

Sunday March 26  
Lesson 4: Great Expectations  
Scripture: Matthew 22: 41-46

**Context:**

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “The Life of Faith.” In the first unit, “The Journey to the Cross,” we are reflecting on the season of Lent and examining the lessons in Jesus’ final time with the disciples. We will continue to focus on the gospel of Matthew and Jesus’ words to the various crowds and teachers of the law. Today we look at his response to a group seeking to question his identity. The purpose of today’s lesson will be to examine anew what we believe about Jesus.

The scripture today comes as part of a narrative where the various religious sects come to Jesus with questions and debates. After having a revelation with the Sadducees about resurrection, the Pharisees offer their line of questions. They bring up the question of what is the greatest law. Jesus then offers the Shema: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Jesus goes a step further to add loving one’s neighbor as yourself. This focus is what the law and prophets center on: loving God and loving others.

Jesus decides to take his conversation with the Pharisees a little further. He asks them about the Christ and whose son he will be. In this question, Jesus is pulling from a psalm attributed to King David. Psalm 110:1 states: “The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Here, Jesus is connecting what is presented at the start of the gospel of Matthew with his earthly father Joseph being tied to the Davidic line.

Yet in the same breath, Jesus is also making a point about his mission and his identity. This line is alluded to often in the New Testament more than any other verse in the Old Testament and is echoed in the Apostles’ Creed (“and is seated at the right hand of God.”)<sup>1</sup> Jesus as Lord does not necessarily mean though he comes to hand out punishments and torture those who refuse his rule. When reading Psalm 110:1, one sees a passive role to the king, one who is to sit at God’s right hand until God makes his enemies his footstool.<sup>2</sup> The kingship of Jesus is not about earthly power or subjugating enemies. Instead, something else happens with this king.

Jesus pushes the Pharisees and others even more though. As he brings up this allusion, he also points out the flow in the logic of the Messiah being David’s son. What does it mean to refer to the Messiah as the Son of God, one whom even David must call Lord?<sup>3</sup> Pivoting from last week’s lesson, we begin to see how not even genealogy confers authority and power. The identity of Jesus is rooted in something different and there is a higher power at work. While the gospel of Matthew employs the title “the Son of David” more often than any New Testament writer, for him it must be subordinate to the “Son of God.”<sup>4</sup> This concluding message may

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<sup>1</sup>Hare, Douglas R.A. “Matthew.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 261.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

silence his opponents and yet it also means Jesus will come to an end of his ministry.

### **Application**

I remember this past Christmas scrolling various sites to look for gifts. One of the things to stick out to me was a vendor who had created a wooden ornament tree with the various names for Jesus. They were all there: Prince of Peace, the Messiah, Wonderful Counselor, Son of the Living God, and the list goes on and on. I found myself searching in scripture for each one and being amazed at all the titles we have for Jesus. Some of them are similar, and others give such contrasting images to show the beauty of the Lord of lords who is also the Paschal lamb.

Thinking about names for Jesus also reminds us of how God rarely fits into the nice boxes we like to put God in. We discover as much today when Jesus keeps the Pharisees on their toes, who love to have debates about scriptures and the identity of God. Jesus, in his subtle way, reminds humans of how just when we think we have God figured out, God likes to throw us a nice curve ball.

The purpose of today's lesson is for us to examine anew what we know about Jesus. So before we go any further, I want you to do something. Sit down and write your first memory of hearing about Jesus. It can be anything.

Maybe it is you remember going to the church with your grandparents for the first time and hearing the older preacher talk about the "saving grace of Jesus." Or maybe you saw it on a sign as a teenager with the immortal John 3:16 looming underneath it. Perhaps you're like me where it's hard to remember as you've grown up hearing about Jesus your whole life.

For me, the earliest memory I have of Jesus which I can tangibly remember comes from when our parents would read to us a bible story each night. On the cover of the book was a picture of Jesus, smiling and laughing with children. Both my parents affirmed Jesus loved me and how he would always be there for me.

Fast forward a few years later and I remember having a conversation with someone where we talked about how we see saw Jesus differently. When I pressed them, they said, "Your Jesus is about love and comfort. He wants to push you gently yet loves you deeply." When I asked them what they thought of with Jesus, they responded: "My Jesus wants to come in and turn my life upside down and inside out. He wants to turn tables and upset the status quo." We both mulled on it for a bit and the conversation went on.

Yet the conversation sticks with me because I've realized how Jesus is never one way in our lives. At times, he is like our initial image of him, perhaps a friend or a judge. At other times, he is the Lord, the one who steps on our toes and reminds us he has called us to follow him and only him. And in other places, he is our comfort, the good shepherd who holds us when we cannot walk and who seeks us out when we are lost.

I think for all of us, Jesus can and should be different things in our lives. He is both the shepherd and the judge, the mighty lion and the gentle lamb, the Lord and Savior. Perhaps the danger for us as Christians though is when our Jesus completely looks, thinks, and acts like us. This is when we have made God into our image, and we have lost our salt as disciples.

Every time I read scripture, and especially the gospels, I notice different things about Jesus. God continues to put me in wonder about how far God will go to reach people and speak into our lives. When I teach my students at Huntingdon College, I invite them to hold the gospels in tension with each other and to marvel at the mystery of Jesus in each one of them. While some might be overwhelmed at the discrepancies or how each gospel is so different, I marvel at how our God loves us so much, we are given different perspectives at how Jesus taught, healed, and

loved people in various ways. Jesus was always making people ponder anew at what God could do in their lives. And Jesus does the same with us today, reminding us he is the one who is the Messiah and he comes to both bring comfort and turn our lives upside down.

What is your earliest memory of Jesus? Who taught you about Jesus both by telling you about him and by their actions? Where are places you see Jesus at work in this world? What is your favorite title for Jesus and why? Where are the places Jesus is pushing you to grow as a disciple?

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