

ONE QUESTION JESUS ANSWERED

April 13, 2025

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Matthew 21:8-11, 22:34-40

8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

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."

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. Jesus enters Jerusalem to great expectation. The Messiah was thought to be the one who would liberate the Israelite people from their captivity (to Rome). The Messiah would expel the foreign armies, restore the Davidic throne, and bring relief to suffering people.
 - a. Does Jesus do this? Why or why not?
 - b. How does the image of Jesus on a donkey contrast with the expectations of a powerful military ruler?
3. The "turmoil" of Palm Sunday spills into the days that follow, as Jesus clashes with religious leaders in Jerusalem. Jesus dispenses with the Sadducees' attempt to play a game of theological hypotheticals (Matthew 22:22-33). Then the Pharisees want Jesus to give them one clear central commandment.

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They may be hoping Jesus will sum up the law as a Pharisee would: “Love the Lord your God with your whole self.” And Jesus does. This was fairly uncontroversial. The more controversial move may be that Jesus doesn’t stop there. He goes on to teach that there is another commandment “like it”--meaning it cannot be separated from the other. The two are different sides of the same coin. Loving God cannot be abstracted from loving neighbors, and love for our very selves. Jesus’ ministry has been all about lifting up marginalized neighbors—sick, poor, hungry, children, women, and “foreign” neighbors—and helping them love themselves as God loves them.

- a. Why might that aspect of the love command be controversial?
 - b. In today’s world, in what ways does “loving God” get separated from loving neighbors, or loving ourselves?
4. Jesus says the “law and prophets” (meaning the rest of scripture) hang on this love command. What does this mean to you? What difference does it make to interpret all of scripture *through* this lens?
5. Holy week (of which Palm Sunday is the “start”) concludes with the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus (called “Good Friday”). The crowds that chanted “Hosanna!” on Palm Sunday change their tune (or they

are a different crowd) and demand his death.

- a. Why might there be support for his capital execution by the Roman authorities?
- b. How does Jesus’ own teaching about the love command—everything must be interpreted through it—transform the meaning of his later death into something that brings hope and healing to all, including us?