

"Listen to Jesus Speak on what's Most Important"

Mark 12:28-34

Some passages of Scripture can become so familiar to us that we can become desensitized to them because we think that we know it just because we can recite it. But having the knowledge of what it says does not mean we practice it. For example, we can recite the Lord's Prayer off by heart; yet how many prayed for the kingdom to come this week? How many prayed that they would not be tempted by evil? How many made sure God would hear their prayers of forgiveness by asking God to forgive our specific sins? Jesus warned us not to simply hear His Words but to do them and only then will we be blessed.

In Jesus' day, every Jewish person old enough to speak could recite the Shema. Every parent taught their child to say this twice a day, at your rising and at your going down. Shema means 'Hear' or 'Listen' and it refers to Deut. 6:4-9

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The reason why they say it twice a day is found in the next verses:

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

So when Jesus came along and was confronted by the Pharisees (the religious leaders), the scribes (those who meticulously copied Scripture for a living) and the teachers/ lawyers (whose role it was to explain the Scripture to the people), He often challenged them with the Scriptures saying things like 'It is written' or 'Have you not read' or even here in Mark 12:24 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures.' Knowledge of what Scripture says does not guarantee application or obedience.

On at least 3 occasions Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment. In Jesus' day it was very common for Rabbis and teachers to debate about what commandment was greater than others. Or rather what commandment could best summarize all God's commands? They had broken down the Pentateuch and discerned there were 613 commands; 248 positive, 365 negative. They divided them into 'heavier' and 'lesser' commands. Jesus acknowledged this in Matt. 23:23 when He rebukes the Pharisees by saying,

²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

Here in Mark 12 it is Jesus' last week before the cross. It is Monday or Tuesday. The religious leaders keep coming after Him to trap Him with trick questions but they don't succeed. One scribe is impressed with Jesus' answer and wants to know what Jesus thinks is the greatest commandment.

Jesus answers the scribe says 'good answer'. To which Jesus says 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' Implied; knowing the right answer doesn't mean your life is being changed by God.

With that in mind, I'm sure everyone here can recite this passage as well on what is the greatest commandment. We know what it says but do we understand what it means and, are we doing what it says. So then what did Jesus consider the most important command(s) or better, what does Jesus say is most important for us to do?

Priority #1A – Love God with Everything You Have **(Mark 12:29-30)**

The scribe's question to Jesus is which Scripture best summarizes all of Scripture, or which one takes priority over all or encompasses all the commands best? So Jesus quotes the most recited passage in all Judaism, Deut. 6:4-5. So then what does it mean to truly Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? For that we must study Deut. 6.

The word for "hear" is the Hebrew shema. Shema means listen to obey. It does not mean passive vibration in our ears but the active movement of our bodies! To listen is to obey. That's why Jesus said of many Israelites in Matt. 13:13, 'though hearing they do not hear or understand.' What are they to hear and do? V.6

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

So to know what it means to love God then means,

****You Can't Love God without loving His Word (Deut. 6:4-7)****

These commandments . . . Impress them . . . Talk about them . . . Tie them . . . Write them. This is what defines how one loves God; our response to His unique Oneness.
"The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

This Lord redeemed Israel from Egypt and brought them into the land of Canaan. Just as they were about to cross over, Moses says, this is what God wants your new life to look like. Show your love to God by hearing what He says and doing what He says. Life will be more enjoyed when you love God by doing what He says. God always wants a relationship with people. We must believe who He is and accept by faith that His promises are all true. Just as Israel believed God by faith that he would get them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Those who didn't believe lost out on God's blessings while alive and ultimately lost out on a relationship with God in His presence forever. When you are in a love relationship you demonstrate that love by actions; no different than our relationship with God. What action specifically? Love God with everything we've got sounds good but what does it look like? Moses mentioned 3 ways, Jesus mentioned 4. To love God with all our heart means to,

Obey Him because He occupies first-place ["heart"]

To the Hebrew, 'heart' means the center of one's life. It describes your focus, your purpose. To love God with all our heart means to let God occupy center stage in our mind so that our thoughts and actions revolve around His purposes for us and His glory. The best illustration I can think of is when you were dating your spouse and you knew he/she was the one and the bulk of your day was

filled with thinking about him/her and looking forward to being with him/her. This is the kind of love relationship God desires with us. To make Him the priority of our lives so that I want my marriage to reflect Him, I want to reflect Him in my workplace, school, arena, mall; wherever I go and in whatever I do. *“So whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).*

That means saying no to things and activities that always try and dethrone God for center place in our life. Remember playing king of the hill as kids? Push everything away that tries to remove God from top priority in your life and your family’s life. If we’re serious about God we’ll start making different decisions about our priorities.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul . . .

The word “soul” in Hebrew refers to your existence, your very breath. When God created Adam He breathed his ‘soul’ [nephesh] into him and he began to live and breathe. So to love God with all our soul really means . . .

Obey Him with your time [“soul”]

All your breaths; all your time or all your life. For the duration of your living days. Which is really interesting because we all have a different starting point as to when we came to believe in Jesus and live for God. But if it means ‘the duration of my life’ it means if I haven’t been doing that well at this I can start again today. Because today is the first day of the rest of your life. And since we can only live one day at a time, God only expects you and me to seek to love Him by obeying Him for the duration of today. And then tomorrow I’ll start again.

I believe this was the original reason the Jews were to recite the shema when they rose and when they went down. It’s a recommitment today to make God the center of my life for the hours I’m awake today and the places I go to and where I sit (don’t go). And here we never realized how practical and down to earth this command really is. Because initially it sounds so vague and unattainable, doesn’t it? But all of a sudden I can break it down to making God my priority and His Word my priority today. Where will I sit and go today and how will I use my time today that will reflect God is # 1 priority in my life?

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . .

The mind is where we interact with God’s Word. Where we think and then decide. So to love God with all our mind means to . . .

Obey Him with a desire to learn [“mind”]

We are commanded to grow in knowledge of God through His Word:

2 Pet. 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Paul prays that our love would grow through our knowledge and depth of insight so we can discern (make informed decisions based on the truth of the Word) to how to best live for God so we grow to be like Jesus.

Phil. 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for

the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Again this is what the shema centered on; learn to love God more by speaking about and listening to the words of God wherever you go and in whatever you do. Let godly information result in visible transformation of your life into Christlikeness.

Now the Hebrew only had 3 'love God with all your heart, soul and mind.' Except the Hebrew word for 'mind' isn't mind; it literally reads "*love the Lord your God with all your very*" . . . Very what? Scholars were never quite clear what it was supposed to mean. It was left open ended. Since 'very' is an adjective that emphasizes what it describes it began to be understood as everything in your very life that God has given you. So they divided it up into mind and strength; the mental and the physical. So love the Lord your God with your very mind (mental capacities) and your very attributes and blessings given by God. So to love the Lord Your God with all your strength means to . . .

Obey Him with all you've been given ["strength"]

Your health. Your resources. Your talents. Your spiritual gifts. And again "all" implies all in. Commitment. Too many people think living for God means to serve Him with as minimal time commitment or energy commitment or even financial commitment ["come on, it's our turn to do this at church this week!"]. Do we have a talent or gift that we've never used to serve God? Are we as late for work or hockey games just as much as we are for church? Do we leave church early and yet will stay and watch the credits after a 2 hour movie? Do we tip more than we tithe? How are we giving God are all?

*Love the LORD your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind and with **all** your strength.*

But Jesus isn't done.

Mark 12:31 *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

Jesus says there are two commandments and both are equally the greatest.

Priority #1B – Love Others as Much as Yourself **(Mark 12:31)**

The best way to love others is to love them as yourself. How do we love ourselves? We don't intentionally hurt or belittle ourselves. We carve out time for ourselves. We'll serve and spend money on ourselves. We'll make ourselves our priority.

By saying these two commandments are essentially tied for # 1, Jesus links the two together.

****You can't love God without loving His creations****
(1 John 3:16-18)

For the apostles our love for others is a test of our love for God:

¹ John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees a*

brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Listen to Paul in Rom. 13:8-10,

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul uses the command to love another the same way the Leviticus 19 passage (which Jesus quotes) uses the love command. In Lev. 19:9-18 God told Moses don't do all these things to your neighbour [don't deprive the poor of your extra, don't steal, lie or deceive another, don't harm the disabled and vulnerable, don't slander, hate or seek revenge).

Love seeks no harm to others (Rom. 13:8-10; Lev. 19:9-18)

We wouldn't do any of those things to ourselves nor do we want anyone to treat us that way, therefore don't do that to anyone. Instead to love others means . . .

To seek God's good for others (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

How does God seek our good?

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Is God patient with us? Eternally so. Then we need to act like Him and show patience to each other.

Is God kind to us? Undeservedly so. Then we need to show kindness to others when we've been mistreated.

Does God keep a record of all our sins? No, He's buried them in the deepest sea. So why are we holding on to grudges?

Does God enjoy seeing us do well? Of course! Then why are we sometimes jealous of others getting credit or doing well?

Is God committed to us by protecting us from the evil one, trusting us with the gospel, continually hoping we'll grow in spiritual maturity, persevering with us to the point where He never leaves us nor forsakes us? Then why do we give up so quickly on others, who like us, betray a trust, prove undependable at times, and even disassociate from others (relationally) even though they never meant to hurt us?

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Here's the thing: none of us love God with everything we have and none of us love others as much as ourselves. But we don't stop doing these things because they are too daunting. We do these things because Jesus commanded us and what Jesus commands us to do, He empowers us to do. We also seek to love God with everything we have and love others as ourselves today; for the breath that God gives me today. And tomorrow when we rise up, let's recite the greatest commandments praying that we would seek to love God by letting Him occupy first place in our lives, let His gift of time to us be used for His purposes, spend time in His Word with the desire to hear and obey Him by using His gifts and resources to bring Him glory.

If we seek to love God I don't think we'll have any problem loving others as ourselves because we'll see more clearly how gracious He is to us and so shall we be to others.

And when we lie down at night let's recite it again, thanking Him for breath given us this day and the ways in which we succeeded and brought Him glory. And if we didn't asking forgiveness and seeking to start again tomorrow for the breath given us then.