Then, Jesus sums it all up saying, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). When Jesus says the laws "hang" on these two commands, he means they function like a door on a hinge or a weight suspended from a hook. Every single rule, statute, and prophetic teaching in the Hebrew Bible points back to or derives its true purpose from loving our God and loving our neighbor. Everything. Not most things and not just the important parts. Everything hangs on this dual-sided commandment. Jesus shows that God's rules are not just a cold checklist of dos and don'ts, but an expression of relational love. Fulfilling God's law requires a heart transformed by love rather than begrudgingly going through rituals. Jesus’ answer does not prioritize the law: it re-centers the life of faith.

When we hear Jesus’ answer we are tempted to hear that and nod along: of course we love God, and of course we love our neighbor (most of them). This commandment fits and feels right. But before we get too comfortable, we need to notice what Jesus has really done. He’s taken the entire weight of the law and placed it on something that cannot be managed: LOVE. Love, not a belief system. Love, not assent to a theological doctrine. Love, not compliance with the law. Love for God and love for neighbor. Period. Love, as Jesus uses it, is not sentiment or the warm feeling you get when things are going well. This love is total devotion; it encompasses your heart, mind, and soul. This love demands our whole life. This command requires we go “all in” in our love for God and neighbor.

Then, just when it seems like Jesus finally gives the Pharisees an answer they can work with, he asks a question of his own. Jesus asks, “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They answer quickly, “The son of David,” which is the right answer, the expected answer based on Old Testament promises that a future king would come from David’s royal line. Jesus challenges their answer asking, “How is it then that David, by the Spirit, calls him Lord…?” (Matthew 22:42-43). Jesus is quoting Psalm 110:1, asking how David, speaking by the Holy Spirit, could call his own descendant "Lord" (*Adonai*).

In ancient Near East culture, a father or ancestor would never address a son or a descendant as "Lord." With his question, Jesus shows that the Messiah is both *human*, the "Son of David" through His earthly lineage, and *divine*, the "Son of God" who existed before David and who holds supreme authority. If David calls him Lord, then the Messiah is not just David’s descendant; he is someone greater. The Pharisees have a category for the Messiah, a neat box into which they think the Messiah fits; but Jesus the Messiah does not fit neatly into their expectations, nor will he stay in the place they assign to him.

The mood in the room shifts again as Jesus exposes the Pharisees’ assumptions. Matthew tells us, “No one was able to give [Jesus] an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46). I’m sure the Pharisees had lots of questions for Jesus. My bet is that they were afraid to ask those questions, fearing Jesus’ answers would test their beliefs and confuse their expectations. This is where the text starts to press on us because we come to Jesus with our own questions, the kind that come from trying to live faithfully in a complicated world. What matters most to God? What does faithfulness look like here and now? How do we navigate this life? What is Jesus calling us to do?

Like the Pharisees, we want answers that fit the framework we already have. We want clarity that confirms our assumptions. We want guidance that leaves our categories intact. We want a Messiah who fits into our lifestyle. Jesus’ answer does not stay allow us that option. Love your God. Love your neighbor. If everything hangs on this, it means we cannot claim to love God while ignoring our neighbor, and we cannot reduce love of neighbor to whatever is easiest, safest, or most comfortable for us. This is real faith that begins in real relationships, making real decisions that affect real lives.

The truth is we can have all the right answers about Jesus and still not know what to do with him. The Pharisees know their Scripture. They know the line of David and the prophecies about the Messiah. But because of their pre-conceived categories, they stand in front of Jesus the Messiah, unable to recognize what does not fit. That is not just their problem; it’s ours, too.

We have our own categories: Jesus as teacher; Jesus as moral example; Jesus as comfort in our distress; Jesus as the One who affirms what we already believe. If Jesus stays in those categories, we are fine; but the moment he steps outside the box, asking something of us we did not anticipate, or refusing to align neatly with our expectations, we go quiet, like the Pharisees. Honestly, a Messiah who fits into our categories is easier to manage than a Lord who does not.

Matthew gives us this strange “no more questions” ending, not because Jesus shut down curiosity, but because he revealed something deeper than curiosity. He revealed that the problem is not a lack of information; it is misplaced control. The Pharisees thought they were evaluating Jesus, sizing him up, figuring him out; but Jesus is the one evaluating them. This is the turn they, and we, do not like because we are more comfortable with a faith where we ask questions. We like a religion where we set the agenda and we decide what matters and what does not. Jesus steps into that fantasy and says, in effect, you are asking

the wrong questions; or maybe more precisely, you are asking them from the wrong place because the greatest commandment is not a concept to be debated but a life to be lived. The Messiah is not a category to be filled; he is the Lord who refuses to fit into our assumptions.

This text does not leave us with neat conclusions. It leaves us with tension. On one hand, everything is clarified. Love God. Love neighbor. Everything hangs here. On the other hand, everything is unsettled. Who is this Messiah, really? Not just in theory, but in practice. Not just in doctrine, but in daily life. The Messiah is not a problem to solve. Who he is to us and for us is the beginning of faith.

The moment we think we have Jesus figured out and fully contained, we've stopped listening; and the moment we stop listening, we stop being changed. The Pharisees stopped asking questions because they feared Jesus' answers, and their faith stopped growing. The danger for us is not that we ask too many questions; it is that we stop asking questions because we've decided we already know the answers. Jesus, in one conversation, refuses to let that happen. He gives an answer that demands our life and asks a question that unsettles our assumptions. Then he leaves us there, not with closure, but with himself; and friends, Jesus is enough.

I think pastor and theology professor Leonard Sweet summarizes this story perfectly when he says that there is a difference between "Jesus, I want you to become part of *my* story," and "Jesus, I want to become part of *your* story." Jesus doesn't come to improve our storyline. Jesus comes to make us a line in His eternal Story. When Jesus becomes part of our story, he's a character. When we become part of His story, he is Lord. "My story + Jesus" is self-help. "His story + me" is the gospel. The gospel isn't Jesus decorating our life story; it's our life being written into God's Never-Ending Story. "Jesus, fit into my life" is religion. "Jesus, rewrite my life into Yours" is gospel.

Prayer: Faithful God, teach us what it truly means to love you with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. Strip away our half-hearted devotion and our surface-level faith and fill us with a loyalty that claims every part of who we are. Lord Jesus, you who are both David's Son and David's Lord, reign not just over history or the scriptures, but over our daily choices. Remind us that we cannot walk this path in our own strength. Pour out your Spirit upon us so that our belief in you overflows into real, humble, active love for the world around us. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Source: Leonard Sweet, Substack Note, January 26, 2026.

When Jesus Won't Stay in His Place

Sunday, November 15, 2026 Matthew 22:34-46
Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

The Pharisees tired of Jesus; tired of not being able to win an argument with Jesus. They took their shots. They tried political traps, trick questions, and public challenges. Each attempt was carefully designed, and each one fell apart. Now the Pharisees regroup. One of them, a lawyer, steps forward with what sounds like a safe question: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" (Matthew 22:36).

This is a good question. A practical question. The kind of question religious people argue about incessantly. The Pharisees are the religious rockstars of their age, strictly adhering to the laws prescribed in Scripture. They add extensive oral traditions and rigid interpretations (such as 39 categories of forbidden labor on the Sabbath) to the written *Torah*, placing heavy spiritual burdens on ordinary people. They are legalistic and judgmental toward those who cannot meet their impossible standards. In the Gospels, they are prideful, they seek public honor, they take the chief seats in synagogues, and they trust their own moral performance rather than God's grace

Jesus frequently clashes with the Pharisees, criticizing them for prioritizing religious ritual and strict rule-following over grace, mercy, and justice. But in all fairness to the lawyer who questions Jesus, when you have 600-plus commandments floating around, you're probably going to start ranking them. You are going to ask which laws matter most? Which laws carry the most weight? Which laws can you not afford to get wrong? The lawyer's question feels like solid ground: he's asking Jesus to interpret the law in the light of the Scripture.

Jesus answers without hesitation: no delay, cryptic parable, no clever wordplay. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Jesus is quoting the *Shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4. This is the daily prayer of faithful Jews which begins, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." You can almost hear the room exhale. Finally, something they recognize and can agree on.

But Jesus does not stop there; he rushes on, almost without taking a breath. "And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:39). Here Jesus does something subtle but deeply unsettling: he answers the question and he expands it. He ties together things the Pharisees usually hold apart: God and neighbor. But for Jesus, love of God and love of neighbor are not two separate tracks: they are one, unified commandment with two inseparable directions.