

Thoughts Concerning Christ.

Text: Matt 22:34-46

Suggested Hymns:

113, 311, 16, 166, 621

1) The first question

2) The second question - The promised One

3) The second question - The Christ that came

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 22:34-46, ³⁴ *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.* ³⁵ *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,* ³⁶ *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* ³⁷ *Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* ³⁸ *“This is the first and great commandment.* ³⁹ *“And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”* ⁴⁰ *“On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

⁴¹ *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,* ⁴² *saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?”* *They said to Him, “The Son of David.”* ⁴³ *He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying:”* ⁴⁴ *‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”?’* ⁴⁵ *“If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?”* ⁴⁶ *And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we shall consider the two question in our text. *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* And more importantly the second *“What do you think about the Christ?”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The First Question

Immediately after John baptised Jesus in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit led Him out into the Judean wilderness to be tempted by the devil. That was how Jesus' public ministry began.

Now it is Tuesday of Holy Week, and Jesus' public ministry is rapidly drawing to a close. Once again He has to face three temptations: the question of paying taxes to Caesar, the question of the resurrection of the body, and this question regarding the greatest commandment.

The Pharisees were no doubt delighted to see that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, but they did not hesitate to ask Jesus another question themselves. Their sinful pride blinded them to the fact that Jesus could also silence them just as He had the Sadducees.

When Matthew tells us that the Pharisees were gathered together, in other words, they "took counsel together," he uses exactly the same Greek phrase that we find in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) at Psalm 2:2, where it says, "***The rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed One.***" It is pertinent that only two verses later the psalmist tells us, "***The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.***" Man proposes, but God disposes.

An expert in the Law asked Jesus, "***Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?***" Perhaps it is not immediately clear how this question is designed to test Jesus. Saint Jerome was perceptive enough to see that all of God's commandments are equally great. No matter how insignificant it may appear to us. Whatever God commands is great because He is God.

Thus, if Jesus elevates one commandment above another, He will be exposed as a liberal who does not esteem all of God's law as highly as He should. But in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had already asserted that neither the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pen would by any means disappear from the Law.

Notice that Jesus says much more than merely, "Love God." First of all Jesus calls God "***the Lord,***" a clear reference to the God of the Old Testament, who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. The Lord's mighty acts of deliverance and His clear commandments reveal who He is and what He is like.

Furthermore, Jesus calls him “*your God.*” This implies that a relationship already exists. When Jesus commands us to love the Lord our God, He wants us to respond to the love God has already shown to us.

Although Jesus was asked to single out one commandment, He insists on giving a two-part answer. The first commandment must come first, and the second commandment must come second, but they are equally important.

Jesus answered, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*”³⁸ “*This is the first and great commandment.*”³⁹ “*And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*”⁴⁰ “*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*” What Jesus here joins together let no man tear asunder.

John exhorts us, “*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*”¹⁰ “*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*”¹¹ “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*”¹

2. The Second Question

Thoughts Concerning Christ - The Promised One

Important as the question of the Pharisees was, the question of the Lord is of even higher importance. *What do you think about the Christ?* Why is it important? Because the Lord’s question concerns the Redeemer promised by God to man at the time when the Law became man’s accuser because man had fallen into sin.

It concerns the Messiah, the Christ, whom God Himself had anointed, “*set*” for the purpose of saving man from sin and all of sin’s consequences. God announced this Christ in the Garden of Eden, and God’s revelation from that time on was revealed in an even fuller and clearer form in the Christ of God in whom mankind was to be saved.

It is of utmost importance that we see Jesus Christ and properly think of Him who is God Himself and who reveals God’s thought to man. Man’s thought concerning this Christ determines man’s weal or woe for time and for eternity.

Simeon refers to this fact when, with the Christ-child in his arms, he exclaimed, ***“Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against.”***² This prophecy was fulfilled in Israel. Just so also the lot of all people is determined by their thoughts concerning the Christ.

So this question is also important for us. ***What do you think about the Christ?***

We call attention to the insufficient thoughts of many people, the thought that considers Christ less than what He was promised to be. The opinion which, although good in itself, nevertheless does not give to Christ the honour or the position that God in His promise has given Him.

According to divine promise the Christ was to be the ***“Woman’s Seed,”*** the Redeemer whom the Creator Himself would ***“put,” “set,”*** into a battle that would settle accounts with the Tempter, the Deceiver, who by sin had won over to himself and to destruction, man God’s crown of creation, Adam and Eve.

According to the divine promise this special gift of God to man, Jehovah’s Saviour, was to be most truly one of our human race, Abraham’s son, and yet the Lord in whom Abraham believed, and through faith in whom, Abraham was accounted righteous in the sight of God.

He was to be David’s son and at the same time David’s Lord, the Good Shepherd, by faith in whom David could say: ***“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”***³

The promised Messiah was to be, as Isaiah so clearly prophesied, the ***“Immanuel,”*** that is, ***“God with us,”*** the One whose name would be called ***“Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”***⁴

He was to be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, He ***“Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”*** Such, is the Christ of promise, and into this outline divine prophecy fills in God’s work for the salvation of the human race.

Surely the thoughts of the Pharisees of our lesson cannot be sufficient when they regard Jesus merely as David’s son but not as David’s Lord. No matter how high their thoughts of David or of the house of David may be, as long as those

thoughts remain within the limitations of the human mind, they do not measure up to God's thoughts concerning the Messiah.

As long as those thoughts make the Christ a mere man, they are insufficient, and they do not measure up to God's thoughts concerning Christ as revealed in the promises concerning Him.

May we indeed "*search the Scriptures*" because in them we have eternal life and because they testify of Christ; and we heartily accept, and by faith embrace, the Christ who is revealed there!

Only in the fullness of revelation is Jesus sufficient for our needs. Isaiah chapter 53 sums up the work of Christ. ² *For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.* ³ *He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

⁴ *Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.* ⁵ *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.* ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

3. The Second Question part 2

Thoughts Concerning Christ - The Christ That Came

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He declared Himself to be the long-awaited Messiah, but He did so in the humblest manner, riding upon a donkey. But now, as He puts this question to the Pharisees, He makes the highest claims for Himself as the Messiah.

He will sit not on the throne of David, but at the right hand of God. The Pharisees expected the Messiah to re-establish the golden age of David and Solomon, to cast off the Roman yoke and put an end to the hated tax. But Jesus sees the glory of the Messiah in the fact that He is David's Lord, and that in an act of divine condescension He is willing to become also David's son.

When Matthew tells us *“the Pharisees were gathered together,”* we hear another echo of Psalm 2:2. This ties their question about the law together with Jesus’ question about the Son of David. Jesus is the Lord of the Law because He is also David’s Lord.

Martin Luther made another connection between the two questions. He pointed out that Jesus preached the Law when He answered the question about the greatest commandment, and then He preached the gospel when He declared himself to be the Son of David who was prophesied in Psalm 110.

Furthermore, it is through faith in the Son of David that the Holy Spirit gives us the desire and the strength to love God and to love our neighbour. And it is in the Son of David that we find forgiveness for all those times when we have failed to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And it is in the Son of David that we find forgiveness for all those times we have failed to love our neighbour as ourselves.

When Jesus quotes the Psalms, he is quoting the hymnbook of the Jews. As the liturgy and the hymns are repeated year after year, they embed themselves in the minds and hearts of the worshipers. That is why some of the most effective religious instruction takes place in the Divine Service.

Jesus says that when David wrote his psalms he was *“speaking by the Spirit.”* It is typical of Jesus to mention the inspiration of the Scriptures in passing rather than making a point of it. Jesus simply takes it for granted that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Instead of labouring to establish the authority of Scripture, Jesus simply quotes it.

So when David, speaking by the Spirit, calls Jesus *“Lord,”* we see another illustration of Paul’s teaching, *“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*⁵ So the Holy Spirit teaches David, and David teaches us, that the promised Son of David is also David’s Lord. The mystery of the God-Man is right there in the Old Testament hymnal, the Psalms. And it is in our hymnal too, Hymn 16, *“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed, great David’s greater Son!”*

The Promised One has come. Jesus of Nazareth has been sealed by God, by many signs and wonders,⁶ to be both Christ and Lord. In His teachings and in His life He has revealed Himself as mankind’s great Prophet, Priest, and King.

“What do you think about the Christ?” the Christ of fulfilment? Does He measure up to the Christ of promise?

Jesus of Nazareth claims for Himself that He is the promised **“Son of Man.”** At Caesarea Philippi, on the borders of Judaism and paganism, in the face of the world’s great philosophies, or so-called religions, Jesus asks the question, **“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”**⁷

His disciples tell Him of the insufficient thoughts of men concerning Him, thoughts that were by no means mean or low, but high as far as the thoughts of men concerning mere men may be. Jesus then asked His disciples, **“But who do you say that I am?”** And when Simon Peter had answered, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus tells Peter that the Father in heaven had revealed this great fact to him. Yes, Jesus declared Himself to be the promised Son of Man, the Christ of God.

Did Jesus of Nazareth measure up to the promises concerning the Christ? **“Search the Scriptures,”** read the gospels. Again and again your hearts will burn, as did those of the disciples on that resurrection day, as Jesus opens to us the Scriptures to show us and all people that in Him the Scriptures have been fulfilled. Yes, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega of the Bible.

True, the Pharisees of our lesson did not accept Him as the Christ. Neither did they accept the Christ of promise. Concerning the Christ of promise they permitted their own insufficient thoughts to take the place of the thoughts of God so clearly revealed.

Concerning the Christ of fulfilment they permitted their prejudices to blind their minds, and in their rage they indulged thoughts that were both blasphemous and devilish.

Yes, they straightway accused Jesus of having a demon and of doing His marvellous works of love with the help of the devil. They called Him a glutton and a wine-bibber.⁸ They accused Him of being a perverter of the people, and they delivered Him to the Gentiles to be crucified.⁹ In an ignorance that is almost inconceivable, they **“killed the Prince of Life.”**¹⁰

What do you think about the Christ? Are your thoughts of Christ sufficient, sufficient to save? Are they the thoughts that God Himself has revealed in promise and that Jesus proclaimed and fulfilled?

Psalm 2 concludes with the words, ***Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.***

May our thoughts of Jesus be the thoughts of Peter who said, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***¹¹

And of John, ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”***¹²

And of Paul, ***“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.”***¹³ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 John 4:9-11

² Luke 2:34

³ Psalm 23:4

⁴ Isaiah 9:6

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:3

⁶ John 6:2

⁷ Matthew 16:13

⁸ Matthew 11:18

⁹ Luke 23:2

¹⁰ Acts 3:15

¹¹ Matthew 16:16

¹² John 1:14

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:22-23