**Love God With All Your Heart**

**(Love God by loving your neighbor)**

September 27, 2020

Mark 12:28-44

Key Verse: 12:29 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Today’s passage is concerned with life’s most basic question. Namely, what is the most important thing to do as a human being? Even unbelievers are interested in these kinds of questions. They want to know why they are here on earth. One person said that he grew up in a Catholic church and all he heard was, “Don’t do this, don’t do that, and the church made people feel guilty.” In the time of Jesus, the teachers of the law agreed that there are 613 commandments in the Old Testament; among them 365 are, “Don’t do…”; 248 are “Do...” They also agreed that some commandments are more important than the others. But they could not agree on which is the most important. They held seminars and symposiums, but they could not reach the conclusion. One of the teachers of the law was looking for a teacher who could give a clear and convincing answer. So he asked Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” Jesus is the author of the law. So he gave a brief and complete answer. There are three main parts: The Lord is one true God, love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

**First**, The Lord is one true God. Look at verse 29. “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”’” Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:4, which is the beginning of what the Israelites called the Shema. (The full Shema includes Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and 11:13-21, as well as Numbers 15:37-41.) The Shema was read at the opening of each service in the synagogue. It was a definitive statement of faith like the Apostle’s Creed. It was essential. So God commanded the Israelites to talk about it constantly--while sitting at home, while walking along the road, when they laid down and when they got up. They were to impress it upon their children. They wrote it on the doorframes of their houses (Dt 6:7-9). They did that to remember the Shema constantly. It is like putting Bible verses everywhere of the house, even in bathrooms, to remember them.

Shema is the imperative of the Hebrew verb “to hear,” from the first word, “Hear, O Israel.” It carries the idea of listening to something important. We must hear what God says about himself to know him. The essential thing God reveals about himself is: “the Lord is one.” The one true God made a plan of salvation for mankind which runs through the Scriptures. This plan culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins. The one true God offered his one and only Son Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins. The one true God crushed Satan’s head to win eternal victory. The one true God restored the kingdom of God, and brings us there to live with him forever. God did this because he loves us. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” When we accept this love, the love of God begins to sprout in our hearts. We love God because he first loved us. We respond to God’s love in saving us.

One missionary compared a sinner’s condition to that of man who is drowning, and wondered what the major religious leaders mighty say to this man: “What is the best word Confucius has for this man who is sinking? ‘Profit by your experience.’ What is the most hopeful message that Buddha has for the sinking man? ‘Struggle.’ What is the most encouraging teaching of Hinduism for the sinking man? ‘You may have another opportunity in the next incarnation.’ What does Mohammed say? ‘Whether you sink or whether you survive, it is the will of God.’ And what does Jesus Christ say? ‘Take my hand.’ There is all the difference in the world between his answer and that of other religions and so-called saviors. It is the difference between sinking and being saved.” The truth is: only Jesus saves. Jesus demonstrated his love by dying on the cross in order to save us. Based on his love, we can love him back. Why do we love our mother? Because she gave birth to us. But God’s love is greater. Isaiah 49:15 says, “So the LORD answers, ‘Can a woman forget her own baby and not love the child she bore? Even if a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you.’”

**Second**, Love God with all your heart. Look at verse 30. “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 word “Love” in this verse comes from the Greek word “agape.” In English, the word “Love” is ambiguous. We say, “I love my mom.” We also say, “I love pizza.” If love means the same thing in both of those cases, your mom will not be happy. Love is not primarily a feeling, because emotions come and go. Love is action. Agape love is a decision to put God first in our thoughts, words and deeds. Loving God is not just a one-time act. It calls for a life-time commitment.

What does it mean to love the Lord your God with all your heart? What is the heart? The heart in the Hebrew understanding is the core of your identity, the source of all your thoughts, words, actions. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” It is the core of your being. Love God with the deepest, purest, truest part of you, your deepest identity. Soul has to do with your emotions. It was Jesus who said, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow.” (Mt 26:38) He was speaking of his soul as the seat of emotion. Mind may be best seen as will, the power of intention, the power of purpose. We sometimes say, “I made up my mind.” Then Jesus adds strength, the reference to physical energy. So the intellectual, emotional and physical elements of personhood all combine to love the one true God. It is an intelligent love, it is an emotional love, it is a willing love and it is an active love. It is an all-consuming love. Look at how the words are all repeated; “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The addition of those words “with all” every time is to lay out the emphatic nature of this comprehensive whole-hearted love. We might say that God’s whole-hearted love toward us should not be returned with a half-hearted love on our part. We must love God with everything we are. This seems to be too demanding. One may say, “If I love God with all my heart and soul and mind and strength, I won’t have any love left for my spouse or my parents or my children.” But the mathematics of the Bible doesn’t work like that. When we love God with all our hearts, he fills us with his own love. He enables us to love others with more love. Love multiplies when we give it to God. When we shut God out of our hearts and only try to enjoy human love, we find that we only become lovers of ourselves. Our hearts become cold and hard and selfish.

So loving God is both the beginning and the end of a relationship with God. It is what it means to be a believer in God. It is what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christians means to be a lover of God. There are only two kinds of people in the world. The second commandment of the Ten Commandments says, “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” That is the first category. Those who hate God. But showing love to a thousand generation of those who love me.” Everybody in the world is in one of those two categories. You are either a God-hater, or a God-lover. When we love, we become like God. 1 John 4:16-17 says, “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them…In this world we are like Jesus.” However, when one does not love God with all his heart, two things happen.

Firstly, they become ignorant of the Bible. The Pharisees taught that the Messiah is the son of David. But look at verses 36-37. “David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” Because they did not love God, they spent hours and hours debating which is the most important commandment, while being ignorant of the identity of the Messiah. Psalm 110 already reveals that the Messiah is more than a human being. Here David was listening in on a conversation in heaven. The speaker is the LORD (capital letters, see Psalm 110), that is YHWH, the God of Israel. The one spoken to is the Lord (small letters), that is the Messiah. God directly appoints the Messiah to sit at his right hand, the position of power. If the Messiah were a mere human being, David would not call him Lord. He would call him, “great...great...great grandson.” He might pat the Messiah on the head and say he was proud of him. He would certainly not call him “Lord.” Yet David, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called the Messiah “Lord.” Therefore, the Messiah has a divine nature as well as a human nature. The Bible clearly teaches that the Messiah is in very nature God.

Secondly, they live in hypocrisy. Look at verses 38-40. The Pharisees really enjoyed walking around in their flowing robes, attracting the attention of people. They acted like fashion models. They craved the praise of men through greetings and places of honor. But their hearts were completely corrupted. They devoured widow’s houses in their wretched greed. They had the image of Satan, not the image of God. Still they made lengthy prayers as a show. When they did not love God, they became sheer hypocrites. Jesus warned them of the most severe punishment. Jesus said of them in John 5:42, “I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts…How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

But there was one person who loved God. Look at verses 41-44. Jesus sat down opposite the offering box and watched the crowd put their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts, with extended arm motions. They dropped their bills in one at a time, slowly, to make sure everyone had time to count them. Each succeeding person wanted to offer a little more than the previous person. An audience began to keep score. Then a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins. It was 1/64 denarius. If a day wage is $100, it is worth $1.50. People began to shake their heads and despised the widow. But not Jesus. Jesus began to rejoice. Jesus was greatly encouraged by this widow’s offering. He called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” Jesus valued the widow’s offering so highly because Jesus was looking at the heart, not at the offering amount. Jesus knew that this widow was very poor. When she put her offering into the basket, she was putting in everything she had. She was literally offering her heart to God. This tells us that God was everything to her. She was willing to give everything to the one who was everything to her. She could have thought her small offering was nothing compared to the large amounts that others gave. But she did not. She offered before the eyes of God. She knew that her offering mattered to God. She offered to God to honor God out of her faith in God.

**Third**, Love your neighbor as yourself. Look at verse 31. “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” This is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18. It was not part of the Shema. The teacher of the law did not ask for the second commandment. But Jesus put it together with the Shema intentionally. It is to show us that we do not love God in isolation, while ignoring all of our fellow human beings. Of course, loving God is first, but it is also essential to love one’s neighbor. When we truly love God, we will love other people as ourselves. 1 John 4:20-21 says, “For whoever does not love their brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” Loving God and loving our neighbor are two sides of the same coin.

We already love ourselves too much. Who did you dress this morning? Who did you comb? Who did you feed? We don’t have to learn to love ourselves; our whole lives are consumed with taking care of self. What Jesus is saying is, “Treat other people with the same detailed care you treat yourself.” It is not a call for self-love, it is a call to love others the way you already love yourself. How can we love our neighbor? The best way is to love others as God loved us. Namely, he sent his one and only Son to save us from our sins. He reached out his hand to us who were drowning. Likewise, people are sinking in sin and we should reach out to them and offer the way of salvation, saying, “Take Jesus’ hand.”

How did the teacher of the law respond to Jesus’ words? He accepted them and agreed with Jesus. He demonstrated that he understood the essence of faith in God, and in loving God and loving others. However, Jesus did not give him an A+. Jesus said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” Knowing is one thing. Doing is another. We must practice the love of God and the love of others. It is a command to be obeyed. There are no hypocrites in the kingdom of God. Only those who truly love God and others will be in the kingdom of God.

God is the only true God who first loved us. That is the basis of our love for God. We love God by loving our neighbor. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each of us to do so.

Big Idea: Love God by loving your neighbor