

STATE OF THE CHURCH
Headed Where? Matthew 22:34-40
April 23, 2023

INTRO.: Every year, in January or February, the President of the United States delivers what is called *The State of the Union Message*. This year it was given on February 7th. In the message, the President talks about important issues facing Americans and offers his ideas on solving the nation's problems, including suggestions for new laws and policies. At our annual meeting in January 2022 the membership voted on our first Elder Board. In the Constitution and By-Laws of the church the following is the summary of the roles and responsibilities of the elders: "The Board of Elders are to have oversight of the spiritual needs and direction of the church. They are responsible for the Biblical accuracy of all that is taught and are to provide Biblical vision for the church." There are currently nine men that serve on the Elder Board, and I am grateful for each one of them. We spent several meetings praying, discussing, and looking at the Scriptures for what God would have for the goals of First Baptist Church this year and in the years to come. We have concluded that at the beginning of each year we would like to come to the church with the vision and goals for that year. Currently we have the following two statements:

Mission of the Church: Reaching People for Christ, Building Believers in Christ, Sending Disciples of Christ

Vision of the Church: A Community in Christ, Reaching Our Community for Christ

As we unpack this today we want to answer the question, "*Headed Where?*" To do this we are going to look at Matthew 22:34-40 and begin by reading this passage in unison. As we read it think about God's goals for His followers and His church.

Matthew 22:34-40 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " '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."

The two areas we would like to zero in on are "Loving God" and "Loving Others." Each one of these areas find their foundation in the Old Testament. Many would like to just skip over the Old Testament but you and I cannot fully understand the New Testament without the Old Testament.

LOVING GOD

In verse 34 Matthew mentions two groups of people, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. Both were groups of religious leaders and both groups were trying to trap Jesus and trip Him by asking Him various questions and presenting various situations to get His response. In the verses right before what we just read the Sadducees, who didn't even believe in the resurrection, asked Him about the following scenario: in the OT if a man died without having children his brother must marry the woman. So, if a man had seven brothers and they all died after marrying the same woman, whose wife would she be at the resurrection. Now remember, they didn't even believe in the resurrection. Jesus tells them she wouldn't be anyone's wife because there is no marriage in heaven. What was the response?

Matthew 22:33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

In earlier encounters with the Pharisees Jesus speaks to the crowd in parables: a story with a spiritual meaning and application. There's the parable of the tenants of the land where there were vineyards owned by the landlord. The tenants were supposed to harvest the fruit and the landlord sent his servants to collect the fruit. The tenants beat up and killed the landlord's servants he sent 3 different times. Finally the landlord sent his son believing that surely they wouldn't be so brazen as to kill his son, but they did. So, the landlord came and held them accountable for their actions. Of course, this is a picture of God sending His Son and the Pharisees rejecting Him. So this is their response to Jesus' parable.

Matthew 21:45-46 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. **46** They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

So, the Pharisees hatred and jealousy of Jesus is really beginning to ramp up. In the account we read in unison the Pharisees come up with another scenario to trap Jesus. The Sadducees hadn't succeeded yet, so they thought they would give it another shot. Their thought: "We'll ask Him another question which he can't possibly answer correctly."

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

They had come up with over 600 commandments, most of which they made up themselves. One of these made-up commands or laws we’ll talk about later. With over 600 there is no way Jesus could narrow it down to one, or so they thought. Guess what? Jesus doesn’t even hesitate. Here’s His answer:

‘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.

“*heart:*” the core of our being

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

“*soul:* our emotion

Word Jesus used the night He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

“*mind:*” moving forward with great determination.

This corresponds to “might” in Deuteronomy.

The gospel of Mark adds “might.”

Mark 12:29–30 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

Where did Jesus get this from? It came directly from the Old Testament. It is a passage of Scripture referred to as the “Shema.” This is the Jewish confession of faith.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **5** Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. **6** These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **7** Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. **8** Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. **9** Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

This is something the Israelites took seriously. Tied to loving God was obeying His commands, His Word. This does not mean that we gain entrance into heaven by our good works. It has always been salvation by grace! Yet, one who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ is to have a life marked by obedience to God.

John 14:23–24 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

1 John 2:3–6 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

In the shema they were reminded they needed to teach love for God and the need to obey His commands to their children. We have baby or child dedications often in this fellowship. We take seriously the admonition to “be fruitful and multiply.” These dedications are really dedications of the parents to raise this child in the teachings of the Word of God. When I hear that a couple has a child, I begin to pray for them as they teach and live the Word of God to their child and I pray that the child would come to know and love the Lord Jesus. So, that’s what I did when I heard that Linsey had this precious baby girl.

You want the greatest, most important commandment Jesus says, “Here it is.” Love God with everything you have; go all out! Live with no regrets when it comes to your walk with God. By the way, we can’t do this without first having a relationship with God. We need to recognize our sin, repent or turn from it, and seek God’s forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection, giving our lives to Him. It is giving God ownership of our lives. When we come to faith the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us, providing the power, desire, and strength to obey God and live a life honoring to Him. Jesus doesn’t stop there. He begins with, **LOVE GOD** as the most important commandment but He adds this:

LOVING OTHERS

Not only: “ ‘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. **BUT ALSO: Matthew 22:39-40** And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

So, who is our neighbor? Is it just someone living close by? In Luke 10 we have the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. Jesus is asked by an expert in the law, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” So Jesus, as He so often did, answered the question by asking a question. “What is written in the law? How do you read it?”

The man repeats the Shema:

Luke 10:27 He answered: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Jesus commends the man and says, “Do this and you will live.”

Understand that apart from a relationship with God and thus, having the Holy Spirit in us, none of us can do this. The man really wasn't interested in Jesus' response, he just wanted to feel good about himself, so he asks, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus tells him this parable about the *Good Samaritan*. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, was attacked by robbers. They beat him, took his clothes, and left him half dead. This man was in critical condition. A priest, and then a Levite, both saw him and walked by on the other side of the road. But a Samaritan, (half Jew, half Gentile: hated by many Jews and Gentiles) saw the man, took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, cleaned them out, put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, when he left, he paid the innkeeper to take care of him and told the innkeeper this: “Look after him, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.” Jesus concludes with this question, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

I can almost hear the man chocking on his words: “The one who had mercy on him.” He couldn't even bring himself to say, “The Samaritan.” Jesus' last challenge, “Go and do likewise.” You can almost hear the grumbling and complaints about how ridiculous they thought this was.

Who is the neighbor? Anyone we come in contact with, anyone who has a need we can help meet regardless of race, political persuasion, economic status, or even religious belief. Just a little note: as Jesus loves people He never compromised the truth of God's law. How do I know they had this whole idea of neighbor confused? Look at the Jesus' message, part of what is called *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Matthew 5:43-45 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

“You have heard that it was said....” Where did this come from? Who said it? God didn't say it! How do I know that? Look at the OLD TESTAMENT!! Can't fully understand and appreciate the New Testament without the Old Testament!! Did I say that before? Next week we will dive back into our series, *Chasing the Wind*, from the book of Ecclesiastes, which is part of the Old Testament.

Leviticus 19:18 “ ‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:34 The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

NOTE: loving and agreeing with them are two different things! You and I can love and serve those with whom we disagree. God does not say, “Hate your enemy.”

Back to Matthew 5, what does Jesus say we are to do with those who are enemies?

“Love (present tense command) your enemies and pray (present tense command) for those who persecute (present tense participle).” Matthew 5:44

“Love and keep on loving and pray for and keep on praying for those who are persecuting you and who keep persecuting you!!”

This is quite a command! It is absolutely impossible without God’s strength and power. I much more enjoy loving those who love me. Don’t you? Let’s be honest!! What does Jesus say about that?

Matthew 5:46–47 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Tax collectors were thieves, they collected more taxes than required by the law and kept whatever was extra. Pagans were those who didn’t worship God, unbelievers. So, if you and I only love those who love us we’re no different than those who don’t know God. Why would anybody want to come to Jesus if we’re no different? I was listening to a message this week and was once again challenged by this question, “Would our community notice if our church went out of business? Would our church be missed?” If each of us, individually are loving others, and the church as a whole are loving others there should be an impact on our community. When it comes to the use of these facilities we try to say yes as often as possible: voting booth, blood mobile, and many other things. Some we can’t say yes to because of what the Scriptures have to say.

As elders we want to zero in on **LOVING GOD** and **LOVING OTHERS** in our preaching and teaching. Each year we would like to emphasize one theme from each of these two areas as we continue to systematically and exegetically preach the Word of God. This year our emphasis under the heading of **LOVING GOD** is:

LOVING GOD: PRAYER

We have been doing some of this with the prayer Walk and we will be planning other events as well to encourage prayer. We will continue to teach about prayer. This morning I want to highlight just a few thoughts about prayer.

*Why should I pray?

Because God command us to, but also because of who He is and who we are. Without Him we have no power to do what is right and what should be done.

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

“*I, I am:*” this is for emphasis, Jesus and Jesus alone

“*remains:*” to abide, to walk with, ongoing relationship

“*he will bear much fruit:*” present tense, a life of fruitfulness, the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23.

Galatians 5:22–23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

“*apart from me you can do nothing:*” “can:” present tense; “do:” present tense

*When to pray:

Jesus told a parable about needing to be persistent in prayer and the account begins with this:

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

When should we pray? *We should always pray* (present tense) and *not give up* (present tense: be discouraged or lose enthusiasm)

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

These are all present tense commands!! Keep on praying!! Being joyful, praying continually, and giving thanks in all circumstances are connected. They affect each other.

*What should I pray about?

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

“do not be anxious about anything:” present tense command)

How can I possibly do that? You have no idea what I’m going through. Maybe not, but God does.

“but in everything:” how many exceptions? None, zero, nada!!

ILLUS. Was listening to a message from Charles Stanley’s son about what he learned from his father. His Dad always told them to pray about decisions. When he would come to his Dad about what he should do in a certain situation the first response from Charles would be, “Have you prayed about it?”

“present your requests to God:” present tense command (to make known) Even though God knows what is on His children’s hearts, He wants to hear it from them.

LOVING OTHERS: FORGIVENESS

*Why should I forgive?

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

“be:” present tense command

“kind and compassionate:” adjectives

“forgiving:” present participle

“forgave:” past tense (God has forgiven all our sins!)

My forgiveness of others is possible because God has forgiven me of EVERYTHING!!!

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

“forgive:” present tense command

My unforgiveness of others will affect my relationship with God!!

Matthew 6:9–13 “This, then, is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **10** your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’”

“forgiven:” past tense

*When should I forgive?

Peter comes to Jesus with this question:

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Normally, they would forgive a person up to three times. Like my baseball team: three strikes and you’re out. I wonder if Peter thought Jesus would be impressed because he said up to 7 times. This is more than double what was required.

Matthew 18:22 (NASB95) — **22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

What is Jesus communicating? Keep on forgiving. As a word of caution, this doesn’t necessarily mean we keep putting ourselves in the same situation.

With this topic of forgiveness we will be also be looking at anger, accountability, bitterness, hurt, and gossip.

SO WHAT???

I would ask you to pray for the elders as we continue to seek God's direction and wisdom.

How would I say I am doing with Loving God?
(reading & obeying His Word, worship)

How would I say I am doing in Loving Others?

What steps can I take to improve my prayer life?

Who do I need to forgive?