

“What’s in a Name?”

Matthew 22:34-46

Intro

When we first hear the passage for this morning, it can be real easy to get hung up on the first paragraph. The opening set of verses contains the answer to a question that, more than likely, had been asked and answered and debated and disagreed upon for generations. The question is, “which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus’ answer is what we have come to know as the ‘Summary of the Law’.

It’s real easy to get hung up on that. It’s familiar. It’s comfortable.

Because of this feeling, the second paragraph feels like this disconnected add on.

This morning, I’m going to try and shift the focus from the familiar and comfortable, to a conversation that Jesus initiates but no one is able to speak to. The question that Jesus’ raises, at least initially, is about the lineage of the Messiah that is to come. He asks whose son he would be. The Pharisees answer that the Messiah would be of the line of David, and would therefore be considered the ‘son’ of David.

It is at this point that Jesus illumines a very familiar scripture in such a way that the people who heard it spoken of would never be able to understand it in the same way again.

The question that I would like to ask you is, do you consider Jesus your Lord? And if so, what does that mean to you? The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 22:34-46

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ 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.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet” ’?”

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

“What’s in a Name?”

The naming of children has been an interest of people for a long time. As far back as I can remember, there have been those lists that give us the ‘10 Ten Most Popular Names’ for both boys and girls. You head into just about any decent sized bookstore and you’re bound to find a section that gives you all of the children’s names that you, and anyone else, could ever think of.

Amazingly enough, these books seem begin to put letters together in a way that had not even been conceived of just a few short years before (Ines and Saskia anyone? And yes, both those names are in the top 100 list for girls names right now). I did a quickie look this past week and pleased to discover that while Atticus is still the second most popular name or boys (who knew that 'To Kill a Mockingbird' was still that popular?), Theodore has made a huge surge and is up to number 5 (which happens to be the middle name that I was given: go Theodore!).

I know that when Jen and I were thinking about what Austin's name would be prior to his birth, we were very intentional. For example, the reason that Austin is named what he is, is because of Jen's family. Many of us know someone or were even named in such a way so as to remember or honor a descendent.

However, in our case, the name of Austin was chosen not because of it being used as a first name, but because it's Jen's maiden name. Jen has three sisters so despite the fact that there are grandchildren all over the place, none of them carry the family name of Austin, at least until 2005 when the surname was used as a first name. His name has meaning that goes beyond whether or not we like the way the letters sound when they come together.

The name that identifies us should be important to us. It was obvious that this was true in the case of the one who would ultimately be identified as the Messiah. The Pharisees knew their answer right away in regards to Jesus' question of whose son the Messiah was to be: the son of David.

The thing is, this is not the name that Jesus is ultimately interested in.

Instead, he looks to the scriptures, to what we know as Psalm 110, the piece of scripture that was our Psalter reading for this morning, and asks the question, "If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

Just to remind you of how the Psalm by David starts out, "The Lord, says to my Lord". To break it down even further, David is saying is, "God the Father says to my messiah."

The name that Jesus is interested in is 'Lord' because he knows that David is speaking to his Lord, and if the messiah is considered David's Lord, then it is David who follows the messiah and not the other way around.

The Pharisees had it flipped. They thought that the Messiah would answer to David. Jesus points to the scriptures that they know by heart and shows them that they are wrong. The messiah is Lord and if we claim Jesus as our messiah, then we also name Jesus as our Lord.

So what does that mean? What does it mean to call Jesus our Lord?

To call someone your Lord, at least according the Webster's, is to say that such a person has great power and authority; they are a ruler; they are your master.

As Americans we hear that definition, especially the last portion of 'master', and we start to twitch in a not so positive way. As Americans, we have been raised in an environment to respect our leaders, not bow to them. Our forefathers revolted against a king, the king was

supposed to be the master and the people of the colonies said, “um, no. We will speak for ourselves and guide our own future; not be beholden to the one that you would create.” As Americans, the whole concept of having a Lord, of having a Master, is considered horribly inappropriate. Each person is called to be his or her own master. Sure there are some people who seem to hold more sway than others, but ultimately, the person you answer to is the person you see when you look in the mirror. That’s the cultural ethic that we have been raised in.

With that sort of foundation in place, is it any wonder that when we hear the summary of the law of loving God and neighbor that we start to wonder how to do that? After all, if we are at the top of our respective food chain, then how can we love God or our neighbor as ourselves? To do so would mean that they are, at the very least, on par with us, if not greater than us, and that means that we are beholden to someone else, and if we are the supposed master of our own domain, then how is that possible?

To call Jesus your Lord means something. It’s not just a nice sounding adjectival word that we use in a prayer that is offered up when we’re facing dire circumstances: ‘O Dear Lord Jesus’.

Instead, it means that we place Jesus above ourselves and will answer to him because he has spoken for us through the actions in his life, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the grave. As Christians we are called to recognize this reality. As Christians, we are called to bow down and follow where Jesus leads us through the movement of the Holy Spirit. That is the life that we as Christians are called to live. We have been talking about that over the last six weeks in regard to living inside out.

So to follow up on those conversations, how are we doing at that? How are we doing at not only calling Jesus our Lord, but actually living lives that reflect that understanding that Jesus is our Lord? How are we doing?

I think that the honest answer is that the Church, in general, is struggling with it. There are too many examples, especially in our little corner of Christendom, where we have members of churches working incredibly hard to make sure that their congregation survives. Too many activities revolve around holding up the walls of the building and while it is important to make sure that you care for the physical plant that you have been blessed with, if that becomes the priority, as opposed to caring for the people who are both within and beyond the walls, then we are moving in ways that do not reflect Jesus as Lord.

In specific, the classis, the regional group of churches of which we are a part, has presided over the closing of two churches in the last year and a half. There are a few others that seem to be headed that direction both in terms of the financial and people resources that are a part of their community.

There are some people who face that reality and think, ‘how do we get more people in the pews?’ The thought is that more people will be able to pay the bills. That direction reflects a mentality where what is our lord? Our particular church edifice.

But at the end of the day, is that our job? Scripture says, ‘no’. Our job is to follow our Lord (and love God and neighbor). Our Lord is not the church. Our Lord is Jesus Christ. We need to listen

to the whisper of the Holy Spirit and live out the love of God. Again, the church as we think of it is incredibly important...when it is in service to our Lord Jesus Christ. But when the church, or anything else becomes the focus, then things are out of whack.

We, as sinful and fallen creatures, need to understand that we are not the masters of our own domain. I think that there are too many people, both inside and outside of the church who have forgotten that. We have forgotten that Jesus is Lord. We need to stop living as if our wants and desires are the ones that are the most important, that we are the ones who set which rules as being the most important, and begin to remember and/or recognize that it should be our Lord who makes that determination.

As Christians we say that Jesus is our Lord. In the scripture we hear our Lord tell us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. But if we don't remember the meaning that is behind that name of Lord, then we end up saying the right things one morning (say for example, Sunday morning), and doing something completely contrary the next (when we're at work on Monday morning).

To say that Jesus is your Lord means that you take what you hear on these Sunday mornings and put it into practice the other six and a half days, regardless of what the world says the consequences may be.

To say that Jesus is Lord, means that you will trust in him, even when the world says to trust in no one but yourself.

To say that Jesus is your Lord means that you will reach out in love, even after the world declares that you should withdraw in fear.

As Christians we are called to name Jesus as our Lord. There is power and meaning in that name. So what about you? Do you name Jesus as your Lord? Maybe a better way of getting at the true answer to that question is by answering another: does your world know that you name Jesus as your Lord?

We were created to have Jesus as our Lord. Are you ready to bow down, live inside out, and trust in the master?

After Sermon Prayer

Holy Jesus, help us to mold and shape our lives so that we are able to truly and totally call you our Lord. Help us to show this trust by living lives that love God the Father and our neighbor as ourselves. Help us to display this truth by bowing down and following where you lead.