

"The Best Lawyer"

Text: Matthew 22:34-46

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you in full, rich measure from our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Recipients of the Lord's goodness,

The general reaction or attitude of our society towards different occupations is a fascinating study. With some occupations our attitude is almost always positive. With others it is generally indifferent, but at times borders on adoring. With still others it can be generally hostile, but occasionally grateful. For the most part, for example, our society loves firemen and soldiers. Plumbers, on the other hand, might not be high on the list of beloved occupations, but your plumber suddenly becomes your very best friend when your sewer backs up a few hours before your party guests begin to arrive. While many inexplicably seem to resent police officers (for whatever reason) you can just bet that that is the first number they will dial when a drug-crazed sociopath breaks into their house at 2:00 a.m.

There's one occupation in particular that falls into the love to hate, hate to love category - lawyers. For some reason the world has always had a thing about lawyers. Societies of all times have considered lawyers to be some sort of necessary evil that they would love to be rid of if only they could. Yet, again, a lawyer becomes my lawyer (and I suddenly love him dearly and can't survive without him) the moment I get into legal trouble. Again, this is anything but new to our times. Shakespeare wrote the classic line already back in his day: *"First thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."*

That sentiment long predates the 17th Century. Already in Jesus' day there was a problem with lawyers, as our text will clearly indicate. What is *not* always so clear to us is that there was more than one lawyer at work in our text. It is on the person and work of this other lawyer that we focus this morning. The text that forms the basis for our meditation is found in Matthew's Gospel, the 22nd Chapter:

ESV **Matthew 22:34-46** *But 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 is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And 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 great and first*

commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." ⁴¹ ¶ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? ⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

This is God's Word. Acknowledging these to be the very words of life and love from our omnipotent God, so we pray: **"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Go back for a minute to that famous Shakespeare quote: *"First thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."* Since the line is almost always quoted out of context, most assume that Shakespeare was not a big fan of lawyers. Context proves just the opposite. The quote is from Henry VI, spoken by a character named Dick the Butcher. He was part of a rebellion led by Jack Cade, an anarchist who wanted to overthrow the king and establish a dystopian, populist regime. He envisioned a world, led by himself, where there is no money and where basic literacy is punishable by hanging. In other words, Shakespeare wasn't criticizing corrupt attorneys. His point was that lawyers are necessary protectors of justice, constitutional order, and individual rights. His point was that by executing them, rebels would remove the single greatest obstacle to their anarchy.

So, as with pretty much every profession, there are good lawyers and bad lawyers. I'm sure you had no trouble identifying the sleazy lawyer in our text – the guy who tried to ensnare Jesus. Did you catch the rather veiled reference to a second lawyer? It was, of course, Jesus himself. Jesus, a lawyer? According to the Apostle John, Jesus certainly fits the basic definition: ***"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."***^{NIV} (1 John 2:1). (The New King James translation has: ***"...And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."***) Jesus is, then, our Advocate, our Attorney, our Lawyer – the One who represents us before the Righteous Judge. How is he defending us? What is his argument? What is his defense? The answer to that

question is the gospel itself. Jesus, the very best lawyer we could ever hope to retain, speaks in the plainest of terms to the Righteous Judge: *"Let these go free. Punish me in their place."* Clearly Jesus is anything but a typical lawyer.

Take another look at the words of our text. These events took place on Monday of Holy Week. The enemies of Jesus, incensed by his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, rallied their forces in an effort to discredit him and destroy his popularity with the people. They were clearly out of their league, but were too proud and stubborn to realize that rather obvious fact. What we see then are legal wranglings designed to trip Jesus up. Do you recall some of their traps? First they asked him by what authority he cast the thieves out of the temple. Obviously they thought this was a no-win question. If Jesus answered, *"By authority of the religious leaders in Jerusalem,"* the Scribes and Pharisees would condemn him for lying, for they considered themselves the religious leaders of that day and they had given him no such authority. If he cited *secular* authority, his enemies would condemn him as an ally of the hated Romans and turn the people against him. If he cited divine authority, they would condemn him to death as a blasphemer.

Jesus countered instead by asking a question of his own: ***"John's baptism-- where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"*** Having discussed it among themselves, his enemies refused to answer. ***"If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'-- we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."*** Though they failed to answer his question, they had the tenacity to try again. The next attempt was to ask him: ***"Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"*** (Matthew 22:21). If Jesus answered yes, the people would turn against him. If he answered no, his enemies could and would arrest him as an insurrectionist and an enemy of Rome. Jesus, of course, disarmed them with his simple, ***"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."***

The Sadducees were not yet ready to accept defeat. The Sadducees, you will recall, denied any resurrection from the dead. They tried to confound Jesus with the story of the marriage of one woman to seven different brothers. The question they believed posed an insurmountable problem and thus put the lie to any idea of a resurrection from the dead: *"Whose wife will she be in heaven, since she had all seven men as husbands while they lived?"* Jesus brushed aside their relatively juvenile trap by pointing out to his enemies that there was no such thing as

marriage in heaven. This, we hear in our text, was where the Sadducees were finally ***"silenced."*** They gave up trying to discredit Jesus. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were going to give it one last try. Their last effort is outlined in our text.

What was their plan? What was the angle they were taking to bring Jesus into disrepute or turn the people against him? Their plan was to engage Jesus in a battle of legal wits with one of their own lawyers. He asked Jesus what was supposed to appear to be a simple, honest question: ***"Which is the great commandment in the law?"***

Sounds simple enough. Where's the danger for Jesus in venturing an opinion? The success of this trap actually depended on the skill of the legal expert sent by the Pharisees. Had Jesus picked any one of the Ten Commandments, the lawyer undoubtedly would have pounced on Jesus regarding the merits of the other nine. You could almost hear his clever arguments: *"So you are saying that taking the Lord's Name in vain is a trivial matter in comparison to the commandment you picked? Would you have our people murder, steal, lie, and dishonor their parents? Why would you pick one as more important than the other, when the same God gave all ten?"* You can readily see how a clever legal expert could have a field day with this, no matter which commandment Jesus picked.

Only Jesus didn't pick just one. He wisely used the summaries of all the commandments from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19: ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... And 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*** The trap of the Pharisees was sprung, and once again Jesus' enemies caught only themselves.

The problem with the Pharisees was that although they were experts in the law, they failed to see the forest for the trees. They failed to recognize the will of God, though they were experts in individual commands. How was such a thing possible? They failed to apply God's Word to themselves.

Time for us to look in our own mirror. Shame on us whenever we fail to make the shift from passive spectator to active participant in any study of God's Word. Our goal, as always, is to recognize that these words are intended for us. That means that we are not supposed to sit in idle, prideful condemnation of those nasty Pharisees (which benefits us not at all) we are supposed to do what they failed to do –

to see our own image in the mirror of the law that Jesus presented. In other words, each one of us is supposed to ask of ourselves, *"How am I doing when it comes to living up to Jesus' summary of God's perfect will for my life here on earth? Am I loving God as I ought? Am I loving my neighbor as Jesus outlined?"* To fail to honestly evaluate our own sin debt when hearing Jesus' words here gives clear indication that we are not immune to the same sorts of things that had spiritually crippled the Pharisees. How hypocritical to condemn the Pharisees for their failure to rightly apply the law to themselves, while we do almost exactly the same thing. In our thoughts, words, and actions we have failed Jesus' perfect standard at every turn. We have almost uniformly loved ourselves more than God and certainly more than our neighbor. This leaves us, of course, in big, spiritual trouble.

That is undoubtedly why our Lawyer, our Advocate, turned the tables at this point in our text and went on the offensive. We, along with the Pharisees, have failed to keep the law; therefore Jesus draws our attention in exactly the opposite direction – to himself as the Christ, the Promised Messiah, the One who alone could and did solve our sin problem.

On the surface, Jesus' question had to do with lineage – a favorite topic of the Jews. There was much more to the question than just that. Jesus was infinitely more than his enemies thought he was. His object was not to confuse his them but to win them - to prove that he was more than just an ordinary human being. He was an eternal Savior from sin and death – David's Lord as well as David's son (that is, a descendant of David's line or family). The question of his enemies had to do with the requirements of the law. Jesus' answer was undoubtedly intended to help them, and us, recognize how the terrible, impossible demands of the law could be met, and the punishment for failure avoided. The Pharisees salved their consciences by pretending that they had kept the law. Obviously they had not, so Jesus offers himself as the one viable alternative. It was and is David's Son and David's Lord who alone argued our case for us in the court of divine justice. His case, his argument, was both simple and unique: *"My clients are guilty. But punish me in their place. Take me. Let these others go free."* This, God the Father agreed to do. He pronounced his Son, our Lawyer, guilty of all sin ever committed, and he pronounced you and me to be innocent of all charges. ***"The Lord has placed on Him the iniquity of us all."*** (Isaiah 53:6)

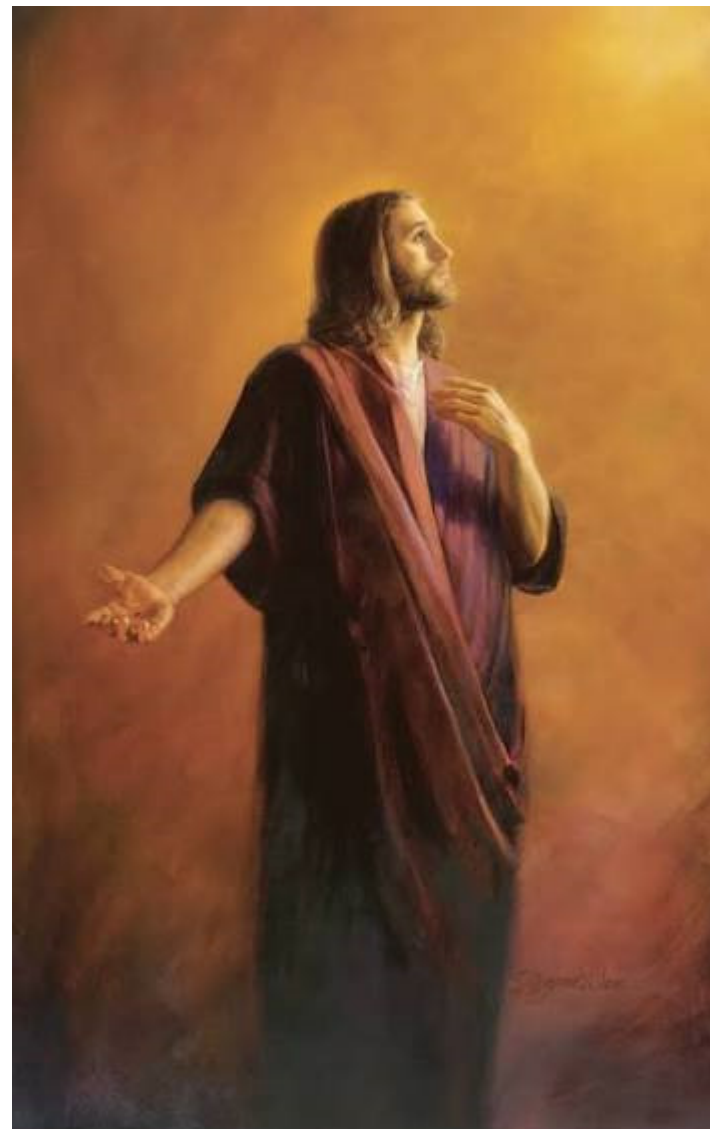
You and I faced a court case we could never hope to win. We were desperate. Our sins condemned us and we had no defense. Our Court-

appointed Lawyer won our case by taking the punishment upon himself. God himself, the Righteous Judge, therefore made an eternal declaration that cannot be appealed or reversed: *"Not guilty! Through faith in Jesus Christ, not guilty!"* Never underestimate either how desperate was your situation, how guilty you truly were, or just how the best Lawyer the world has ever known won your pardon. Amen.

ESV **Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy... ¹⁵ ¶ "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ¹⁷ ¶ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

ESV **1 Thessalonians 2:1-13** For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. ⁹ ¶ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. ¹³ ¶ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

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The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost – October 25, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 632

"Yours Forever, God of Love"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff. (Blue Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18) Hear well these words from the pen of Moses; hear them and allow them to have their desired effect. God here requires perfect obedience, both in our relation to God and in our relation to our neighbor. The requirement God here demands of every single human being is (and ought to be) terrifying for all who do not have Jesus Christ. It is only in fully realizing what was actually required of us that our Savior's value is recognized.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 73 (Hymnal Page 82)

The Second Lesson: (1 Thessalonians 2:1-13) In his missionary journeys Paul routinely diverted attention from himself to his Savior-God. He does so again in this reading, but here he also includes references to himself and to his co-workers as examples of Christian conduct. He then concludes this section with a clear statement on verbal inspiration. We therefore find in this reading a divine summary of how God's children should treat one another – in humble service and Christian love.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 575 (Stanzas 1-3, 6)

"Our God, Our Help in Ages Past"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 22:34-46 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Best Lawyer"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 354 (Stanzas 1-5)

"Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Hymnal page 38)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Hymnal page 41)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 354 (Stanzas 6-7)

"Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time.

A note on Communion: It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is an intimate expression of confessional fellowship based on shared beliefs. We therefore ask those who have not publicly declared their unity of faith with us to first meet with the pastor for the information you would need and want before communing. Please understand that we seek only to follow the Word and will of God and are in no way judging your Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (38) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Frank Gantt has returned the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Pastor Michael Wilke is considering the calls to Gift of God of Mapleton and St. Paul's of Ponsford, MN. Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ. Pastor Paul Krause has accepted the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit, MI.

Church Christmas Flowers – The annual poinsettia order is being prepared. Please see the signup sheet on the mailbox table.

Porch Roofing Project – The last components of the parsonage porch re-roofing project have been added and the project is now complete. Thanks to all who contributed time and treasure.

ILC Visitors Day – Immanuel Lutheran College Visitors Day is scheduled for Friday, November 13th. All high school juniors and seniors are invited to attend. See Pastor Roehl for more information.