
The Greatest Commandment and David's Lord

Matthew 22:34–46 • New International Version

Theme: Loving God and loving our neighbors is the foundation of faithful discipleship. Jesus also reveals that the Messiah is more than David's descendant. He is Lord.

Introduction

We know we are supposed to love God and love our neighbors. Those words sound simple until we consider what they require. Loving God involves our decisions, priorities, and daily habits. Loving our neighbors calls us to show compassion even when people disagree with us, disappoint us, or cannot repay our kindness. In this passage, Jesus brings these responsibilities together and reminds us that religious knowledge must lead to a changed life.

Background

Jesus is in Jerusalem during the final week of His earthly ministry. Religious leaders have questioned His authority, challenged Him about taxes, and tried to discredit His teaching on resurrection. Now an expert in the Law asks Him to identify the greatest commandment. After answering, Jesus asks His own question about the promised Messiah, using Psalm 110 to show that David's descendant is also David's Lord.

Understanding the Passage

Matthew 22:34–36 | The Question

When the Pharisees hear that Jesus has silenced the Sadducees, they gather again. An expert in the Law asks which commandment is greatest. Jewish teachers regularly discussed how the commandments related to one another, so the question itself was meaningful. Matthew tells us, however, that the man intends to test Jesus. Jesus does not allow the man's motives to distract Him from explaining what matters most.

Matthew 22:37–38 | Love God Completely

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, part of Israel's central confession of faith. Heart, soul, and mind together describe the devotion of the whole person. Love for God includes our affections, thoughts, decisions, and actions. This commandment stands first because our relationship with God shapes every other responsibility. Obedience is not a payment for God's love; it is our response to His faithfulness and grace.

Matthew 22:39–40 | Love Your Neighbor

Jesus adds Leviticus 19:18 and commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. The surrounding chapter connects holiness with justice, honesty, and care for vulnerable people. Neighbor-love is therefore practical, not merely sentimental. Jesus says the Law and the Prophets depend upon these two commandments. Love does not cancel God's commands. It shows us their purpose and keeps religious practice from becoming detached from compassion.

Matthew 22:41–42 | The Son of David

Jesus then asks the Pharisees whose son the Messiah is. They answer, correctly, that He is David's son. God promised an enduring royal line through David, and Matthew identifies Jesus with that line from the opening genealogy. But ancestry alone cannot explain the Messiah's identity. Jesus challenges His listeners to recognize a Savior greater than the earthly king they may have expected.

Understanding the Passage (continued)

Matthew 22:43–46 | David's Lord

Quoting Psalm 110:1, Jesus asks why David calls the Messiah Lord if the Messiah is merely his descendant. The image of sitting at God's right hand expresses honor and authority. The early Church understood this psalm in light of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation (Acts 2:34–36). The religious leaders cannot answer Him. Their silence warns us that knowing the right religious words is not the same as receiving Jesus as Lord.

Wesleyan Emphasis

John Wesley understood love for God and neighbor as the heart of Christian holiness. Prevenient grace comes before our response, drawing us toward God. Justifying grace brings forgiveness and reconciliation through faith in Jesus Christ. Sanctifying grace continues to transform us, helping us grow in patience, mercy, and love. The greatest commandment is not a standard we meet in order to earn salvation. It describes the kind of life God's grace is forming within us.

Wesley described Christian perfection primarily as perfect love, not freedom from mistakes or human limitations. Love for God should become visible through love for others. That is why Wesley connected works of piety, including prayer, worship, Scripture, and Holy Communion, with works of mercy, including feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and serving people in need. We grow in grace as we remain close to God and put His love into practice.

Living the Passage

Give God more than a place on your schedule. Loving Him with your whole being means allowing His will to influence how you work, spend, speak, forgive, and make decisions. Faith is not limited to Sunday worship. Our relationship with God should shape every part of ordinary life.

Look for the neighbor in front of you. Love often begins with a particular person: someone who is lonely, a family facing hardship, a visitor who needs welcome, or a person who has been overlooked. Compassion does not require us to agree with every belief or accept harmful behavior. It does require us to recognize each person's dignity and seek their genuine good.

Let grace shape your disagreements. Jesus calls us to speak truthfully without contempt and to hold convictions without treating others as enemies. Listening carefully, showing patience, and setting appropriate boundaries can all be acts of love.

Follow Jesus as Lord, not merely as a teacher. The Pharisees knew important truths about the Messiah, but Jesus challenged them to see more. We also need to ask whether our faith has become familiar without changing our lives. Through Christ, we receive forgiveness; through the Spirit, we are helped to keep growing.

Discussion Questions

1. What competes with wholehearted love for God in our everyday lives?
2. How does love help us understand the purpose of God's commandments?
3. Who is a neighbor we may be overlooking, and how could we show practical care?
4. How can we show love while also telling the truth and maintaining healthy boundaries?
5. How does Wesley's teaching on grace keep us from treating love as something we must earn?
6. What difference does it make to confess Jesus as Lord instead of simply admiring His teaching?
7. How can our congregation better reflect love for God and neighbor?

Takeaway: We cannot claim to give God our whole hearts while refusing to make room in those hearts for the people He loves.