

# THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

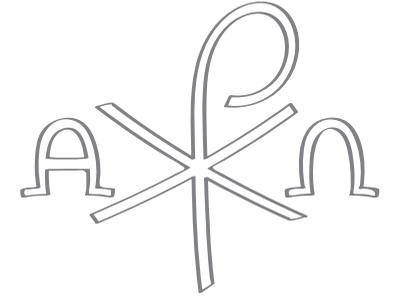
by: Rev. Paul Nus



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## MATTHEW 22:34-46 ESV

### Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused Matthew the tax-collector to write the words of this Gospel around AD 50. Jesus spoke the teaching recorded here on the Monday of Holy Week, after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and His cleansing of the temple (21:1-17).

<sup>34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in The Law?”

- Psalm 2:2 prophesied this “gathering together” of the Pharisees in the vicinity of the Temple court. They saw an opportunity to use Jesus’ popularity against the Sadducees, and determined upon a single question to be put to Him. In the Hebrew Bible the rabbis counted 613 commandments to the Jews from God – 248 positive and 365 negative. Since some seemed to conflict with one another, their teachers argued over which ones should take precedence for a dutiful Jew. Some emphasized circumcision; others the sacrifices; still others the Sabbath laws. Would Jesus side with the Pharisees against the Sadducees?
- If Jesus elevates one of God’s commandments, He would seem to be neglecting all the rest, failing to hold God’s entire Law as highly as He should. In His Sermon on the Mount (5:17-20), Jesus had already asserted that not even the smallest letter or least stroke of a pen can disappear from God’s Law by any means.

<sup>37</sup> And 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. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all The Law and the Prophets.”

- Jesus’ simple and direct answer quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, but His quote does not exactly match any of the Hebrew or Greek Old Testament manuscripts we have today – they say “might” where Jesus says “mind” (Mark’s Gospel includes both words). The sequence surely indicates a “psychology” of man as conceived by God Himself. The very repetition of the word “whole” in each of the three phrases gives it emphasis: God will have no mere part; He permits no small corner to remain closed to Him; He allows no division or subtraction from His Lordship. This “love” is precisely that which Luther uses to explain each of God’s Ten Commandments. Jesus declares that all the other commandments and regulations Moses gave to the Jews must be weighed and gauged by our love for God alone.
- The “likeness” of the second great command extends the full extent of this same love from God through ourselves to every encounter with our fellow man – identified in proximity as our “neighbor”. Everything written in the Hebrew Scriptures to the Jews hangs suspended upon these two commandments; take them away, and the rest fall in a heap, losing purpose, meaning and significance. These two commandments expose our need for The Gospel. The New Testament shows that only those who believe in Jesus and His work on their behalf can fulfill these two commandments to any degree.

<sup>41</sup> Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, <sup>42</sup> saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?”

- The Pharisees’ question sought to advance their own selfish, earthly agenda, but here Jesus sincerely aims to lead His hostile enemies toward the Truth and to save them. In essence this was the same question Jesus had

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- The Pharisees’ question sought to advance their own selfish, earthly agenda, but here Jesus sincerely aims to lead His hostile enemies toward the Truth and to save them. In essence this was the same question Jesus had

already posed to His own band of disciples (16:13-16). When Peter answered correctly, Jesus told him that human power hadn't revealed The Truth to him, but His Father in heaven.

- Multitudes had just thronged about Jesus with palm branches to welcome Him into Jerusalem as "The Son of David". The Pharisees knew that in this question Jesus was confronting them with his own personal identity. Luther sees a natural connection between the Pharisees' question about the greatest commandment and Jesus' question to them about God's greatest human agent on earth (Psalm 110).

**They said to Him, "The Son of David." <sup>43</sup> He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls Him Lord, saying, <sup>44</sup> "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My Right Hand, until I put your enemies under Your feet." <sup>45</sup> If then David calls Him Lord, how is He his son?" <sup>46</sup> And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.**

- David's Psalm 110 is so clear and complete that every believing Jew must at once see and accept it. Even the Christ-denying Jews of modern times recognize Psalm 110 as describing the Messiah. And the pure and mighty love which Jesus has just highlighted in His answer to these Pharisees now moves Him to win even skeptical Jews to faith through the Holy Scriptures. Every Jewish child would readily have responded to Jesus' question with the same answer: "David's". Matthew opened his Gospel by clearly establishing Jesus' legal lineage as David's son.
- David said that *Adonai* ("my Lord") is the one who sits at the right hand of YHWH, whose enemies are made his footstool, who wields the rod of strength from Zion. Note that Psalm 110 and Jesus' quotation not only identify David's son as his Lord, but clearly distinguish *Adonai* from YHWH—Old Testament evidence of distinct Persons within the Godhead. Here One Person speaks to Another. Jesus carefully notes that David spoke "in the Spirit" — a reference to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. No Jew in Jesus' day ever objected when hearing mention of the Father, the Son of God, and the Spirit of God. Here Jesus also underscores the Inspired Divine Authority of Holy Scripture.
- From this phrase in Psalm 110, the Jews took this present imperative durative command and location, "Be sitting at my right," and combined them to produce a Hebrew Messianic title: *Sheblimini* — the Power and

Majesty of God's Right Hand. The One sitting there exercises God's Power and Majesty to the fullest extent. This invitation thus represents the Divine Exaltation of the Christ's human nature. When God's Son, begotten from eternity and co-equal with the Father, assumed our human nature, He communicated all His Divine Attributes to that nature, just as a king who marries a humble maiden makes her a queen by virtue of that marriage.

- Note the way Jesus asks the question: not "How can David's Son be his Lord?" That might seem more logical to modern minds, but the Psalm clearly establishes the Messiah's Lordship over David. But here Jesus asks: "How is He his Son?" This exposes the Pharisees' terrible error: they presumed the Messiah to be merely human: David's son—and only that. Even as they stood Face-to-face with The God-Man Himself, their stubborn unbelief blinded them to His Deity—which David had clearly prophesied in the inspired Words of his Psalm.
- Even as Jesus quotes YHWH's astounding pledge to put His exalted Messiah's enemies (see Psalm 2) under His feet, the obstinate defiance of the men He faces reveals them to be among those very enemies. Into the souls of these Pharisees, The Words of David's Psalm burned, silencing their partisan questions (Romans 3:19). Convicted, they would not yield. This sets the stage for Jesus' terrible woes of the following chapter.
- From The Law question of the Pharisees, Jesus turned to The Gospel that He Himself is—God in human flesh, come to save us. Just a few days after speaking these words Jesus accomplished that salvation through His suffering, death and resurrection. In and from this Son of David we find forgiveness for all those times we have failed to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. St. Paul would later explain: "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by The Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). And so the Spirit teaches David, and David teaches the Pharisees and us, that David's promised Son is also David's Lord.



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