**Love the Lord your God with all your being**

October 27, 2013

Mark 12:28-34 / Key verse: 12:29-31, “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ There is no commandment greater than these.’”

If you are asked about what the bible is about in one sentence, how would you answer? The bible consists of 66 books which are 39 Scriptures of Old Testament and 27 Scriptures of New Testament. These 66 books had been written throughout around 1400 years by 40 different authors inspired by God. So the volume of the whole bible is really tremendous and the messages revealed in the bible are really profound. Nevertheless as any book may be summarized for its main theme in one key sentence, so the bible also may be summarized in one sentence. Someone said, “The bible is God’s love letter given to each of us”. I agree with this opinion. Throughout the whole bible, what God really wants to speak to us is this; “I love you.” And this is real. God really loves each of us. Everything that has life whether it is plant or animal not to mention human being wants love and without love they are neither happy nor feel alive. Although a man can have everything in this world but if he has no love, he feels empty after all. It is because the essence of life is love. But the problem is that there is no perfect love in this world. People long and seek for love. But no one can find true perfect love in human beings. To find the true perfect love, we must come to God. In God there is original love. God is the original author of love. The Bible says, “God is love”. God’s love is flawless and perfect. It is divine and unconditional. God’s love leads the level of our life to different dimension; from our physical, conditional, selfish level to holy, unconditional, and divine level. When we have the love of God, we have everything. We don’t need to worry or to be afraid of anything. We live in the paradise in any circumstance. God loves us so much that he gave us the most important commandment so that we can continue to remain in his love. Today’s passage is about this most important commandment; the commandment of love. Let’s learn from today’s passage.

In the last couple of weeks, we had studied the series of debating between the religious leaders and Jesus. All of them came to ask Jesus not with genuine intention but with wicked motive to trap Jesus. But in today’s passage, one of the teachers of the law was different. Look at verse 28. One of the teachers of the law came to Jesus and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” In the Old Testament, there are 613 laws. 248 laws are about what the Israelites should do and 365 laws are about what the Israelites should not do. And above all there are 10 Commandments. So of all the commandments and laws, knowing which was the most important was really important matter to the teachers of the law. To us it is also important to know which is the most important among all the commandments of God since it gives us clear direction for the priority in our lives.

How did Jesus answer? Let’s read together verses 29-31. “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ‘There is no commandment greater than these.’” Jesus’ answer consists of 3 parts.

**I, the Lord our God is one (29)** Here the Lord (LORD) is the English translation of Hebrew “YHWH. The name of God “YHWH” was revealed to Moses when he appeared to him at the burning bush for the first time. (Exo 6:3) “YHWH” means “I AM WHO I AM.” This means that “YHWH” God is Creator God. Creator God is not dependant on anything in order to exist. He exists by himself. This distinguishes God from all human beings and man-made gods or idols. No one can say, “I am who I am,” because we are all born as created beings. And there are no other gods or idols that can say, “I am who I am.” Therefore, the God of Israel; the God whom the Bible tells is only one true Creator God. Another meaning of “YHWH” is Redeemer; the God of salvation and love. “YHWH” God redeemed Israel from their slavery in Egypt. As for Israelites, there was no way for them to be freed from the slavery to Egyptian king Pharaoh. Yet the Lord God revealed his sovereignty and almighty power by liberating Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh. Through the Exodus event, Israelites vividly experienced that there is only one true almighty God who rules the universe and at the same time loves them so much. It is also “YHWH”; our only true Creator God who made the only one way for the salvation of all people on earth through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God-sent only way for our forgiveness of sins and salvation from our sins through his death and resurrection.

We live in time of polytheism believing that there are many gods and many ways for our salvation. This sounds good to our ears because we may have diverse options for our lives. But this is total lie driven by Devil; the father of liar. There is no one except Jesus Christ who paid the price of our sins to forgive our sins and makes us holy and rose again from the dead to make us free from the power of death. The YHWH God is our only Creator God and he is only God who really loves us. Ro 5:8 testifies about this love of God, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. People make and serve their own gods of many kinds. But no matter how different gods they make in their own way whether it is money or pleasure or human love, power or worldly honor, their expectations are same. They want true life, love, satisfaction, happiness and security through them. However, everyone who seeks for those expectations apart from God will fail and feel empty because our God is the only God who gave us our very this life and can give us what we really need with the unconditional and perfect love in Jesus Christ.

**II, Love the Lord your God with all your being (30)**

As we have just studied, “YHWH” God is the God of love. From the creation of all beings to all his redemptive work for fallen sinners through Jesus Christ, there is nowhere that the love of God is not revealed. Since God is God of love, the motive and purpose of all he does is love. God so loved us that he gave us the most important commandment to love him with all our being so that we may continue to remain in his love. As you know, people are bound and ruled by what they love. If a man loves money more than God, he is poisoned by money and his heart and mind are occupied by the thought of money all the time. Likewise, if a man loves the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, his heart and mind are bound and ruled by God and his love. When we are bound and ruled by God and his love, what happens next? There are no rooms for any other idols to come into our heart because our mind and heart are already fully occupied by God and his love. Then gradually we are changed and grow to be like him in his divine loving character.

Then practically how can we love God? First of all, we must accept God’s love first in Jesus Christ. As I mentioned in the beginning part of this message, the main message of the Bible is that God loves each of us so much. 1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Loving God starts when we know the love of God first and accept it from our hearts. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection is the climax of God’s love toward us. When we see Jesus’ death on the cross, what do we see? We call Jesus’ suffering “Passion”. It is the same word when we say about his passionate love toward us. Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross shows his passion of love for you and me; how intensely and unconditionally he loved us. Jesus was silent on the cross but in his heart the intense love was flowing, holding all the pains and sorrows to carry all our sins and curse and shame. What a wonderful and marvellous love this is! This is God’s love; Agape love. When 12 disciples realized and accepted this love, this love changed them to become courageous, Spirit- filled witnesses of Jesus who willingly gave their lives for Jesus just like Jesus gave his life for them. When we really accept the love of God in Christ, the love become the unshakable foundation of love through which we too can love God with all our being no matter what.

Secondly, we must keep our hearts pure. God is invisible. Sometimes we feel like that God is not with us. Like clouds make us not see shiny sun above the cloud, the cloud of life trials and troubles makes us not look at God who is always with us above the trials and troubles. Our real problem is not the clouds outside of me but the clouds inside of me; the clouds in my hearts; anxiety, doubt, fear and the dark cloud of my evil or sinful thought and desire etc. Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Proverbs 4:30 also warns, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” The pureness simply means no mixed-up. When in our hearts there are things that are supposed to be, our hearts are pure hearts. We were originally created in the image of God. So our heart should have godly things which came from God alone. 1John 2:15-16 says about this. “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-comes not from the Father but from the world. To make our heart pure, we must clean up all things in our heart that did not come from God with genuine repentant heart and when our heart is pure, we can see God with the eyes of our heart and love him with our pure heart.

Thirdly God’s love language is obedience. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” And in John 14:21, Jesus said again, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” The best example of obedience is our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ prayed earnestly at the garden of Gethsemane to obey the will of God even though he knew the obedience meant his death. About this, Hebrew 5:8 says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. Here we learn that obedience is not naturally easy because we have our own human nature and sinful nature. Obedience to God is what we must learn through enduring suffering. When we practice obedience one by one, our spiritual muscle grows and it becomes stronger and stronger. Later we can obey more and better. When we obey his command, it must be done with all our being; our heart, soul, mind, and strength just like Jesus obeyed to God to the point of complete death with everything he had. God is not impressed by our knowledge of the Bible but by the concrete obedience to the word of God. The bible was not given merely to be read but to be obeyed from the heart. Therefore, reading, meditating, and studying the bible is just first step. We should not stop there. We should read, meditate, and study the bible not to be just bible fan but to be his true disciples obeying concretely what God commands us to do.

**III. Love your neighbour as yourself (31-34)**

God’s first greatest commandment of loving God with all our being is to restore our broken relationship with God. Now the secondly important commandment is to restore our broken relationship with each other between people. As we learned in the genesis, when the first man Adam sinned against God, the love relationship with God was broken and at the same time the perfect love relationship between Adam and Eve also was broken. Sin made Adam and Eve selfish and self-centered. Now the secondly most important commandment is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This love relationship should start from family members; husband and wife and children and all people around us no matter how different they are in their language, culture, race, gender, etc. Here is God’s great vision to restore his kingdom of love. Sin brought hatred, revenge, murder, all destructive things between people making many enemies. But in Christ, now there is no enemy. Jesus taught in his sermon on the mount. “Love your enemy.” And he showed his love for even his enemy who crucified himself praying for them, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” In the parable of good Samaritan, Jesus taught us that we should take initiative first to be good neighbour to anyone whom we encounter in our life path whether he or she deserves our love or not.

Also when we love our neighbour, another question is “How much should I love my neighbour?” Jesus says, “as yourself.” This means that Jesus wants us to be one in our relationship with others. Also, “Love your neighbour as yourself” implies that God not only wants us to love our neighbour but also to love ourselves. Think about when we do not love ourselves as we are, can we love others? It is impossible. When I love myself as I am in God’s love, I can love others because in me there is the love of God. The best expression of love toward our neighbour is sharing the word of God and the love of God in Jesus Christ with one person by one person. Agape love is not based on my human emotion or feeling but on the decision of my will to put God and his love first in my heart and obey his command by faith. Our 1:1 bible study is one of the best expression of our love toward our neighbour; especially campus students.

The man fully understood what Jesus answered and added his understanding in verse 33. “to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offering and sacrifices.” He knew God does not delight our religious activities and offerings without the love of God. When we serve God in busy activities but without our genuine motive of love in our heart, we are not praised by God. God sees the center of our heart. No matter what we do for God, we should do with all our heart, soul, mind and strength as genuine love for him. Jesus gave a good comment to him saying, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” The kingdom of God is the kingdom built in our heart driven by only the love of God. When our heart and mind is occupied by God and his love and we can love ourselves as we are and love our neighbour also as ourselves.

In conclusion, may God bless each of us to accept the love of God and love God with his love and love ourselves and love our neighbours so that the kingdom of God’s love may be established among and through us powerfully in this fall semester! Amen.