Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Loving God
Scripture: Mark 12:28-34
Code: 41-63

For this morning, we're going to turn to the twelfth chapter of Mark and we're going to be looking at verses 28 through 34...28 through 34. You'll notice that I've titled this, "Loving God," and that's really obvious. And as I was thinking this week about love and loving God, obviously a huge subject, something came across my desk that I thought was interesting, from Ripley's Believe It Or Not. And according to Ripley, the longest expression of love ever written was the work of a Parisian painter named Marcel De LaKurre, who wrote it in 1875. It was addressed to Magdalena DeVilla Lora, his artistic light of love, he said.

This particular letter contains the phrase *chevu omi*, I love you, one million eight-hundred and seventy-five times. Why that number? A thousand times a calendar year of the date, 1875. This prodigious expression of love was not, however, written by Marcel's own hand, rather he hired a scribe. And if he were a lazy man, he would have instructed the scribe, "Write the sentence one million eight-hundred and seventy-five times. But that would not have expressed his love, so LaKurre was too entranced with the sound of those two words in French and with the woman to whom he was expressing them, so he dictated it word for word, and had the hired man repeat it verbatim before he wrote it. All in all, therefore, the phrase was uttered orally and in writing five million, six hundred and twenty-five thousand times before it reached its destination.

I frankly hope she was impressed. I really do. It doesn't matter now, but it might have mattered then.

Now you might say that is a great expression of love. Well it's a great expression of foolishness, that's for sure. And it may express a moment's love, but it's a long way from the true expression of love we're going to look at as we look at the Word of God.

Let's begin at verse 28. "One of the scribes came and heard them arguing and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, that is Jesus, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?' Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord and you shall 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 second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to Him, 'Right,

Teacher, You have truly stated that He is one and there is no one else besides Him, and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor

as himself is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

"When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God.' After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."

Now the theme here, of course, is to love the Lord your God, as expressed in verse 30. It is a command. You shall love the Lord your God. This is the foundation of spiritual life. It is the beginning of true spiritual love, to love the Lord your God imperfectly, it is the culmination of spiritual life in heaven to love the Lord your God perfectly. We endeavor to obey that command as believers, although we are imperfect in our obedience, we long for the day when we will in His presence love Him perfectly.

So loving God is both the beginning and the end of a relationship with God. It is what it is to be a believer in God. It is what it means to be a Christian, to be a lover of God. It is the most defining attitude that we can express in explaining who we are. We are those who love the true and living God, the one true God who is not only the God and Father of the patriarchs, but who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Trinitarian true God. We love God.

So if someone were to ask, What does it mean to be a believer? What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to be a lover of God. And though we love Him imperfectly, we seek to love Him perfectly and long for the realization of that perfect love in the glory which is to come.

Now this then is a definition of what it means to be a believer and to have a relationship with God. But it is also a universal command. It is a universal command and it must be stated that disobedience to this command is why hell will be forever populated. The world has been, is and will be full of people who refuse to love God. This is the great consummate command, disobedience to which brings about divine and eternal judgment and punishment. Nothing is more critical than this command. It is far-reaching as to its implications, as we'll endeavor to see, and there are going to be some necessary edits, as we go through this, because this is such a grand subject, we can't cover it all, but we'll give you enough to give you the sense of what our Lord is saying here.

Let me give you the setting in the twelfth chapter of Mark. We're on Wednesday in Passion Week. Monday Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in what is known as the triumphal entry. Friday He will be crucified. So we are in the middle...Wednesday. And during this particular day, our Lord dominates the temple. The day before, on Tuesday, He had gone in and thrown out the bazaars of Annas, He had thrown out the buyers and sellers, the corrupt marketers who were extorting money out of people for animals they didn't need, and overcharging them on coin exchange. They had turned it in to a den of thieves, it had actually been that for a long time, actually it had been that for centuries.

Jesus had done the same thing at the beginning of His ministry, according to John chapter 2, when He made a whip and threw them out. He's back three years later, the final week of His ministry, two days before His crucifixion and He does it again. The people who run the religion in Israel are not happy about that, obviously. But they haven't been happy since Her showed up three years earlier and did it the first time. The Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel made up of 70 men, plus the High Priest who were responsible for the theology of Israel, at least in some measure, but more for the civil and religious life of Israel, they were in positions of power and Jesus had set Himself against them by doing what He did to the temple. Now the second time and also because He exposed their theology as apostate, their religion as hypocritical, and their influences damning...they were making sons of hell, He said, and He said that on this same Wednesday. But He had exposed them for the three years of His ministry in very similar fashion.

The Sanhedrin now is infuriated with Him. They're not only infuriated with Him, the Sanhedrin being made up of Pharisees, Sadducees and certain scribes, most of whom would be Pharisees, not only furious with Him because of His theology and His assaults on His religion, but because He had become so popular. He had banished illness from the land of Israel for the duration of His ministry. He had power over demons, power over disease, power over death, power over nature. No one had ever lived on this earth that could even come close to Him in expressions of divine power. He had amassed popularity the likes of which they had never imagine could come to any man, and it all showed up on Monday when He came into town and there was that great mass of several hundreds of thousands of people hailing Him as their potential Messiah.

So not only were they being attacked by Him economically in the operation of the temple, they were attacked by Him theologically as He exposed them as apostates and hypocrites and spiritual frauds and fakes, but now they were being attacked in terms of their popular power because the crowds were all drawn to Jesus. His popularity threatens them, threatens their power, threatens their position and their income.

In response, they want to discredit Him. They don't know how to get rid of Him. They want Him dead. But they're afraid of the people because He's so massively popular. They can't just wander in and execute Jesus because the crowds would turn on Him. They have to find a means to get the people to turn against Him, and also to get the Romans to see Him as an insurrectionist, somebody amassing an army against Rome and execute Him for rebellion against Caesar.

So, they unpack some of their traps. They try to entrap Him with a series of questions. First, we remember, the Sanhedrin sent the Pharisees along with the Herodians, and the trap failed and they were left stunned and speechless and sort of sliding away into the shadows. Then they sent the Sadducees, both were component bodies within the Sanhedrin, and the Sadducees attempt to discredit Him publicly in front of the people, failed as miserably as the Pharisees had failed, and they too quietly went away...not to stay away, but to regroup.

Now as you come to verse 28 it says, “One of the scribes came,” so you’re in the scene of the third wave of questions coming from representatives of the Sanhedrin. First came the Pharisees, then the Sadducees, and now this scribe. But you need to know the preliminary to this. There was a meeting held by the Sanhedrin. Matthew tells us about that. Matthew has a parallel passage to this very important text, as you know, and what we learn from Matthew’s parallel text, Matthew 22:34 is they were gathered together. The meeting of the Sanhedrin reconvened again because the first two traps were utterly unsuccessful. Both groups have been left stunned and speechless and had gained no ground at all. In fact, they had just become those who aided the showcasing of the brilliance of Jesus. The whole thing was counterproductive. So now they meet again.

And it’s important to make that comment from Matthew 22:34, they were gathered together, because it’s a fulfillment of a prophecy. You say, “What prophecy is that?” It’s a prophecy in Psalm 2 and verse 2. In Psalm 2 verse 2 says, “The rulers take counsel against the Lord and against His anointed.”

You say, “Well wait a minute, that could have happened a lot of times in history. How do we know that Psalm 2:2 is a prophecy that’s fulfilled here?”

We know that because of Acts chapter 4...Acts chapter 4. Here we have Peter and John and the Apostles being arrested and when they were released in verse 23, this is after, of course, our Lord’s resurrection and ascension and the Day of Pentecost. “They went to their own companions, reported all the chief priests and elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voice to God with one accord and said, ‘Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your father David, Your servant said....and this is a quote from Psalm 2....Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples devise futile things, the kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ?’” And then comes the prophecy. “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus whom You anointed both Herod and :Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.” And so here the Apostles, Peter and John, say that the fulfillment of Psalm 2:2 occurred when they gathered together against Christ. That would embrace the gathering of the Sanhedrin, that would embrace the gathering of the false trials before Annas, before Caiaphas, before Pontius Pilate, and Herod and even the Roman complicity in the death of Christ along with the people of Israel.

Verse 28 says, “All of them together were only doing whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.” So it’s important to note that they went back and reconvened and it’s on schedule. People have often said that Jesus’ life went bad, that He couldn’t plan the outcome, that He was hoping for better things. That He was a noble teacher and a good man and a moral man and a teacher of divine truth and somehow He got carried away and made some bad turns and ended up dead.

No, every detail of this is planned and prophesied in the Old Testament, even down to the very details of His death, as we will see, which are laid out for us as to the very facts of His death in Psalm 22 and the meaning of it in Isaiah 53. But just a little note from Psalm 2:2, they were doing exactly what God had predetermined what they would do with no lessening in their own culpability.

So out of that meeting comes one final attempt at putting Jesus in jeopardy. They want the people to turn against Him because they're afraid of His popularity. He's just too popular. He is amazing in what He says and they stand in amazement at the things He says. And yet it never diverts them from the desire to have Him executed. And so this is their final attempt to cause Him to say something that will force the people to turn away from Him and then they can move in and carry out their plot.

And so, in verse 28, out of that meeting, one of the scribes who, according to Matthew 22, is also a Pharisee. Most of the scribes, they were the legal experts, they were the ones who studied the law, they were the theologians of the Pharisaic legalism and this would be one of them, one of the Pharisees who was a student of the law, that's what scribes were, is sent as the emissary of the scribes and the point that Matthew makes is that he's sent to test them. He's not looking for information. They were never looking for information. And the word "test" means to trap Him, this is another trap they hope to catch Him in.

Interestingly enough, this man who is not alone, there were others around Him, but seems to be the spokesman, this man is actually somewhat honest. He is, I think, not only an emissary of the Pharisees, but I think...and a representative of the scribes...but I think he came not only volunteering to carry out their mission, but I think he came with a much more objective perspective. He wanted to find something about Jesus for himself because he seems to have an honesty that we don't see in the other questioners. In fact, it even tells us that. This is a scribe who had heard them arguing. He would have heard the previous argument over the resurrection over the Sadducees and maybe heard the previous argument to that about the Pharisees' concern regarding whether or not you're to pay tax to Caesar. And he was stunned by the answers Jesus gave, recognizing that He had answered them well.

So he comes with another question that is a question that has been dreamed up in the convocation of these men in a private place, and now it is sprung on Jesus. Here's the question. This man comes realizing in his mind that Jesus has answered well which tells us a little bit about the fact that He is not all bad and he asks Him the question that's been decided... "What commandment is the foremost of all? What commandment is the foremost of all?"

Now you ask the question at this point, what are they after? I mean, that seems like a pretty innocuous question. It doesn't seem to be connected with anything particular. Why is a trap connected to this question? Where...where...where lies the potential entrapment here?

Well the answer would be this simple. The Pharisees felt that the gospel that Jesus preached was contrary to the teaching of the Law. That's pretty basic, right? In fact, that was the cry against Jesus, that He speaks against the Law. It was the same thing against Paul, that he speaks against the Law. And it was, of course, what they accused the Apostles of doing. Therefore that Jesus proclaimed things that were inconsistent with Moses, that His teaching was a teaching against Moses and Old Testament Law.

Now the Pharisees took the whole Old Testament and all their interpretations of it and all the traditions that grew up around it and all of that was their Law. The Sadducees took nothing more than the first five books, the books of Moses, and they said that's all that came from God. So you can see the Pharisees and the Sadducees didn't agree on what was divine Law, but they both did agree that Moses' writings were divine Law; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers. They all agreed that is the Law of God. So the Sanhedrin comes up with a question they can all agree to...what is the greatest commandment, or what is the most important commandment, what is the foremost commandment and their hope is that He's going to give them something that is not found in the Law of Moses, something that supersedes Moses, something above and beyond Moses. They were all zealous for the Law of Moses and the zeal they had for the Law of Moses was only outstripped by the zeal they had for the honor they got by teaching the Law of Moses. The purpose of this approach is to get Jesus to say something they're positive will not be in the writings of Moses because they all have concluded that He's against Moses, He's anti-Judaism, He's anti-Moses. He is setting Himself up as some supreme authority. He is saying things that are not like what we hear, what we teach and what we believe. And if they can get Him to elevate Himself above Moses, then the people will be more likely to turn from Him.

Now why was Moses elevated so much? Well, if you know your Old Testament, you would know that Moses had some fairly unique experiences with God, the most amazing of which was he alone saw God face-to-face, right? As a man looks at a man in the book of Exodus, Moses saw God and he spoke face-to-face with God. It didn't start there, of course, it started at the burning bush that God and Moses had communication one to one. The man who spoke face-to-face with God as a man speaks with a friend is Moses. The glory of God was on his face, he came down the mountain and the glory that had come from God transferred itself to his face was shining, put a veil over it to cover it so the people wouldn't see it diminish because it was only a reflected glory. It was to Moses that God had given the Ten Commandments and then restored them again.

There was a rabbi named Shelafda in the second century who said, "God calls Moses faithful in all his house and therefore ranks him higher than the ministering angels themselves." That's quite a leap, supposedly borrowed that from Numbers 12:6 and 7. But the idea of the rabbis and the people was that no one was higher than Moses, Moses was the ultimate, he was supreme. It would be impossible then for anyone to be nearer to God than Moses. No one could be closer to God than Moses and

therefore no reflection of the Word of God would be purer and truer than that which came from Moses. His Law was the ultimate.

And if the Pharisees and the scribal questioner could get Jesus to put His own teaching above Moses, then they could cause Him to turn into a heretic. They wanted an apostate Jesus. This would be viewed as blasphemous folly, would discredit Him with the people. They would reject Him as the Messiah and then they could sell the idea to Rome that this was a rebel who was a potential threat to Roman security and even to Caesar and should be executed. They wanted Him dead, but in order to get that execution pulled off, they had to turn the people against Him. So they asked the question, “What is the foremost commandment of all?” The assumption is, He’s not going to give us something that we believe and we know, because He’s attacked everything about our religion. They want Him to elevate Himself above Moses.

Now, just as a footnote, the rabbis...there’s a whole history of the rabbis discussing these kind of questions. This stuff is part of the daily fodder of rabbinical dialogue. If you read the Mishnah, the Codification of Jewish Law, the Talmud, you find all through the writings of Judaism how the rabbis argued about the priorities of certain laws. Now they had decided that there was 613 laws, not just biblical laws, but biblical interpretations that became laws and traditions. But they decided there were 613...you say, “Well why would they come up with a number like that? Six-hundred and thirteen, why?” Because that’s how many letters there were in the Decalogue. If you took the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, there’s 613 letters so they said there had to be 613 laws. Pretty silly, but that’s some of the rabbinical nonsense.

They then concluded that 248 of them were affirmatives, positives and 365 were negatives cause there needed to be one for every day. So they concocted this whole scheme. And then they argued about where were the lighter laws in terms of what pleased God, and where were the heavier laws and how were they to know those and apply them? Some were light laws, some where heavy laws, and in Matthew 23:23 on the same day, on the same Wednesday, and we’ll look at it in a minute, when Jesus was talking about the Pharisees and said, “You hypocrites, you hypocrites,” one of the things He said was, “You tithe of the tiny little seeds of dill and mint and cumin and you ignore the weightier matters of the Law, such as justice and mercy and faithfulness.” So even Jesus recognized that there were lighter issues, those laws which had to do with diet and food and things like that, and there were heavier things that had to do with matters of spiritual priority.

So the rabbis all discussed, and you can find all kinds of rabbis giving you all kinds of answers to this question about what is the foremost commandment. And, of course, they worked hard at this because they couldn’t keep all the commandments, nobody could. And so they began to take a kind of reductionist view to their religion, if we could just find a few key ones and keep them, we’ll be okay. Which is always the problem legalists have, right? If you’re going to work your way in, you know you can’t be perfect, you know you’re a sinner, your heart knows it, your conscience knows it, your minds

know it, your wife knows it, your kids know it, your friends know it, the whole world knows it, so who are you fooling? So you've got to find maybe a few that you can keep and that's going to be enough to satisfy God. So they were always concerned with finding the weightier ones that they could observe. The truth of the matter is, they were characterized by giving tithes of seeds while ignoring righteousness, mercy, and faithfulness which were the real issues. So they didn't succeed at that.

In fact, in Mark 7, do you remember in Mark 7 Jesus says to them, "You have substituted tradition for the Law of God," you've substituted your foolish traditions for the Law of God, because traditions were easier to keep than divine laws.

Well the Sadducees rejected all the laws of tradition. The Sadducees rejected all the Pharisaic interpretations of the Old Testament. And the Sadducees said, "Only the Pentateuch, and only what Moses said," so at least the Pharisees and the Sadducees could agree on Moses. Moses is the supreme authority and that is supposed to be the trap. If Jesus comes up with a new law, some law they've never heard, then He is a self-declared apostate, He is a self-declared heretic, He has attacked God because God is the friend of Moses.

The scribe, according to Matthew 22:34, starts talking to Jesus by saying to Him, "Master, Teacher," he uses the term of respect that you don't see in Mark's account. Then he says, "Give us the number one law. What is it?

And our Lord's response is always perfect and absolutely accurate. He answers from the framework with which the Pharisees and the Sadducees could agree. He answers from the Pentateuch. He answers from Deuteronomy and then He answers from Leviticus and He speaks words that are very familiar to every Jew. The Jews were required to recite these things twice a day. They knew these words. So He affirms complete solidarity with Moses and with the truth of the Word of God as recorded by Moses. Let's pick it up in verse 29.

We saw the question and the approach, here's the answer. "Jesus answered, 'The foremost is this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and you shall 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 second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

Well, that was absolutely accurate, wasn't it? Absolutely accurate. And, you know, the well-established thinking intelligent, as Jesus used the word, honest rabbis would have had to agree with that and this guy does. "The scribe says to him in verse 32, 'You're right, You've got it.'" I mean, there's a sense in which he's glad about that because he does have a degree of objectivity here and there's another sense in which he hasn't been able to pull off his mission.

Let’s go back to Deuteronomy 6 and look at this, for its own sake. While we could be content with seeing it only as an effort to trap Jesus which didn’t succeed, we can’t ignore its reality in and of itself. It is what it is. It needs to be understood for what it is. Deuteronomy 6, the setting here I think is very important in Deuteronomy. Moses is about 120 years old now and he’s at the end of his life, he’s about to die and he’s talking really essentially about the last time to the people of Israel. You remember his life in sort of blocks of 40 years. Well the previous 40 years had been spent in the wilderness. He has been leading Israel, the nation has been wandering all over the wilderness between Egypt and the land of promise which isn’t a long trip at all, should have been able to have been made in a few days. It ended up taking 40 years because of their disobedience and unbelief and the whole generation of disobedient, unbelieving, idolatrous Jews that came out of Egypt in the Exodus wound up having to die in the wilderness.

Those 40 years are now up and Deuteronomy is the messages of Moses to the people who will go into the land. A generation has arisen in the wilderness, they’re going to go into the land. The book of Deuteronomy happens in a month...in a month, not a long period of time. It happens in one place. It happens just beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho as the people who have now escaped out of 400 years of Egyptian tyranny and they’ve been wandering 40 years in the wilderness and now it is time for them to enter the land.

Deuteronomy then is the second law...that’s what it means in Latin...Deuteronomy, or even the Greek is similar as well. But Moses then gathers the people in this period of time, in the same location, there’s no real chronological history going on here, and he delivers a series of messages to them and then, according to chapter 31, he writes those messages down and those messages become the book of Deuteronomy so that all the generations to come have those messages. And so we stand with Moses here and the people on the brink of entering the promised land after hundreds of years of an unfulfilled promise, 40 years of judgment, the hour has finally come and they need to be reminded of what God expects of them when they go into the land.

We could pick it up in chapter 6, or we could back up a little bit in to chapter 5, for example, verse 32, “You shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you.” Now that becomes the theme of the whole book of Deuteronomy...do what I command you, do what I command you, do what I command you. It’s just repeated again and again and again in all of Moses’ messages. And there are always results and effects and implications to that obedience. And you can go back even further in to chapter 5 and you can go forward into the remaining chapters and it’s all going to be a calling to obedience.

So let’s pick it up in chapter 6, “This is the commandment, the statutes, the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you that you might do them in the land where you’re going over to possess it.” You need to go there and obey the Word of the Lord so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I

command you all the days of your life and that your days may be prolonged. O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly just as the Lord, the God of your fathers has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey."

Again the whole emphasis here is a call to obedience, and it's repeated through this entire book. And connected to this is if you do that, God will bless you, God will multiply your families, God will multiply your crops, multiply your grain and if you do that God will defeat your enemies, if you do that God will prosperous you and bless you." Just constant through the book of Deuteronomy.

Now wherein lies the motive for this? Wherein lies the motive for this? The motive really is given in verses 4 and 5. This is called the Shema, the Jews know it as the Shema, many Christians know it as the Shema because the first word here in Hebrew is *Shema*, hear...hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And here comes the motive, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might. And then these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart."

In other words, you're never going to be able to be obedient if this is external. This has to be internal. This has to be internal. And notice the foundation of this extensive call to loving God. "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one." It was a polytheistic world which means there were many gods, many nations, every nation had its own deities, its own sets of deities. There were gods all over the place...that is false gods, gods that did not exist, fabrications of demons and men. But there was only one true God, the Lord is the one true God. Therefore you don't need to worry about dividing your allegiance, right? You only need to love one God because there is only one God and you need to love Him with all your capacities.

This is what drives this obedience. The word "love" that our Lord uses in the New Testament accounts, in Matthew and in Mark, is from the verb *agapao* which is the love of intelligence, the love of the will, the love of purpose, the love of choice, the love of sacrifice and the love of obedience, not *phileo* which is the love of attraction. It is a sense of love connected to fearing God, as we read in verse 2. He is worthy of our affection and certainly we give Him our affection, we give Him our emotional love as is part of what is being discussed here, but it's because of who He is that we do that, not something stirred up emotionally, but something emotional in response to what is a true revelation of God.

So the purest, noblest, highest, most comprehensive, most exhaustive, most complete love is given to the one true God. There is only one God and therefore you can give Him all your love. And that comes out in the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods before Me," right? That's the first commandment, don't have any other gods, there are no other gods. Don't be led to think there are. The most basic Old Testament truth is there is one God, that is the beginning of the Shema, it is the basic of the Old Testament truth, it is today to this day in this time, in this period, what the Jews

most celebrated about their religion that there is only one God. The supreme, most comprehensive duty of man then is to love that one God for who He is, for what He has done. That's why we are to love Him with out heart, soul and mind, as Moses put it in Deuteronomy. And our Lord in the New Testament, in our passage in Mark added another dimension, "strength." The Lord added that, 'heart, soul, mind, strength.'

Now are these things to be sort of broken down? Are we conscious of some differences in these things?

Well in a sense I guess we could break them down. What does it mean to love the Lord your God with all your heart...by the way, you can go back to Mark...what does it mean to love the Lord your God with all your heart? What are we talking about? What's my heart?

Well, the heart in the Hebrew understanding is the core of your identity, the source of all your thoughts, words, actions. That's why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life." It's 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 exceedingly sorrowful," Matthew 26:38. He was speaking of His soul as the seat of emotion. Mind may best be seen as the will, the best intention, the power of purpose. We sometimes say, "I made up my...what?...my mind to do this." This is a kind of clarification of might, in the sense. And then Jesus adds strength, the reference to physical energy.

So the intellectual, emotional, volitional 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.

Back in to Mark 12, just to show you 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." And the addition of those words "with all" 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.

I do need to just go back to Deuteronomy for a minute because I don't want you to miss the fact that this is so important and so basic, and that's why the scribes said you've got it right. That if you go back to Deuteronomy for just a minute, you would say....you could listen, that's just as well....there are repeated calls to the same exact kind of love. Deuteronomy 11, here's Moses again, "You shall therefore love the Lord your God and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinance and His commandments,." 11:13, "It shall come about if you listen obediently to My commandments which I'm commanding you today to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul...so forth...you'll receive rain and grain." Verse 22, "If you are careful to keep all this commandment which I'm commanding you to do, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways

and hold fast to Him, the Lord will drive out the nations who are your enemies." Chapter 13, "You shall not listen to the words of a false prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." And it just keeps going like this all through Deuteronomy. Chapter 19 verse 9, "If you carefully observe all this commandment which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to walk in His ways always, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three," and He talks about very specific promises for those who express that love as a people. And there is even in the wonderful thirtieth chapter, "Moreover...verse 6...the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul so that you may live." Verse 16 , "In that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments, His statutes, His judgments, that you may live and multiply." Verse 20, "By loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, by holding fast to Him, this is your life."

Foundational. When somebody asks you, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" It means to love the Lord your God with all your entire being. We know the one we love, do we not? Because He's disclosed Himself to us in Scripture. He's worthy of our love. He's worthy of far more love than we will ever be able to give Him. Joshua 22:5; Joshua 25:11; when Joshua gets his opportunity to speak, he calls for the same thing. He heard Moses and he understood what he said and he calls on the people to do the same thing, to love God...to love God.

The Apostle Paul reminded us to let our love abound more and more in all knowledge. And I think our love for God is connected to knowledge. The more you know about God, the more there is to love. Is that not true? Your love is in correlation to the revelation of God which you know. The more you know about God, the more there is to love Him.

The truth of the matter was, the Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees and leaders of Israel and people who followed them weren't anywhere near this. It's an unmistakable command. I read it to you a dozen times. It isn't that they didn't know it was there. It isn't that it was unavailable. It is that they can't do it on their own. See, this is a command to do something you can't do on your own. This was really a Deuteronomic assault on legalism. People needed to cry out in response to the message of Moses. "How can we do this? How can we do this? We're sinful...We're sinful. We have a history of breaking Your Law even here in the wilderness for 40 years, how can we keep this law?"

The whole nation could have fallen on its knees right there on the plains of Moab in those 30 days where Moses was talking to them and said what the Publican said in Luke 18, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." How can I love like that?

The Pharisees had no interest for pleading for an ability to do that. They were hypocrites of the worst kind. Remember now, we're on Wednesday of Passion Week and Wednesday is dedicated to preaching the gospel, teaching the Kingdom and being confronted by the leaders of Israel. They

confront Him first. They ask Him three questions. Then He turns on them. He starts asking question, then He denounces them in a terrifying denouncement. We're going to see a little about that when we move ahead next Sunday. Connected with His denouncement of them, which will be the message from next Sunday, is the whole diatribe in Matthew 23. But I want to just refer to it because here we find how far these religious leaders were from loving God. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...hypocrites. You shut off the Kingdom of heaven from people. You travel around on land and sea to make a proselyte and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you blind guides, you fools, you blind men, you blind men. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, blind guides. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, inside they're full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the dish, and the outside itself may become clean also."

So they never got to the inside. They never ever came to the place where they love God. They love themselves and they loved money. You ware whitewashed tombs. On the outside you appear beautiful. On the inside you're full of dead men's bones and uncleanness. You appear outwardly righteous to men, inwardly you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness, etc., etc. And your hands are bloody with the blood of all the prophets, He says.

So they were...they were far from lovers of God. God not satisfied with the outside appearance of works, demands the inward love. That's what Moses taught. If you want to be right with God, if you want to be blessed by God, you must love God with all your heart.

In fact, the Old Testament, and you need to know this, the Old Testament even refers to people in two categories. There are only two kinds of people in the world, right? Two kinds. My grandfather used to say the "saints and the aints." That's one way to distinguish them, but there are two kinds of people in the world. Let me tell you what they are. Listen to the Ten Commandments, "You shall not make for yourself an idol of any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth, beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me. That's the first category. Those who hate God. But showing loving kindness to thousands to those who love Me."

Everybody in the world is in one of those two categories. You're either a God-hater, or a God-lover. What defines the unregenerate is they hate God. What defines the regenerate is they love God.

Deuteronomy 7:9 repeats the same thing. There are the haters of God and the lovers of God. Nehemiah 1:5 refers to believers as those who love God. So even in the Old Testament, those are just samples, the last one I gave you, Nehemiah 1:5, it talks about the people of God as those who love God. It's not about ritual and routine, as we will see, the young scribe, we assume he may have been young, maybe not, that scribe even understood that in the darkness of his own soul.

Listen to what the psalmist said in Psalm 69 and verse 36. “The descendants of His servants will inherit it...that is the promised blessing...and those who love His name will dwell in it.” If you want to be a part of God’s glorious promised fulfillment, then you need to be among those who love His name. Psalm 97:10 again makes this same emphasis. “Hate evil, you who love the Lord.” That’s what defines us. We’re those who love the Lord. First Corinthians 2:9 has to be added to that list. “Just as it is written...this is taken from Isaiah...things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man all that God has prepared for those who...what?...who love Him....who love Him.” Loving God is what defines believers.

The eighth chapter of 1 Corinthians, verse 3, “If anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” Conversely if you are known by God, if you have a true relationship to Him, it’s evident because you love Him. The opposite, 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be cursed.”

Well, loving God. The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself...love your neighbor as yourself.” What are we talking about there? That ‘s Leviticus 19:18, that was the second command. You love God and you love your neighbor as yourself. And there’s a lot of people who say, “Oh, this means you need to love yourself. You need to work on loving yourself. You need more self-esteem. You need to love yourself more.”

No you don’t. You need to love yourself less. That’s not what it’s about. You already love yourself. Who did you dress this morning? Who did you comb? Who did you feed? Look, we don’t have to learn to love ourselves, our whole lives are consumed with taking care of self. What our Lord is saying, “Treat other people with the same detailed care you treat yourself.” It’s not a call for self-love, it’s a call to love others the way you already love yourself.

Why does He come up with these two things? Because there’s no other commandment greater than these. And our Lord also said, “On these two, hang all the law and the prophets.” The Ten Commandments are connected to this. The first four are about loving God. You don’t have any other God. You don’t make a false idol. You don’t take His name in vain. And you remember to worship Him. That’s loving God. And to 10 it’s about loving man. You...you’re respectful to your parents. You have respect for authority, you have a respect for life, you don’t kill people. You have a respect for moral purity, you don’t commit adultery. Respect for others’ goods and rights, you don’t steal. You have respect for what is true, you don’t lie. Have respect for what God has provided and you’re content, you don’t covet. All that has to do with man to man. The first half has to do with man to God, then man to man, so that these two commandments are simply a summarization of the whole Law.

There are only two possibilities...God’s laws that relate to our relationship to Him, and His laws that relate to our relationship with others. This is the genius of our Lord. In these two commands, He has said it all. It’s all gathered up in those two commands. Stunning. Love Me, love others, even your

enemies, Matthew 5:43 to 48, not just your friends, not just your brothers, but love your enemies and you'll truly be the children of your father. Love others.

They didn't do that either. They had nothing but disdain for others. They despised the informed, the poor, the weak. They had no respect for those people who were beneath them. Pharisees wouldn't even eat with a non-Pharisee. Their religion was false, it was corrupt all the way through.

Well, the scribe said to Him, verse 32, and the ending is very interesting, "Right, Teacher." What a disappointment. You got it right. There goes that trap. You've truly stated. You gave us the *Shema*, He is one and there's no one else besides Him, and to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as himself is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Boy, he got the point, didn't he? He knew exactly what Jesus was saying. Had all this ritual, all this routine, remember where they are, they're standing right in the temple courtyard where all the sacrifices and all the burnt offerings took place constantly every morning, every night of every single day of the year. And then additional sacrifices being made at a massive level and the Passover Week, where they are right now, He was in the middle of that sacrificial system with priests all over the place and He said what's more important than this is to love God and to love others. And this is a concurrence. He's even agreeing that this man's religion, the one that he propagates and espouses is in fact apostate. You got it right...You got it right.

From an enemy sent to trap Him, he gets complete agreement because he can't deny the Scripture. And Jesus in verse 34 saw that he answered intelligently, he knew his Old Testament. He also said to him, "You're not far from the Kingdom of God."

By the way, that's good, but not good enough. Near isn't good enough, you must enter...you must enter...you must enter by faith in Christ in His death and resurrection. But in what sense is this man near? He's near because he understands that it's an internal issue, not a ceremonial ritual issue.

That was the final shut-down. After that, no one ventured to ask Him any more questions. Nothing that they tried to use to turn Him against the people and the people against Him, so far, has succeeded. They will get there. And by Friday, they'll have those people screaming for His crucifixion.

Father, we thank You for the time in Your Word, this morning. Always so profoundly rich. Seal it to our hearts and use it, Lord, to bring honor to Your name. We want to love You perfectly, more than we do. Enable us to do that by Your power, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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