

You will need: a copy of both **Matthew 22.34-46** and **1 Thessalonians 2.1-8** readings, paper and a pen, a Bible and Bible commentaries.

Pressure on Jesus is unrelenting and, in **Matthew 22.34-46**, a lawyer now poses a question about the commandments. Jesus answers this readily and responds with a further question – that no one can answer.

This is the second of six Bible studies in which we recognise the urgency of the gospel message, reading Matthew's uncompromising words as we approach the celebration of Christ the King.

Bible notes

Jesus' first answer was very familiar to his audience. It is the quote from Deuteronomy 6.4-9 that forms the first part of the Shema, the central prayer from the Jewish prayer book (Siddur) that is said at both morning and evening prayer. They are often the first words of Scripture that a Jewish child will learn, and may be used as a bedtime prayer. His second quote, from Leviticus 19.18, would also have been familiar. It was common for rabbis to debate Scripture and the importance of the commandments, so in one sense this was not an unusual question. The difference with Jesus is that the answer is not legalistic but emphasises love. The Thessalonian reading this week shows us that sharing the gospel is about sharing ourselves in practical love.

The Pharisees hoped to trick him, but Jesus turns the tables by questioning them. Again he refers them back to familiar Scripture (verse 44 quotes Psalm 110.1). It's a classic conundrum – if the Messiah is the son of King David, how can he also be David's Lord, seated at God's right hand? It's the answer of a politician and a teacher; Jesus isn't trapped into saying something that would get him into trouble, and he's making them work it out for themselves.

Make connections

Familiar words can be comforting, anchoring and helpful when teaching. Publishing led to the loss of our oral tradition and new technology is changing our reliance on the written word. Jesus' use of familiar words must have reassured his followers that he spoke with some authority. How do we learn and use familiar words from Christian faith and popular culture?

Today's teaching methods can be traced back to this method of question and answer, dialogue and debate. This passage is like Prime Minister's question time in the British parliament, with different parties trying to catch each other out!

Sometimes Jesus seems to speak in riddles and the answer is not immediately obvious to us, as he is himself interpreting Hebrew Scripture in rich ways, with layers of meaning. How can we use questioning and wondering to help us understand the Christian Bible and make sense of big theological questions such as 'Who is the Messiah?'

Explore

This Matthew passage is great for provoking discussion; just remember, it's OK not to have all the answers!

Divide into pairs or small groups and read the passage together. Make a note of all the questions you have about what the passage means.

After about ten minutes, the leader will collect in the top five questions from your group and then you can discuss the answers together. It is unlikely you will agree about everything, but make sure you understand how everyone reached their answer and why they think that.