

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-9 God's Greatest Commandment

People wanting to please God might ask, “What is the greatest deed I can do during this life to please God?” Some people asked Jesus this very question. Many wanted to bribe God this way and assure their entry into paradise. This question wrongly assumes there is something we can “do.” The truth is that God is not looking for deeds, but relationship with us. Jesus revealed that God seeks people for a relationship with him based on love.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together again. This time they recruited a lawyer, an expert in the law. They wanted him to test Jesus with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

The Pharisees kept trying to investigate Jesus and his teachings and trap him somehow. Rabbis taught that there were 613 laws for Jews to keep—both ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’. They divided the laws into those that were ‘heavy’ (or great) and those that were ‘light’ (or little). For those who were sincere, keeping the Law became their life’s task. Since some laws were considered more difficult, a person keeping those was considered even holier in the sight of God.

The Pharisee’s simple question received the same kind of reply from Jesus. He said: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22: 34-40).

The answers Jesus gave were already familiar ideas in Judaism. He combined Moses’ command to love God with all your being with the command from Leviticus to love your neighbor as yourself. The emphasis was on love—the Jewish confession that God is one and he is to be loved. Jesus purposely joined the command to love God with the one to love those made in God’s image. Love for neighbors, our fellow human beings, is a natural outgrowth of love for God.

The Pharisees thought they were good at loving God, but Jesus was pointing out that more was required. This same chapter in Leviticus told God’s people to love the foreigner living among them. Moved by love, God delivered Israel while they were foreigners living in Egypt. God desired his people to build relationships with those different from themselves. The Jews were inclined to love only Jews, people like themselves. They needed by their actions to show to others the same love God had shown to them.

While the Pharisees were gathered to test him about the greatest commandment, Jesus asked them, “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” In other words, Christ was asking, “Who is God’s greatest Son, called the Messiah?” The identity of the Messiah was the central question for the entire ministry of Jesus. His question asked who the father of the Messiah is.

The Pharisees gave him their standard incomplete answer. They said, “He is the son of David.” That answer focused on their ‘vision’ of Messiah as a political leader. The reason they rejected Jesus as their Messiah was because he didn’t fit their expectations—their ‘vision’ of him.

Then Jesus asked them further, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, ‘God said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.” If David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” (Matt 22:41-45). He was quoting from Psalm 110. In their culture and time a son would call his father ‘Lord’ out of respect, but a father never called his son ‘Lord.’ That was impossible! Jesus said there was no mistake here, for David had spoken under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. David had seen into the future with a prophet’s eye. He had seen that one of his own sons would be the Messiah, God come in flesh. Therefore David’s son rightly deserved to be called ‘Lord.’ Some argued that the Messiah was just a human descendant of David. Jesus revealed that only a divine son could explain the words which David spoke under the power of the Spirit.

When he asked the Pharisees this question they were finally silent; they had no more questions for him. No one could say a word in reply. And from that day on, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

This story is **important** because it discloses the two greatest commands of God and the truth of Jesus the Messiah, revealed to David centuries before his birth.

The **main truth** of this story is that God’s love and desire for relationship with people motivated him to send Jesus—who demonstrated God’s love through his death.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. How did Jesus answer the lawyer who asked about God’s greatest commandment?
A. [Pause] If you answered that Jesus said, "Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself," you are correct.
2. When Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he,” what did they answer him?
A. [Pause] If you said they answered him only that he was the son of David, focusing on their vision of him as a political leader, you are correct.
3. How did David know that one of his descendants would be the Messiah?
A. [Pause] If you answered that David wrote the Psalms under the power of the Holy Spirit, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After telling it, discuss these questions with your friend, “What are some of the ways that God has demonstrated his love to you personally? How have you shown his love to someone in need?” Share your stories with your friend.