

Silenced by the Truth

22nd Sun. after Pent. / Reformation Sun. – 10/29/23
Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church - Past. Keith Besel
Text: Matthew 22:34-46

v. 41-42, **“Jesus asked [the Pharisees] saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?’”**

Introduction

✘ Though we are celebrating Reformation Sunday today, I have chosen to do so this year without the use of our traditional Reformation texts from Scripture. Why? Well, I realized that because we co-opt the Sunday closest to Reformation Day, which is October 31st, as the day to celebrate that wonderful event where God began to “reform” and bring His corrupted church back to His pure and saving Word in 1517, we unfortunately miss out on the equally wonderful texts of Scripture that are assigned to this, the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost. In fact, in my 20 years here at Mt. Calvary, I have not yet preached on this very important interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew, chapter 22.

→ Yet, not to worry, my dear died-in-the-wool Lutherans; I think you might be a bit surprised at how great this Biblical text fits and serves us today on Reformation Sunday.

I. Jesus silences the false Jewish leaders.

✘ The text draws us in to the middle of a contentious interaction, now only one day after Jesus had entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the shouts of the crowds and the children, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Mt. 21:9) On that same day Jesus drove out from the Temple the money-changers and merchants who had converted God’s house into a place of business instead.

→ Now, as He entered the Temple the next day, the chief priests and the elders jumped on Jesus, attacking His authority to do these things. A particular group of Jewish leaders – the Sadducees tried to trip Jesus up with ridiculous questions about marriage after the resurrection of all flesh. But as verse 34 of our text says, Jesus “had silenced” them with the truth.

→ Now, it is another group of leaders – the Pharisees, who consider themselves to be the law makers and law enforcers of God’s church and God’s people, who step up with a question that they intend to use to entrap Jesus, “which is the great commandment in the Law?” (v. 36) You see, the Pharisees had put together 613 so-called “commandments” that they believed could and should all be followed for a person to be in good standing with God. So whichever one Jesus might pick as the “greatest”, they were ready to convict Him as guilty for putting just one above all the rest.

✘ But Jesus silenced them by ignoring their man-made laws and quoting God Himself in Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” as the greatest, and Leviticus 19:18 in our Old Testament Reading, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” as the second. “On these two commandments,” Jesus said, “depend all the Law and the Prophets” (v.40).

→ Yet as great as it must have been to see those braggarts stand there speechless in response to God’s truth in Scripture, Jesus had what He believed to be a far more important question for them to answer; a question upon which these supposed church leaders’ eternal salvation depended. He asked, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?” (v. 42)

→ Without a moment’s hesitation, they answered just as the crowd the day before had shouted at Jesus when He entered Jerusalem, “The son of David”, that is, a human man who would be a

blood descendant of the great King David. To this answer Jesus then wanted to know, if that's the case, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls Him Lord saying, (from Psalm 110:1) 'Yahweh says to my Lord (i.e. the Christ): "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool"?' (v.43-44) I'm guessing you could have heard a feather drop. And just in case they didn't get the significance of the question, Jesus helps out by asking, "If then David calls Him (the Christ) Lord, how is He his son?" (v.45). Jesus showed them that He was actually reigning over King David some 900 or so years before He took on human flesh to stand in front of them that day.

→ Silenced again by the truth. But let's understand: with this truth about Himself as both Son of David, meaning He could trace His physical bloodline back to David and also as Son of God, meaning He is without beginning and end and has a place at the Father's right hand in heaven; Jesus basically set the nails against His own flesh for the crucifixion He would endure only four days later on Good Friday.

- ✘ Still, these men had to face this critical question. If they denied Jesus as the Christ of God in the flesh, they could not be saved! If they believed and confessed that truth, they would be saved. Either way, all that they stood for to that point was proven to be false – eventually to be silenced by Jesus, as the Truth.

II. Luther silenced the false leaders of his day.

- ✘ Fast forward from the year 30 AD with Jesus, to April 18, 1521 where Martin Luther stood before Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and was asked a question that literally meant the difference between being burned at the stake or being saved for eternity by this same Jesus we just saw in today's text.

→ He had been summoned to the Diet (or assembly of leaders) at Worms, Germany. All of his Christian writings were being challenged. "I ask you, Martin – answer candidly and without horns – do you or do you not repudiate your books and errors which they contain?"

→ In answer Luther reportedly said, "Since then your serene majesties and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, plain and unvarnished: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me. Amen." (*Martin Luther*, Eric Metaxas, Viking press, ©2017, pgs. 215-16)

→ With that Charles V rendered his decision against Luther and said, "I declare that I now regret having played so long the proceedings against [Luther] and his false doctrines. I am resolved that I will never again hear him talk...and to act and proceed against him as against a notorious heretic." (*Ibid.* pg.222) With this judgment, the required punishment was to be put to death by burning.

→ But Luther trusted in Christ and His Word of truth alone – for His physical safety, but even more for the safety of His soul and those to whom He had preached and taught. So, just as it was in the Temple in our text, so it was for Luther, always about Jesus and His Divinity and truth.

- ✘ Part of what upset the Pope and the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church so much was what they were calling Martin Luther's "New Theology" where the Gospel of Jesus was taking the central place instead of the Roman Church's emphasis on the Scholastic theology of man and tradition.

→ That became evident in Luther's take on the very thing that the Pharisees asked Jesus in the first part of today's text. With the greatest commandments identified by Jesus, "Love the Lord you God with all your heart..." and "...love your neighbor as yourself" (vv.37, 39) the Catholics traditionally spun this in such a way that it justified loving oneself above one's neighbor and sometimes even above God. But Luther, as he focused on Scripture before the church's teachings, taught that "loving your neighbor" meant loving all men without exception, good or bad, friend or enemy. In fact, Luther claimed that "the road to God began with a repudiation of oneself" and in God's eyes the most important thing is a person's motivation of truly loving his/her fellow man. (*Luther and His Times*, E.G. Schiebert, CPH, ©1950, pgs. 291-92)

→ And as for Jesus' question regarding whose Son He is as the Christ, Luther addressed that with a comparison between the Muslims, who were threatening to take over Europe at that time, and the true Christian understanding of Jesus' natures. He said that the Muslims would say, "You Christians go and make not only two Gods but also – in order to keep the second God from really being God – you make a human being of Him. That makes no sense at all." "I know very well that it makes no sense;" said Luther, "but if sense is to be the deciding factor, we shall not keep any article of our faith. Therefore you should speak like this: Whether it makes sense or does not make sense, at any rate I know that no one can speak so well of God as He Himself. Therefore we should simply follow the Word of God in this matter and not further question how it may be possible." (*What Luther Says*, Ewald Plass, CPH, ©1959, pg.250 #744)

→ Additionally Luther said, "...if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, His side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet He can also readily go up again, or leap out of the scale! But He could not sit on the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death". For God in His own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God." (SD, VIII, 44)

→ Once again the truth of Jesus Christ, spoken this time through Luther silences the falsehood of corrupt human beings, even within the established church of the middle ages.

III. Who/What fills the In Between Today?

✘ But folks, let's not pretend that Satan is still not trying to tear all of mankind away from Jesus in our day right now. He absolutely is by getting so many who claim to believe in Christ to think of Jesus as the one who came to earth as man, lived, died, rose back to life and ascended now to reign in heaven until His final return. That's all well and good, but as for us right here and now in the "in between" time, we too easily believe that He's pretty much left us to our own devices. In fact, that's the way that far too many of us within the Christian Church want it to be – where "my life is all up to me"; up to me to figure out what I want to believe about Jesus and the truth; up to me to be in charge of how I stay "right with God"; up to me to determine why or why not I treat my fellow human beings with love or vengeance, with kindness or with evil, with prejudice or with favoritism.

→ But Jesus is not okay with that corruption and the way that it is allowing false human leaders to guide entire denominations away from the clear words of Scripture and ultimately away from Jesus as the only Lord and Savior of souls!

✘ And so, Jesus still asks you, my dear Christians, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" (v. 42) Because your answer to that question, just as it did with Martin Luther, answers the question for you today, "Where is Jesus right now today – between His ascension and His return on the Last Day?"

- For Luther, Jesus was standing there in front of the Emperor, Charles V at Worms with Luther. He was with Luther when the Pope condemned him and wanted to burn him at the stake. He was reigning on the throne and 100% in control through the likes of Prince Frederick of Germany who spoke up to defend Luther; when Luther was secreted away and taken into safe keeping at the Wartburg Castle so that Luther could translate the Bible into the German language of the common people for the first time in history.
- And Jesus, my dear friends, is right here with you and me this very day – in the midst of every trouble and pain and grief...and joy! He reigns as the Lord of lords and King of kings, entirely in control when you struggle to pay your bills; as you deal with problems as a child, a teenager, a young adult, a parent or grandparent; when you ask, “How am I supposed to know what to do with my life?” “How do I go on as a Christian when the world says the Bible’s teachings are not true or don’t apply now today or are just plain ‘dumb’?” “How do I keep going when my body is falling apart or I’m facing a serious disease or illness or disability?”
- ✘ Jesus is right here with you as the Son of David who gave His real human flesh to be tortured and sacrificed on the cross in your place. He is here as the Son of God who conquered Satan and paid for your sin and overcame death for you. He reigns as your Victor right now with you; holding you in His hand; leading you as your Shepherd; defending you and strengthening you to stand firm in the one holy Christian faith against any and all opposition; guiding your doctors; comforting you in grief; teaching you through His word; using the people around you – pastors, parents and fellow Christians – yes, to correct you when you stray, to punish you when that’s what it takes to teach you the truth – but always with His arms open wide to forgive and love and embrace you as His beloved sheep each and every day into eternity!
- Jesus is the one who promised in John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”; and in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them” and as He ascended in Matthew 28:20, “...behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.
- ✘ Yes, it’s here, in the words and promises of Jesus, with Jesus at our side; it is here that I stand! Here that we stand without fear. For it is here in the face of His truth that everything else is silenced! Amen.