessary that he be a man because the law was written for men, not for God. For him to keep the law, to obey it, that is, to never do anything that it forbids and to do every single thing that it demands. He does not sin. He does all of the good works that we should do without failure. He is obedient perfectly to the law without chafing, without grumbling. He knows no envy, no covetousness, no lust, no greed, no unrighteous anger. He is holy and without sin, and yet he is a man. He has to be a man for us to actually say that of him. So he fulfills the law in that sense that he keeps it.

So also, of course, he must be a man so that he can have the law do to him everything that it demands of us who have broken it. He must suffer the full wrath of his father. He must be punished as a sinner. He must die. In order to be a sacrifice for the violations of the law, in order to die, he has to become a man. So the Messiah has to be a man. But if he's only a man, it's not good enough. If he's only a man, then he could only be a substitute for one other person. And he would have to stay in hell for eternity because the wages of sin is death. So we need more than just a perfect man. We need a man who can make himself a sacrifice and substitute for all of humanity. And who can overcome death, who can actually finish in eternal punishment by 3 o'clock on Good Friday, and pronounce that it is finished, and then rise from the dead victorious, and then, as a man, ascend into heaven in order to elevate our nature and to open up the whole thing for us.

What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he? This is the most significant question that has ever been asked. It's way better than Socrates running around Athens bothering everyone with questions about what is justice and what is truth. Here is a question that the Bible actually addresses directly and the contemplation of which gives ongoing reward. Here is the heart of our faith. What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he? He's the son of David. Well, how is it then that he is also God himself, the creator?

✠ In Jesus' name. Amen. ✠