

Focus on Matthew 22:34–46

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” Patrick Gray

No surviving Jewish texts from antiquity read Psalm 110 as a messianic prophecy. Matthew and others in the early church allowed their experience of Jesus to shape their reading of the Scriptures. They did not allow their reading of the Scriptures to define or limit Jesus in his role as the Christ. Jewish expectations in the first century about the identity and character of the Messiah were far from uniform. Christian hopes centered on Jesus were not shared by all Jews, but nevertheless comprised a vital component of this diverse milieu.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Tim Beach-Verhey

God’s purposes are larger than any single people. The Messiah’s mission transcends the salvation of any particular group. Those who follow the Messiah must subordinate all particular interests, identities, and purposes to the Savior’s universal mission. Jesus refuses to identify love of God with rigid religious requirements or to identify faithfulness to himself with loyalty to a particular community of people. As he approaches the cross, Jesus makes clear what it means to love God and be a follower of the Messiah: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,” Earl F. Palmer

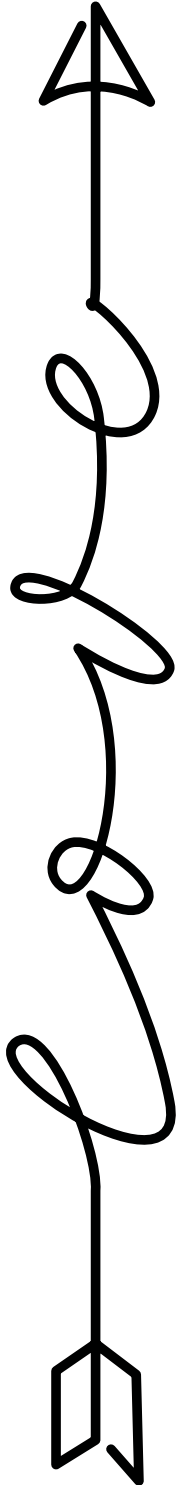
I think it is important for us as interpreters of this Monday event to see these encounters as a deepening journey. The lawyer may or may not be sincere in his question, but what has happened is that what he asks is near to the center of what really matters in life. My own experience as a Christian disciple and pastor is that if we wait it out with those in our lives who have questions on their minds, and then take each question in turn and do our best to say some one or two things in response, then sooner or later even the questions themselves get better, deeper, and more significant.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”
Allen Hilton

In his answer to the Pharisees’ question, Jesus gives two separate commands: the “greatest,” to love God; and the “second,” to love neighbor. Although he says the second is “like” the first, Jesus does not collapse the two, as if love of God *equals* love of neighbor. We probably should not collapse them either. “What is it to love God whole-lifedly?” One Ignatian author has hoped to be “seized so completely by the love of God that all the desires of my heart and all the actions, affections, thoughts and decisions which flow from them are directed to God.” How would one obey a command to “be seized”?

Jesus the Good Rabbi



The church has often made the mistake of separating Jesus from his very real Jewish roots. Old Testament “law” is frequently contrasted with New Testament “grace”—as if the Old Testament knows nothing of grace and the New Testament conveys nothing of law. The exceptions to that misapplied standard are not only legion, they are dispelled in the very ministry of Jesus. Consider his answer to the inquisitive (or it is inquisitorial?) Pharisee in today’s passage. Good rabbi that Jesus is, he quotes the Torah for revealing his take on the greatest commandment(s).

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4–5, sometimes called the Shema (from the Hebrew word meaning “to hear” or “to listen”).

The Shema was (and is) integral to Jewish piety, to be prayed twice daily and used in community prayer services. Likely not coincidentally for Jesus’ use here, these verses are immediately followed in Deuteronomy 6:6 with the injunction “Keep these words that I am commanding you.” Jesus’ appeal to this as the primary commandment would have placed him in good stead with the Pharisees and in the whole of Jewish tradition.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus pairs the Shema with yet another quote from the Torah, this from Leviticus 19:18b. In Leviticus, the confession of God as holy (see 19:2) becomes the basis for a complex series of codes aimed at evoking Israel’s holiness as a people. And here in chapter 19, the basis for holy living takes the form of this command to love neighbor.