Sermon: Heart Soul Mind

New North Church, Hingham

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25 October 2026

Based on **Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18; Matthew 22:34-46**

Today's readings are a jumble of themes and cross references, with a little misdirection thrown in. The first part of the Gospel passage connects with the portion from Leviticus, but then Jesus takes into entirely new territory.

First things first.

The LORD spoke to Moses (and continues to speak to us), saying, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'

Holy does not mean perfect. Rather, it means to be set apart. We are all made in God's image, and that divine spark carries with it an obligation to live in a particular way, and that way is central to the book of Leviticus. Human holiness is found in the distinctiveness of a compassionate and open-hearted lifestyle.

Can holiness be commanded? God gave Moses a list of behaviors which are difficult to control with laws or decrees. How can you legislate against failing to act on your neighbor's behalf? How can you legislate emotions, or outlaw hatred, or the desire for revenge? Each item on God's list depends on the individual's desire to comply.

In the first part of today's Gospel reading, Jesus took two verses – completely out of context – shortened one, put it next to another, and made Scripture out of it.

First, he quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5, which reads: 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul (or your whole *self*), and with all your *might*. The first and greatest commandment except Jesus changed *might* to *mind*.

Then from Leviticus he borrowed the part about loving your neighbor as yourself[1] and called that a commandment *like* the first. Not identical to it, but like it.

By choosing to follow Jesus, we are choosing to follow these commandments.

Reading these two passages together teaches us that openness in our relations with our kin and with our neighbors will help us avoid slander, hypocrisy, deceit, and any number of other sins, and the community as a whole will benefit.

Then, out of the blue, Jesus asked the Pharisees a loaded question: 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?'

Mark and Luke both include shorter versions of this passage, but Matthew offers no context for it. No one knows why he included it here. Best guess is that since it had to go somewhere, why not put it in this larger section of challenges and testing?

In any case, it's here, and we will deal with it.

There is, in the Old Testament, a long tradition of the Davidic Messiah, and of course, it's complicated, given the tumultuous history of Israel and Judah.

First and Second Samuel tell the story of David's accession to the throne, his dynasty and covenant with God, and his last words (2 Samuel 23:1-7). He was explicitly called a messiah, an anointed agent of YHWH, in the same way God anointed Cyrus a few centuries later (1 Samuel 16:1-13).

Tradition says that David wrote the Psalms, which are actually songs meant for singing, and they stress the enduring character of the Davidic dynasty.

Despite his human failings, David was completely devoted to God and was ever mindful that he was only a king because he was favored by God and chosen to rule in place of Saul. David saved Israel and made it into a kingdom.

We can find what is now called the Davidic Covenant in Second Samuel, where:

> Thus says the LORD of hosts:
>
> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors,
> I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body,
> and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I
> will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

This is a proof-text for Christians who know Jesus as both a Son of David (Matthew 1:1-17) and as Messiah (16:16).

Now, in what Jesus said to the Pharisees about David, and after quoting Psalm 110, written by David, according to tradition, we are left to wonder, has Jesus purposely cast doubt on his ancestry to David or is he reinforcing it? Bear in mind that there are plenty of people out to get Jesus at this point in the story. Has he chosen *now* to finally be more careful, or is he being cagey and provocative at the same time?

The LORD gave us the first commandment, saying 'I am the LORD your God...you shall have no other gods besides me' (Deuteronomy 5:6-7).

When you live in a dangerous and messy world, regardless of your historical time or place, acknowledging the first commandment is not just a 'religious' decision…it is in fact a political decision.[2] For ancient Israel, it was a decision against the Assyrians, Babylonians, and all the other surrounding cultures and their many gods. In the first century, it was a decision against the emperor. In the 1930s, it was a decision against the Nazi government.

In our time, it's a decision against the gods of greed. It's a decision against doing harm to your neighbor. It's a decision to do God's will even when it might be unpopular. It's a decision to be holy, compassionate, and open-hearted.

Jesus asked the Pharisees two questions. 'What do you think about the Messiah?' Literally, 'What seems *right* to you concerning the Christ?'

They didn't have time to answer before Jesus asked them, 'Whose son is he?'

They nailed it when they said, 'The son of David,' because that's the tradition they grew up with, that the Messiah would come from the house of David (as Jesus did). But they never got around to telling Jesus what they thought of the Messiah.

This cryptic exchange between Jesus and his enemies implies that there is more to messiahship than just being of Davidic descent. It's something for us to wrestle with, and Matthew's Gospel drops many hints for us to think about.

Jesus also said, 'You must love the LORD your God with your whole heart' and so on, the greatest and first commandment.

But a second is *like* it in importance – love your neighbor as yourself. The ancient rabbis took the neighbor reference to mean a fellow Israelite. In Luke 10, Jesus expanded 'neighbor' to mean anyone who needed help and mercy. We are indeed our brother's keeper. This is the moral order of the world.

If we are to be holy, as God said we shall be, then this is how we should choose to live.

Amen.

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[1] Another way to look at it: 'The non-Jew came before Hillel and Hillel converted him saying, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor, that is the entire Torah, the rest is just commentary, now go and study."' Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath 31a.

[2] Karl Barth, quoted by Patrick D. Miller, *The God You Have: Politics and the First Commandment,* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004, 4.