

Rev. Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**Matthew 22:34-40 | Testing Jesus: Theology**  
Sunday September 21, 2025

**WELCOME:**

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

**REVIEW:**

We continue our verse-by-verse exposition of Matthew's Gospel.

We find ourselves in the last week of Jesus' life—Passover week.

On Monday, Jesus arrives proclaiming that He is their king.

On Tuesday, Jesus cleanses the Temple, proclaiming He is their High Priest.

On Wednesday, Jesus curses a fig tree, proclaiming He is their prophet.

It's still Wednesday—a long day for Jesus as He teaches in the Temple all day.

We've studied the three parables that Jesus taught, and now Jesus is responding to three questions from the religious leaders.

But these are not just questions—but tests/traps.

Why is Jesus being tested?

Because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Just as Yahweh God commanded the Israelites to examine their own personal Passover lambs to ensure they had no flaws, spots, or blemishes for the Passover feast, Jesus must also be examined.

His examiners are Israel's religious leaders.

The first test had to do with money. The second had to do with the resurrection.

~~Last Sunday~~, we saw the Sadducees pose a ridiculous riddle regarding the levirate law.

The levirate law said that if a woman lost her husband, his unmarried brother was next in line to marry her—provide for her and give her children.

### **LW KEYPOINT:**

*The Sadducees' question about marriage in Heaven assumes that the afterlife is just like this life.*

That's a grave mistake that we make today.

Why do we think it? Is it because we spend too much time in the world—watching the news, scrolling through our social media feeds, watching Wheel of Misfortune night after night?

Heaven can't be like this life! It's impossible for two reasons:

1. It's where Christ dwells
2. There's no sin.

### **LW KEYPOINT**

*Marriage is a beautiful and divinely ordained institution but it is an earthly and temporal one as well.*

Jesus taught that the only marriage in Heaven will be His. He is the groom and we, as His Church, are His bride.

The Sadducees didn't recognize any of this. Why? They handled the Holy carelessly.

**LW KEYPOINT**

*Jesus rebukes the careless reading of His Word.*

The Sadducees took the law of God and made a mockery out of it—they made the Bible about themselves.

The Sadducees thought they knew the Scriptures.

**LW KEYPOINT**

*When people don't know the Scriptures, they can't know the power of God, and when they don't know the power of God, they don't know God Himself.*

When we don't know God Himself expressed through His Word—we don't know how to worship, treat others, handle money, sex, marriage, or what bathroom to use.

We want to know both the Scriptures and the power of God, which is why we read the Word of God from cover to cover over and over.

We want to experience God, and that's why we participate in Bible studies.

We want to <sup>know</sup> experience God, and that's why our friends, fellowship, and church family revolve around the Kingdom of God.

Lastly, Jesus taught that the power of God leads to the resurrection.

**LW KEYPOINT**

*The Lord does not resuscitate; He resurrects.*

This is not our best life now. We don't have the capacity to think about how incredibly different things will be in Heaven.

We don't need to fear death—but we can anticipate it with great hope.

*Psalm 42:2—I thirst for God, the Living God—when can I stand before God?!”*

That’s all, a review from last week, which was the second test.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Today, we study the third test by the religious leaders.

Today’s test deals with theology and is one of the most familiar passages found in the Gospels.

It’s about love—loving God and loving others.

That’s easy to do! Everybody loves love!

Countless songs have been sung about love.

Whitney Houston, “I will always love you.”

Countless poems, plays, and novels have been written about love.

Think Romeo and Juliet!

Countless TV shows and movies are produced about love.

Think Casablanca or The Notebook.

Everybody loves love.

But do we truly know what it means to love—from a Biblical framework

Do we love as Jesus loves?

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God’s Word.\**



**SCRIPTURE:**

**Matthew 22:34**— When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together.

**Matthew 22:35**— And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him:

**Matthew 22:36**— "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"

**Matthew 22:37**— He said to him, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

**Matthew 22:38**— This is the greatest and most important command.

**Matthew 22:39**— The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

**Matthew 22:40**— All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

*These are the holy words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, infallible, sufficient, and efficacious Word of Almighty God.*

**PRAY:**

*Give thanks to the God of gods. His faithful love endures forever. (Psalm 136:2)*

**EXEGESIS:**

**Matthew 22:34**— When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together.

~~Big picture.~~ *Review*

Test #1—Pharisees/ political— God vs. Caesar.

*Give, ~~then~~, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* (Matt. 22:21)

Test #2—Sadducees/a matter of life or death— resurrection.

*He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* (Matt 22:32)

So Jesus passes these tests with such ease!

Both times, the crowds were amazed and astonished by Jesus' answers.

Now, it's like the Pharisees are asking one another, "What are we going to do?"

Rather than embarrassing Jesus, they are only embarrassing themselves.

The more questions they ask Jesus, the more the crowds are amazed by Him.

Tragically, they're not even listening to Jesus' answers.

This moment reminds me of watching the debates with Charlie Kirk.

The Pharisees may not know exactly what to do—but they're not ready to give up.

**Matthew 22:34**— When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees,

Silenced is the Greek verb *phimoō*, which literally means to muzzle/gag.

Demons—

**Mark 1:23**—Just then a man with an unclean spirit was in their synagogue. He cried out,

**Mark 1:24**—"What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

**Mark 1:25**—Jesus rebuked him saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

Nature—

*You know the story.*  
**Mark 4:39**—He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. *Muzzled Nature*

It points us back to God's power from last week.

Because God created the cosmos, He can certainly control the cosmos—see Job 38.

When Jesus silences the religious leaders, they have nothing else to say.

**Matthew 22:34**—When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together.

Their plans are failing.

They are getting desperate, and desperate people do desperate things.

They are highly irritated that Jesus can answer their questions so easily.

They are angry that Jesus continues to make them look like fools—*so they came together. — And by doing so, they fulfil prophecy.*

**Psalm 2:1**—Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

**Psalm 2:2**—The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his Anointed One:

Who is the Anointed One? Jesus as the Messiah = Anointed One.

**Psalm 2:3**—"Let's tear off their chains and throw their ropes off of us."

Really? That's your plan? To live apart from Almighty God.



That's such an arrogant statement!

Nostalgia

**Psalm 2:4**—The one enthroned in heaven laughs the Lord ridicules them.

**Psalm 2:5**—Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath:

**Psalm 2:6**—"I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."

→ Jerusalem

**Psalm 2:7**—I will declare the Lord's decree. He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

**Psalm 2:8**—Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession.

**Psalm 2:9**—You will break them with an iron scepter; you will shatter them like pottery."

In other words, repent.

**Psalm 2:10**—So now, kings, be wise; receive instruction, you judges of the earth.

The Pharisees are earthly judges.

**Psalm 2:11**—Serve the Lord with reverential awe and rejoice with trembling.

**Psalm 2:12**—Pay homage to the Son or he will be angry and you will perish in your rebellion, for his anger may ignite at any moment. All who take refuge in him are happy.



~~Read~~ In other words,

These Pharisees should not gather together and get into their unholy huddles to conspire against God's Son.

They should hit the ground begging for mercy—but they refuse.

Regardless, here's what comes from their little meeting.

Other bibles provide more context.

**Luke 20:38**—He is not the God of the dead but of the living, because all are living to him."

**Luke 20:39**—Some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well."

Scribes are part of the Pharisees, and the Pharisees are excited that Jesus answered that question!

The Pharisees are also glad that Jesus embarrassed the Sadducees.

It seems that one of those same Pharisees asked Jesus the third and final test question.

**Mark 12:28**—One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, "Which command is the most important of all?"

**Matthew 22:35**—And one of them, an expert in the law,

An expert in the law = a lawyer.

Mark's Gospel calls him a scribe—so he's both.

It's interesting because Matthew goes out of his way not to call him a Scribe, but an expert in the law.

In other words, not all Scribes are the same.

If anyone would be a match for Jesus, they thought, this man would be.

He graduated from the seminary at the top of his class.

He has won academic awards—he's successful, respected, and even good-looking!

So this is like Chief Justice John G. Roberts from the Supreme Court asking Jesus a question.

**Matthew 22:35**— asked a question to test him:

Test is the Greek verb *peirázō*.

This is a specific question to trap Jesus.

That same Greek verb is used at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*  
(Mt. 4:1)

**Matthew 22:36**— "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"

Something seems different about this man.

The tone of his question is different.

I know that Jesus is incredibly harsh on the Pharisees—but we don't want to paint with too broad a stroke here.

Most Pharisees were hypocrites, but not all —Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

He asks his question in a matter-of-fact way.

He didn't spend time flattering Jesus as the others did before.

The question itself is different—it has more validity.

It's more important than the others.

The first question was political—God, Ceaser, Taxes.

The second question was filled with ridicule and contempt about the resurrection.

This third question is legitimate, as if he really does want to know the answer.

It's not a new question; the scribes have been debating it for centuries.

Nothing could be more important between two rabbis!

*What is the most important thing God wants us to do?*

The question had been asked countless times in their rabbinical school.

It reminds me of some classes in seminary.

Or when pastors get together.

***“Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?”***

In other words, *what is the greatest commandment of Moses?*

Now remember, no one is greater than Moses.

And if the Pharisees can get Jesus to answer this question apart from Moses—they win.

*Background.*

God not only gave Moses the Ten Commandments, but also gave Moses civil and ceremonial laws as well.

As you read through the first five books of the Bible—The Pentateuch—there are 603 additional commands.

Not only did the rabbis count them, but they also divided them into categories.

They divided those 613 laws into two groups: positive and negative.

They came up with 248 positive laws and 365 negative laws.

They spent hours debating which commandments go where.

And they kept asking—which one is the most important?

One rabbi quoted Proverbs 3:6 as the heart of the Law: ***“In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”***

Another rabbi quoted Habakkuk 2:4: ***“The righteous shall live by his faith.”***

Now, because Jesus is a rabbi, they assumed that Jesus did the same thing—ordering, categorizing, and cataloging all 613 commands.

Now, we do see God prioritizing some laws over others—think about the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are called the moral law.

In other words, those laws are timeless and apply to everyone. *anywhere*

The other 600 laws included civil (how Israel was governed) and ceremonial (sacrifices/worship).



So it's a legitimate practice to prioritize some laws over others.

*Example:*

Obviously, committing murder is much more wicked than wearing clothes made of both wool and linen.

Even Jesus recognized a hierarchy of laws;

**Matthew 5:19**—whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

So how does Jesus answer this legitimate but baited question?

**Matthew 22:36**—“Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?”

Because it's legitimate, Jesus answers it with excitement.

**Matthew 22:37**—He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Jesus answers without hesitation—that's interesting.

With the two previous questions, Jesus refused to answer directly.

Instead, he answered those questions with other questions.

He doesn't do that here. This is why I think the Scribe's tone was different.

Big Picture—Jesus' answer is brilliant.

Notice how Jesus answer is bolded in verse 37.

Answer by quoting

Jesus quotes the most familiar, most quoted, and most copied Scripture passages in all Judaism.

This passage is called the *Shema*—meaning “to hear.”

As the Apostles’ Creed is a creed of Christianity, the *Shema* was “the creed of Judaism.”

The Jews recited the *Shema* every day twice a day—morning and evening.

The synagogue service began with this passage.

It hung upon the doors of people’s homes—just like we have Scripture passages hanging on our own walls.

In addition, some Jews wore a small leather box on their head or arm, known as a phylactery.

Inside that box was this passage.

So everybody knew the *Shema*.

**Deuteronomy 6:4**—“Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

**Deuteronomy 6:5**—Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

**Deuteronomy 6:6**—These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart.

In other words, the greatest command is the one that the Jews recited multiple times per day.

Aren’t you glad Jesus didn’t organize all 613 commands?

**Matthew 22:37**— He said to him, "**Love the Lord your God**

Notice what Jesus didn't say—to serve or to obey or to fear God, but to love him.

*Aheb* is the Hebrew verb.

Refers to an act of the mind and will.

It's equivalent to the Greek verb *agapaō* — agape.

*Agape love* is different from all other forms of love.

*Storge* is an affectionate love for your family or a spouse.

*Eros* is passionate love (*eros* = *erotic*).

*Phileo* —brotherly love, a close friendship.

*Agape* is the most powerful type of love on the planet.

It's the most powerful because it demands sacrifice.

*Agape* is sacrificial love.

*Agape* love is more than a feeling—it is an act of the will.

### **KEYPOINT 1:**

It's a conscious and willful decision to love God regardless of feelings or circumstances.

*Agape* love trumps our emotions—there is a cost attached to it.

*Aheb* and *agape* type love primarily include dedication, commitment, and loyalty.

**Matthew 22:37**— ...with all your heart,

The heart refers to the very core of who you are.

The heart represents core values and commitments.

**Proverbs 4:23**—Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.

**Proverbs 27:19**—As water reflects the face, so the heart reflects the person.

**Matthew 5:8**—Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Purity is a very special component of love.

Have you ever put bad fuel in your car?

The same things happen when we mix the world's thoughts and ways into God's ways.

**Matthew 22:37**— ...with all your soul,

Think emotion.

The Greek noun, *psyché*, refers to emotional activity;

When Mary, the Lord's mother, was visiting her aunt Elizabeth, she proclaimed!

**Luke 1:46**—My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

It's the same word Jesus used when He cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane the night He was arrested:



**Matthew 26:38 LSB**—“My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death;

We are to love God with our emotions.

**Matthew 22:37**— and with all your mind.

The mind refers to our thoughts and plans.

It involves intent, attitudes, and motives.

**Ephesians 4:17**—Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts.

**Ephesians 4:18**—They are darkened in their <sup>minds</sup>understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.

We are to love God with our minds. How?

**Romans 12:2**—Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,

**Matthew 22:37**— He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

Why didn't the Lord jam all these traits together?

“Love God with heart, soul, and mind.”

The key to this command are the “all/whole.”

Jesus says it three times in one breath.

## **KEYPOINT 2:**

God's whole-hearted love must not be answered with a half-hearted measure.

When God loves, he loves the world; when he gives, he gives his Son,  
God doesn't hold back—God gave us everything.

**John 3:16**—For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Because God gave us His everything, we, in turn, are the most grateful people on Earth and give our very lives back to Him.

**Matthew 22:38**— This is the greatest and most important command.

Greatest is the Greek adjective, *me-gas*.

*Megas* refers to the most extensive and expansive type of love.

*Most important* is the Greek adjective, *prōtos*—meaning first.

So a self-sacrificing love for God is the biggest priority in our lives.

**Matthew 22:39**— The second is like it:

Jesus isn't done. He provides a bonus answer—a second command.

What does Jesus mean by 'is like it'?

It means that it is of equal importance.

**Matthew 22:39**— Love your neighbor as yourself.

*spiritual*  
This is the same kind of love that we have for God—*agape*.

It includes our hearts, souls, and minds.

**Matthew 22:39**— Love your neighbor as yourself.

There was a Pharisee who asked the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

The short answer is that your neighbor is anyone you come into contact with.

Your neighbor is the guy across the street who drives you crazy.

Your neighbor is the woman you work with who has radically different political views on everything.

Your neighbor is even someone that you consider your enemy.

**Matthew 22:39**— Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus is not commanding that we love ourselves.

We’ve got no problem doing that.

We’ve got no problem feeding ourselves when hungry or making ourselves comfortable when in pain.

But do we go out of our way to feed others when they're hungry? Helping them when in pain?

Think about “The Good Samaritan” in Luke 10.

Why would Jesus add this second command?

Just as the Pharisees had no genuine love for God, they didn’t really love people either.

Here’s the genius of Jesus’ answer.

**KEYPOINT 3:**

*The command to love God is greater than loving people [yet] loving God cannot be met unless we love people (and vice versa).*

I can love people and not love God, but I cannot love God and dislike my neighbor.

**KEYPOINT 4:**

*If the most important command is to love God and love people then our greatest sin is our failure to love God and love people.*

Although the <sup>Jewish Leaders</sup> Jews recited the *Shema* multiple times every day, they still didn't love God or people.

Their words and prayers were hollow and meaningless—and Jesus called them out on it.

**Matthew 22:40**— All the Law and the Prophets...

That's a phrase for the whole Bible.

**Matthew 22:40**— All the Law and the Prophets depend...

The word “depend” literally means *to hang*.

Think of hanging a picture. What happens if you only use one nail?

But what happens when you use two nails of equal height?

Hanging the picture of love involves two nails: loving God and others.

The command to love God and to love people is linked.

Loving God and loving people is a symbol of the cross.



You can't have one without the other.

As we look to Heaven and love God—and as we look to our right and left to love people, we see the cross.

Who hung on the cross?

The One who loved His Father and His people with all of His heart, and soul, and mind.

**Matthew 22:40**— All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

Those other 611 commands are a summary of these two: *love God and love people*.

These two commandments are the greatest because all others flow from them.

**KEYPOINT 5:**

*Loving God is our greatest longing, and loving people is our greatest calling.*

**APPLICATION:**

We all understand what Jesus is teaching today—*love God and love people*—easier said than done!

We all know it's easier to love an invisible God than people.

**But do we love God for Him being God—or** do we love God only for what He provides?

**Do we love God because:**

- He is unlike us—Holy, Holy, Holy/Different/Other
- He is self-sustaining—He needs no one and no thing.
- He is eternal—*“In the beginning, God.”*
- He is all-powerful—He is the Creator.
- He is a mystery—One in Three and Three in One.
- He is always just—He is the only One who is good.
- He gave us His Word so that we would know Who He truly is.
- He gave us His Son.
- His Son gave us the Spirit.

*Do we love God for being God?*

**Or do we love God’s gifts/blessings *more* than God Himself?**

- Air, clothes, health, food, roof, money, retirement, family.

**What happens when God chooses to test us and start taking those gifts and blessings away?**

- Does our attitude change?
- Do we become less loving? More demanding?
- Do we throw ourselves a pity party?
- Do we instantly think that God doesn’t love us anymore?

We have a sign hanging in our home that says, *“I love you MORE.”*

I’m here to remind you of that—that God loves you more.

How do we know? Look at the blood-stained cross.

Whenever you doubt God’s love for you—run to the cross.

- God has chosen to love you.
- God has chosen to forgive you.
- God has given you a Savior through His own Son.

But that doesn't make life easy—Jesus told us in advance that we would have trouble.

***You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.***” (Jn 16:33)

We sang three songs this morning—the first was *10,000 Reasons*.

Whenever we're tested, tried or become depressed—it's always a good idea to start listing those reasons as a reminder of God's love.

This exercise gets our eyes off ourselves and back onto the Lord.

The second song was *Holy Forever*.

Listing ten thousand reasons should drive us to our knees in worship and thanksgiving—because God is *Holy Forever*.

Lastly, we sang *Good Good Father*.

*“(Agape) Love so undeniable I can hardly speak. Peace so unexplainable I can hardly think. As you call me deeper still—love, love, love.”*

*“You're a good, good Father. It's who you are. And I'm loved by You.”*

If we are to love God with ALL of our Hearts—and ALL of our Souls—and ALL of our minds...then ***what are we holding back?***

That's a great question to ponder this week.

With that kind of love comes a great responsibility—to give it away and to love our neighbors where they are.

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**PRAYER**

**DOXOLOGY**

**BENEDICTION**

“May the Lord bless you and protect you;

May the Lord make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;

May the Lord look with favor on you  
and give you peace.” ’ (Num. 6:24)



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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

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