**LOVE GOD AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR**

May 12, 2019

Matthew 22:23-40

Key Verse 22:37-39 “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

What is love? Millions of songs, novels and poems have been written about it. All people pursue it and struggle with it. Love is our inborn desire. It has been called a mysterious mix of sentiment and sex, or combination of obsession and companionship. That is why young people are interested in marriage. In today’s passage, the Sadducees asked Jesus about marriage at the resurrection. One person said that since we are going to enjoy wedding banquet in heaven, our resurrection bodies will have mouth but we will not have to go to bathroom. If we think of heaven from our earthly perspective, we will make such a mistake. They say, “What are we going to do in heaven? It will be so boring, nothing to do.” This kind of question comes from ignorance. Today Jesus teaches the Sadducees and us that heaven is not an extension of earth and we will all look like the angels with the glorious resurrection body. In the kingdom of heaven, the commands to love God and love others are not necessary because we will all be perfectly close to each other and all perfectly intimate with the living God Himself. We will know each other’s thought perfectly. But while living in this world, it is not natural to love God and love others because of our selfishness and self-centeredness. So God commands us to love God and love our neighbor. Let’s learn what it means to love God and love our neighbor.

**First**, God is the God of the living (22-33). In the last passage the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking, “Is it right to pay the tax to Caesar or not?” Jesus defeated them by saying, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” When the Sadducees heard that the Pharisees failed terribly in trapping Jesus, they felt good, thinking that they were superior to the Pharisees. They were more than sure that they could trap Jesus with a very subtle question. Who were the Sadducees? According to Josephus the historian, the word “Sadducee” means “the righteous one.” But in view of history, the Sadducees were never “the righteous ones.” They were opportunists. They rose to be the ruling class by means of bribery and political compromise. They enjoyed all kinds of privileges, power and wealth as aristocrats and upper class people. The high priest and priests who served temple worship belonged to this religious party. There are many irreconcilable differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. One of them was the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and life beyond death. But the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body. They also did not believe in any spiritual realities such as angels or the immortality of the soul.

The Sadducees made up a very sad and grotesque story that involved seven marriages and eight deaths. They said, “Teacher, Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?” (24-28) What a difficult question it was! According to the Sadducees’ logical reasoning, if there is resurrection and life after death, then the seven brothers who married the woman will rise from the dead and engage in boxing tournaments among themselves in order to claim this woman as their wife. The Sadducees thought that in asking such a question they had rendered the whole idea of the resurrection completely ridiculous.

In asking this sad and weird question, however, the Sadducees only exposed their inner thought world to Jesus. The Sadducees were indeed sad people because all they could think about was marriage and death. That’s why they are called “Sad-you-sees.” As we know there are three major events in this life: birth, marriage and death. We celebrate birth and marriage. But when we believe that death is the end of everything, all we do seems meaningless and pointless. This was the agony of the Sadducees. They were aristocratic people. They enjoyed political power and luxurious life. So they wanted to live in this world forever and ever. But things did not go as they had expected. Often their marriages deteriorated. Frequently they were invited to attend their fellow Sadducee’s funeral services. Since they denied the resurrection and the kingdom of God, they felt stuck, trapped in their aging bodies and their meaningless and sad existence on earth, waiting for the day of their final doom.

How did Jesus answer their question? Look at verse 29. “Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” When Jesus saw them, he saw that their root problem was their ignorance of the Bible and unbelief. Jesus taught them the Bible and the power of God. How will God demonstrate his power for us? Look at verse 30, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” According to Jesus, first of all, there will be a resurrection. Death is not the end of everything; there will be a glorious resurrection. When we die, our flesh goes back to the dust of the ground since it came from the dust of the ground. But our souls came from God and will go back to God to live forever in his kingdom. This is possible because the power of God is greater than the power of death. What kind of people will we be? Jesus said, “they will be like the angels in heaven.” Our lives in the kingdom of God will not be the same as our lives in this world. In the kingdom of God we will be like angels. We may die in an ugly body. Sometimes cancer eats up all our bodies. Some live in paralysis. Some live in poverty and sorrow. But we will be raised with a glorious resurrection body, which does not decay. In the kingdom of God we don’t have a marriage problem. In the kingdom of God there will no more death, sorrow and pain. We don’t need to worry about our future security problem or job problem. We will be like Jesus. 1 John 3:2-3 says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

Look at verses 31-32, “But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died long ago. Still God “is” the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because they are alive in the kingdom of God. They look as spiritual and glorious as angels in heaven. Our God is not the God of the dead. God does not spend his time, ruling the dead people in Hades. He is not a funeral director. God is not worshipped by corpses. He is not the God of people who don’t exist. God is the God of the living. Our God is living and has power to make us alive and transform us to be like angels and ultimately to be like Jesus. We don’t need to be sad like Sadducees. We must be happy, believing the Bible and the power of God and having this glorious hope for ourselves and for others in our hearts: Not “Sad-you-sees.” but “happy-you-sees.” Dr. Samuel Lee lived in sorrow because his mother died when he was two months old. His consuming desire was to see his mother’s face. But when he believed in Jesus Christ, he began to have the hope in the kingdom of God. First, Jesus became his mother and wiped the tears from his eyes. Second, Jesus planted hope that he would see his mother again in the kingdom of God. Now both are in heaven, enjoying each other’s company as brother and sister in God.

**Second**, the greatest commandment (34-40) Jesus won the second round with the religious leaders. Look at verses 34-36. “Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’” When we read the first five books of Moses, known as the Pentateuch, we find so many commandments. We can divide them into three categories: moral laws, civil or judicial laws, and ceremonial laws. Therefore, it is indeed difficult to choose one particular commandment as the greatest one. What was Jesus’ answer to him? Look at verses 37-39. “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Love is the most popular word in English. When I google, “What is love?” I get 9,990,000,000 results. In popular culture, people think only about romantic love. But it is only a small part.

Firstly, love is to give the other person the first priority. God demonstrated his love for us when he sent his Son to die for our sins. He is saying, “You are most important to me. You matter to me.” 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” Man’s responsibility is to respond to God’s love. We love because he first loved us. When it says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart,” it means to give our utmost priority to God. In our solar system, the sun is at the center, and the other planets revolves around the sun. There is harmony and order. What if the earth tries to be at the center? There will be a chaos. Likewise, when we give God the first priority, there will be harmony and we can love others.

Secondly, love is to make someone feel safe. King David expressed God’s love in Psalm 23:4, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil.” God rescued us from the devil. God makes us feel safe. Even though the devil attacks us, we know that we are safe in God’s hands. Likewise, we should make our loved ones feel safe.

Thirdly, love is to be with someone emotionally and physically when he or she needs. Jesus promised in Matthew 28:20, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” As Jesus expressed his love by being with us, we can express love for others by being with them both physically and emotionally.

Look at verse 39 again. “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Love your neighbor as yourself” is a very radical command. It cuts to the root of our sinfulness and exposes it and, by God’s grace, severs it. The root of our sinfulness is the desire for our own happiness apart from God and apart from the happiness of others in God. All sin comes from a desire to be happy cut off from the glory of God and cut off from the good of others. The command of Jesus cuts to this root, exposes it, and severs it. Another name for this root of sinfulness is pride. Pride is the presumption that we can be happy without depending on God as the source of our happiness, and without caring whether others find their happiness in God. Pride is the pursuit of happiness anywhere but in the glory of God and the good of other people. This is the root of all sin.

We can express loving God by loving our neighbor. People come to church not only to study the Bible but also to taste God’s love. Therefore, it is important for us to love one another. 1 John 4:20-21 says, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” Those who do not love their neighbors do not know God’s love. They are selfish and egocentric people. They are so busy with the concerns about themselves that they have no room to love even one more person in their hearts. Those who love God must love their neighbors and people around them with God’s love. Jesus said in John 13:34,35, “‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” We are all unique. We are different as an orange is different from an apple. But when we love one another and form a unity in diversity, we can achieve a mysterious harmony and perfection. When we love one another, we can show to the world that we are Jesus’ disciples and display a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

In today’s passage, we learn that our God is God of the living. We have the glorious hope that we will be like the angels in heaven. But while living in this world, we are to love God and love one another. It is the way for showing ourselves to be Jesus’ disciples and attract others in his kingdom.