

Title: The Greatest Commandment

Text: Mark 12:28-34

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Theme: Journey With Jesus

The word “great” has been used so often that it has lost its punch. A great cereal, a great burger, a great cell phone, and a great football team simply means that someone thought they were good.

What does it mean for something to really be great? Wikipedia talks about being superior, majestic, transcendent, or divine. Webster defines great using words like huge, elaborate or ample. Great could be a large number, or it could be something that is remarkable in magnitude, degree, or effectiveness. We might be talking about a distinguished person, someone superior in character, someone with remarkable skill, or a large hall. Most of the time we just use the word great as a generalized term of approval.

What do you think of the “Greatest Commandment”?

Mark 12:28-34

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

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

³²"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

³³*To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

³⁴*When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

John Maxwell says that if you trying to lead and no one is following, "You are just taking a walk."

If you are teaching or trying to share a principle and no one is listening, then what do you have?

I. Listen people.

A. Jesus says, *'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'*

- a. Hey people, listen up!
- b. This is something that the whole community, state, and even nation should hear.

* Jesus began with the opening words of the *Shema*, the first word of Deut. 6:4). This creed (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21) was recited twice daily—morning and evening—by devout Jews. The statement asserted the basis of Jewish faith: **The Lord** (Yahweh), namely, **our God**, Israel's covenant-keeping God, **the Lord is One**, that is, unique.

* There are some things that should be relatively private. For instance, you would prefer privacy if you have something hanging from your nose or if your zipper is down. On the other hand, there are issues that need to be proclaimed publicly.

B. Jesus says, *"the Lord our God, the Lord is one Lord."*

- a. We do not have multiple Gods or multiple Lords.
- b. Or we shouldn't have.

* Throughout history we have watched those who have sought to serve multiple Lords fail in their attempts. Judas Iscariot, Brutus, famous for assassinating Caesar, and Benedict Arnold serve as examples.

Instead of flip-flopping our allegiances, we are called to a divine commitment.

II. Love the Lord your God.

A. With all your heart. – the control center

* I was sitting at my computer thinking, “What can I use to illustrate the control center?” “DUH”! The keyboard and mouse function as my control center. It is there that the computer receives its commands and its programs are enabled. I can have great software but if I can't turn it on and set it in motion, it is as useless as an unused toothbrush.

Loving the Lord requires intentional participation.

B. With all your soul. – spiritual self

* This presents a type of conundrum. All of the picture might be seen as the spiritual self and yet there is an element of this process that poses a more limited spiritual dimension.

Sometimes as we are getting up on Saturday mornings we will put cooking shows on the TV. As I watch the chef's prepare their recipes, almost always they add salt. Why? It is necessary to the flavorful outcome.

Spiritually, if we fail to love God with anything less than our best the outcome will be without flavor. What I am saying is that our life will be flat and without meaning.

C. With all your mind. – thought capacity

* Have you ever found yourself driving down the highway and you can't even remember going through the last town? Where was our mind? Auto-pilot?

When it comes to God, do we go on auto-pilot? Doesn't it make more sense to fill our thought capacity with the things of God?

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

D. With all your strength. – physical powers

* Yes, you are strong. That is until you try to open the pickle jar. Some things require little effort but some things require all the strength, power, and energy that we have with us.

* What happens when a crisis occurs? Suddenly your whole being is involved. You shift into action from your control center, you call out on God for help, you search the recesses of your mind for information on how you need to act and react, and you put your body into action.

Isn't that the way you love God?

III. Love your neighbor.

A. As yourself.

* Who do we really love as much as we love ourselves? We buy clothes to make us look good. We eat the food we enjoy. We buy the best house and cars that we can afford. Who do we really love as much as we love ourselves?

B. Is it possible to love others in the same way?

* Let's justify our self-centeredness.

1. I have to take care of my family.
2. I'm required to look good at my job.
3. I have to eat to live.
4. I work hard, I should be able to live in a nice house and drive a nice car.

Leviticus 19:18b

... Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Matthew 19:19b

...Love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22:39b

...Love your neighbor as yourself.

Luke 10:27b

...Love your neighbor as yourself.

Romans 13:9

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:14

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

What do you really think? Do we love ourselves more than our neighbors?

IV. Most important practice.

A. This double command of love is much more important than all the fully consumed and the partly consumed sacrifices.

1 Samuel 15:22

But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Proverbs 21:3

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Isaiah 1:16-17

Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

B. The most important practice is to love God and to love our neighbors.

What's your grade? A B C D F

What's your score? 100% 75% 50% Less

V. Understanding love helps us understand the "Kingdom".

* Is there anything that we can do that will make us more like Christ?

* There was a time during the Crusades when the Kingdom of Heaven was equated with the control of the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. Unfortunately, position, lands and wealth instead of love often drove the Crusaders.

- A. The Kingdom of God is both present and future.
- B. The presence of Jesus in our lives brings us into the Kingdom.
- C. Receiving Christ's love and expressing Christ's love is what the kingdom is all about.
- D. Without that love the Kingdom cannot be experienced.

Conclusion: I remember in school being given a quiz. The first and most important instruction was given. "Read the entire quiz before you begin to answer the questions."

Of course, the end of the quiz required us to put our name on the paper and put our pencils down. We need not answer any questions or do anything else on the paper.

But so many didn't follow instructions so they were standing up and quoting poetry, or singing a song, or flapping their arms up and down. And those who followed the instructions just smiled (laughed).

Jesus has given us the greatest commandment. Some aren't satisfied with this Godly task and look for other info and tasks that will cement their entrance into heaven. True, other stuff may follow for us but the beginning, our most important task is to love God and to love our neighbor.

How are you doing? What are you going to do about it?