



SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 21, 2024 | PASTOR JONATHAN BARBER

**MESSAGE TITLE:** LOVING CHRIST SUPREME

**MESSAGE SERIES/OCCASION:** VISION SUNDAY 2024

**MESSAGE TEXT:** MATTHEW 22:37

### Matthew 22:34-40

<sup>34</sup>But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. <sup>35</sup>Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, <sup>36</sup>Master, which is the great commandment in the law? <sup>37</sup>**Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.** <sup>38</sup>This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

- How many Christians are defeated?
- How many Christians are hungry and desperate to see a change in their lives in 2024?
- How can we experience true Christ-centeredness daily?
  - Not an outside-in strategy; but an inside-out strategy

**Matthew 15:11** Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

**Matthew 15:15-20** Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. <sup>16</sup>And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? <sup>17</sup>Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? <sup>18</sup>But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. <sup>19</sup>For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: <sup>20</sup>These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

- o While none of us would ever want to identify with the Pharisees of our text this morning, we could really be helped if we would draw some parallels and learn from them.

### **[MATTHEW 22:34-40]**

Background: Pharisees and Sadducees were all about holiness, purity, and victory over evil. But were they successful? No. They didn't really love God; they loved their religiosity and their man-made systems.

Jesus scorched them one chapter later in Matthew 23. He calls them "hypocrites" 8 times!

**Matthew 23:26-27** Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. <sup>27</sup>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

### **[MATTHEW 22:37]**

The Pharisees had documented 613 commandments in the Law, 248 positive and 365 negative. No person could ever hope to know and fully obey all of these commandments. So, to make it easier, the experts

divided the commandments into “heavy” (important) and “light” (unimportant). A person could major on the “heavy commandments” and not worry about the trivial ones.

- **Pharisees**
  - Phariseeism essentially was a lay movement dedicated to obeying the Torah in daily life.
  - **The original Separatists!**
- **Sadducees**
  - The major point of disagreement with the Pharisees was authority. The Sadducees rejected the oral tradition the Pharisees valued so highly, and they continuously battled the Pharisees over matters of interpretation.
  - They were quite conservative religiously.
  - The Sadducees denied such concepts as eternal rewards and punishments and the idea of resurrection. (Holman Bible Atlas)

Pharisees and Sadducees embody that human instinct that continues to this day in so many religious forms. We will sum up their belief system with one word—legalism. While no Christian today wants to be labeled a *legalist*, in the interest of real change, honesty is a must.

**So, why are we speaking about the Pharisees and Sadducees when we are supposed to be looking at Loving Christ Supremely?** Because in our text, it was this group that received Christ’s two-fold command to love. The spirit of this group is alive and well today also, and if we are to love Christ supremely, we will have to address the Pharisaical philosophies in our own lives that we have subtly imbibed.

No amount of law-keeping will eradicate the pull of the flesh.

So how do we find victory? How do we truly experience Christ at the center of our lives? The answer has to be found in how we love. Laws and strong arming the flesh are just not going to work—especially in this digital age.

Consider the possible **motivators** for the Christian life:

- **Discipline**
- **Difficulty**
- **Disapproval**

- **Disappointment**
- **Desire**

All of the above motivators work to a point, and all of them can have their place, but ultimately they are all *selfishly* motivated to some degree.

How about?

- **Devotion**

Why do we spend most of our time and energy inventing ways to keep the devil out, but we spend so little time nurturing what Jesus has put within?

- **Is loving Christ supremely really the answer?**

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