

The Two Greatest Commands
Mark 12:28-34; October 17, 2021

Introduction:

- As you turn to Mark 12, let me set the scene for us:
- This is the last week of Jesus' life. He has entered into Jerusalem and now it's Tuesday. Jesus is on the Temple grounds answering questions from the Jewish religious leaders of the day.
 - Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders: "By what authority are you doing these things" (11:28)?
 - The Pharisees and Herodians: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not" (12:14)?
 - The Sadducees: "If a woman is married seven times, who's wife will she be in the resurrection" (12:23)?

The question we're going to look at today is *the question of all questions*.

Read Mark 12:28

Explain Mark 12:28

- "One of the scribes"
 - This is the next group to test Jesus.
 - The scribes were experts in the proper interpretation of the law.
 - He had overheard Jesus' response to the previous questions and was impressed with his response.
- "Which commandment is the most important of all?"
 - According to Jewish tradition, there were a total of 613 commands in the Law of Moses.
 - 365 were negative prohibitions.
 - 248 were positive commands.
 - Not all of these commands were seen as equal.
 - Some were considered "light" commands and others "heavy."
 - Given this, it's not surprising the a scribe would ask Jesus a question of priority.

The answer to this question gets at the core of what really matters in life.

- Do you know what is the most important thing that God wants from your life?

Transition: Let's see what Jesus has to say.

Read Mark 12:29-34

General observations regarding Jesus' response:

1. Jesus responds with two commands instead of just of one.

- “The most important is...”
- “The second is this...”
- The order does matter.
- We’ll come back to why he gives two commands and the significance of the order in a second.

2. The two commands are quotes from two separate passages in the Law of Moses.

- Deuteronomy 6:4-5
 - This passage is called the *Shema* (for “Hear”)
 - It is recited by devout Jews morning and evening.
 - Some have said it is as important to Judaism as the Lord’s Prayer to Christianity (so Edwards).
- Leviticus 19:18

3. The scribe affirms Jesus’ answer which elevates the moral over the ritual or ceremonial.

- This isn’t a new insight for the Jewish people. This was the biblical perspective of the OT.

“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.” (1 Samuel 15:22, ESV; from the mouth of Samuel to Saul when he was rejected as king)

- See also Prov. 21:3; Isa. 1:11-18; 43:22-24; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8
- What is most important is a right relationship with God and with others.
- The most sacred of rituals have no meaning unless they are expressions of our love for God and others.

4. These are the two greatest commands in the Law.

- In Matthew, Jesus takes it a step further:

“On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:40, ESV)

- “Why does Jesus give two commands instead of just one?”
 - Craig Blomberg notes that Jesus fuses these commands together “...in a way that makes claims of doing one without the other nonsensical.”
 - In other words, these two are the greatest because nothing can truly be obeyed unless these two are observed. It takes both of these commands to do what’s most important in life.
 - The two commands stand together and each requires the other. Loving God without loving your neighbor results in mysticism and loving your neighbor without reference to God results in humanism (so James Edwards).
 - If we were to dig further into the Ten Commandments, we’d see that this is how they are structured:
 - The first four have a vertical aim regarding a right relationship with God.

In other words, love God.

- gods, Idols, Lord's name in vain, Sabbath
- The final six have a horizontal aim regarding right relationships with others. In other words, love others.
 - Honor parents, Murder, Adultery, Steal, Lie, Covet

Transition: Let's dig in to these two commands. There are 3 truths that I want to challenge you with today. The first one is...

I. Love God with all your...Everything (28-30).

Who should we love? “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

- God is worthy of our love.
 - This is a statement of uniqueness and exclusivity.
 - There is one God. He is our God. He is the only God.
 - This one God exists in three persons: The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.
 - We should love God because of who he is.

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV)

- God's love enables us to love him. As a result, our love is a response to his love for us.
 - We don't love God *so that* he will love us. It's because he loves us that we have the capacity to love him in response.
 - We will love God to the extent that we recognize and experience his extravagant love towards us.
 - Listen to how Jesus describes the love of the sinful woman who anointed his feet with oil:

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7:47, ESV)

- Jesus' point isn't that some are forgiven a lot and some are forgiven a little. Rather, this woman was aware of her sinfulness and of how much she had been forgiven. She knew and experienced the love of God and as a result couldn't but help love in return.

How should we love? “Love with ALL your....”

- Jesus gives four categories: heart, soul, mind and strength.
 - *Mind* is not included in Deut. 6:4-5.
- As multiple scholars have noted, Jesus isn't intending to provide a “psychological

analysis of human personality” (Hiebert, Akin, Carson).

- Rather, these are overlapping categories together demanding a response of everything you are and everything you have.
- Think of it this way: there is an explosion of love that...
 - Begins your **heart** with your affections and desires satisfied and filled with the love of God,
 - It expands to your **soul** and **mind** including your intelligence and thoughts,
 - And then moves outward to your entire being with you using your **strength**, your will and your entire body (mouth, hands, feet, talents, skills) to love God.
- All four categories are modified with the word “all,” reinforcing that this is a total response of love and devotion to God.
 - This is a call to love God with all that you are and everything that you have.
- When you love God this way...
 - Every area of your life is opened and available to God. Is it?
 - Every relationship of your life is influenced. Is it?
 - You can’t compartmentalize your love for God.
 - It’s not...I love God on Sunday mornings and at Community Group.
 - Rather, it’s I love God with every second of every day.
 - It’s not...I love God with 10% of my income.
 - Rather, it’s I love God with ALL the money that I have.
 - It’s not...God: First, Marriage: Second, Family: Third, Church: Fourth, Work: Fifth.
 - Rather, it’s God: First, God in my Marriage: Second, God in my Family: Third, God in my Church: Fourth, God in my work: Fifth.

When I look at the world that we live in, this is what people deem most important:

- Money and Possession
- Sex
- Family (in particular, my kids and grandkids)
- Sports: Patriots, Red Sox (two Grand Slams in the first two innings!), Bruins, Celtics
- Work

God is the last thing in most people’s thinking, let alone priorities.

Yet, Jesus is saying, “This is what you were made for. To know and love God!”

Sidebar: Why Discipleship Groups? For the purpose of *accelerated spiritual growth*.

- In short, we see it as a space for disciples to help each other grow in their love for God.

II. Love Others as You Love Yourself (31):

What is the relationship between loving God and loving others?

- The order of these commands matters.

- The most important command is “to love God.”
- Loving God is what makes it possible for me to love my neighbor.
- As one author notes, “We will love others best when we love God most... We are only able to give freely to others what we have received freely from him.” (Jon Bloom).
- This is the message of 1 John 4:7-12.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God...” (1 John 4:7, ESV)

- Loving others is the visible expression and manifestation of our love for God.
- An explosion of love in your heart cannot just extend vertically to God, it must extend horizontally to those around you.

Who is your neighbor?

- In the OT and context of Deut. 6, “neighbor” referred to fellow Jews.
- But Jesus and the early church expanded the idea of “neighbor” to all of humanity, even my enemies (see Luke 6:35; Luke 10:25-37 and the parable of the Good Samaritan).
- Practically speaking, start with those closest to you and then extend outward:
 - Home: those you live with (roommates, spouse, kids, family)
 - Actual neighbors
 - Church family (Community Group, Serve Team)
 - Workplace
 - The city you live in
- This is a call to love the neighbors that you don’t even choose and whom you might not naturally chose to love.

How are you to love your neighbor? “AS” yourself.

- This is a very radical command that cuts at the very root of sin in our lives.
- Think about this:
 - How do you pursue your own satisfaction and well-being in life?
 - Think about *what* you pursue and *how* you go after it.
 - Love others that way!!!
- Let’s make this practical:
 - Apply the same energy, passion, zeal and creativity that you use to pursue your own satisfaction...apply that to others.
 - As you long for food, as you long for clothing, as you long for a great job, as you long for a place to live, as you long for a family, as you long for good grades, as you long for safety and security, as you long for friendships, as you long to be welcomed...SO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR!!!
 - Love others by longing for the same things and in the same way that you pursue your own satisfaction in life.
- As I begin to really wrestle with this, I realize that loving others this way requires sacrifice.

- Sacrifice of time, convenience and comfort.
- It will be costly and inconvenient.
- To do this will require intentionality.

A few practical suggestions:

- Start by praying for others around you and ask God open your eyes and lead you in how he wants you to love them.
- Be intentional with others.
 - Put your phone away.
 - Ask about their life.
 - Follow up on things they've shared with you.
 - Reflect on this:
 - What do you wish your roommate, spouse, co-workers and classmates would do to you to show love and support?
 - What do you think your roommates, spouse, co-workers and classmates wished you'd do to them to show love and support?
- Be an encourager.
- Seek specific ways to help.
 - The more specific, the better.
 - "I have an extra hour today, how can I spend it helping you?"

Sidebar: Why Discipleship Groups? For the purpose of *accelerated spiritual growth*.

- I need others to help me in my pursuit of loving others well.
- Leading a Discipleship Group is a tangible way to love others.
- As I long for my own spiritual growth, I long to see other men and women accelerate in their spiritual growth.

Dream with me:

- What the world most needs right now is to see the church living with this kind of neighborly love.
- What if we saturated every block, every street of Medford and surrounding cities with disciples who are striving to love their neighbors this kind of way?

III. Look to Jesus for Pardon and Power (32-34).

Our response to these two commands exposes our hearts and lays bare our souls. And let's be honest, none of us have perfectly kept these two commands. In fact, if we're honest, even our best attempts are polluted the presence of indwelling sin in our lives, especially that of selfishness.

Who will deliver us from our own sinfulness?

"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in

the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3–4, ESV)

JESUS!!!

- Jesus is the only one who has perfectly fulfilled these two commands. He has loved the Father with ALL his heart, soul, mind and strength. He has loved us, his neighbors, even while we were still his enemies.
- Sin is condemned through Jesus’ perfect life and sacrificial death.
- When you come to Jesus, you are completely forgiven of your constant failure to keep God’s commands and his perfect keeping of them is credited to your account!

This is why Jesus responds the way he does to the scribe in 12:34: “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

- The scribe was coming to pass judgment on Jesus but Jesus ends up passing judgment on the scribe.
- Jesus is not saying, “You’re close, try harder.”
- Rather, he’s saying: “You enter the kingdom by drawing near to me. You need to be made new. You need a new heart. You need to be changed from the inside out. And guess what: when you draw near to me, I will make you a new creation.”
- This was the promise of the New Covenant:

“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:6, ESV)

Make Jesus your focus. Look to Jesus for pardon and power!!!

- As you pursue Jesus, here’s what’s going to happen:
 - You will discover more and more of your own sin and of your own devotion to lesser gods.
 - This will drive you to seek for more and more of Jesus. More Pardon! More Power!
 - You will find that God’s grace is sufficient and you can’t out-sin God’s grace.
- As a result of this moment by moment looking to Jesus, by making him your greatest treasure, by having your soul satisfied by Jesus, we will receive power to love others.
- The fruit of your life will be love.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22–23, ESV)

- The Spirit enables you and me to live the way the law originally intended for the Jews to live.

The Point: Draw near to Jesus to receive pardon and power to love God with all your

everything and to love others as you love yourself.

Conclusion

- Where is God calling you to fresh repentance because you haven't been loving God with your everything?
- Is there any area of your life that you've shut God out?
- Which neighbor, which person, is the Spirit bringing to your mind?

Our response song today is called "Give Me Faith."

The chorus goes like this:

- Give me faith to trust what You say
- That You're good and Your love is great
- I'm broken inside I give You my life

Make this your prayer. Respond with a fresh giving of your life to God.

The bridge goes like this:

- 'Cause I may be weak
- But Your Spirit's strong in me
- My flesh may fail
- My God You never will

Cry out for a fresh empowering of the Spirit to be strong in you as you seek to love God and love others.