

Matthew 22:34-40

The Greatest Commandment

Image Church // Love Your Neighbor Week 1

Introduction

Well good morning Image Family, I hope you're doing well! If you're a guest with us we're so glad that you're here this morning...

We would love to connect with you, you can either stop by our Connection Center, or **you can text the word Guest to the number on the screen** and fill out a short form and we will follow up with you to see how we can serve you or to answer any questions that you might have!

All right, well as a church we're in a **1-year discipleship journey** where we're looking at, and striving to grow in **knowing Jesus and Make Him known...**

And today we're kicking off a brand-new series called **Love Your Neighbor** and what I want to do this morning is as we start this series is to show you how these **2 things** fit together...

That **knowing Jesus and making Him known** are not mutually exclusive of each other, but that they seamlessly fit together, and that one actually is the natural overflow of the other...

And this is going to sets the stage for the next **8-weeks** where we're going to be looking at how we practically live out the gospel in the way that we engage our neighbors as we break down the **who**, the **why** and the **what** behind it all...

Now, a quick caveat... If you're here and you're not a Christian and you're just checking things out... This is an awesome series for you to

jump in on because it will give you a glimpse into what Christianity's all about, and it will let you see why we do what we do, **and** how as Christians we're called to care about you!

Also, **for those of you that are Christians**, this is a great series to invite skeptics and non-Christians to because it will allow them to see the true nature of the church...

- **Example:** Email from Chelsea S. when I preached on hospitality...

There are a lot of people that have been burnt by the church or that are skeptical of the church that will greatly benefit from hearing what we're going to be talking about, and they will be able to see the implications that the gospel has on the way that we view and interact with others...

Alright, here we go, let's jump in to our text that's going to set up this series: **if you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Matthew 22...**

The Bible is divided into 2 parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, and Matthew is the 1st book of the NT...

The book of Matthew is an account of Jesus life written by one of Jesus 12 disciples, named Matthew...

And in **chapter 22** where we're going to be today, there are 2 groups of religious people, the **Pharisees** and the **Sadducees**, who are trying to trap Jesus, through a little **spontaneous Q&A...**

And we're going to be picking up in **verse 34** that takes place right after Jesus had just handled business on a question from the Sadducees... **Who are sad you see, because they don't believe in the resurrection, or any afterlife...**

And now the ball goes to the Pharisees as they take an attempt at juking Jesus... **Let's pick up in verse 34...**

Matthew 22:34-40

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. **35** And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him:

Again, they're not asking a question to find an answer, they're asking Him a question to try and trap Jesus... *So, the expert in the law asks:*

36 "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"

Now here seems to be the play... They were probably either trying to get Jesus to deny certain laws based on His answer, or they were trying to get Him in an open debate that they could jump in on based on His answer...

37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. **38** This is the greatest and most important command. **39** The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. **40** All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

Jesus quotes both **Deut. 6:5**, and **Lev. 19:18** here in His answer...

Following up by the fact that all the Law and the Prophets all **depend on these 2 elements...**

That word **depend** there in the original language literally means **to hang...**

Think about it like this, think about **a door** and how the way it's held up and mounted is solely based on the hinges that it hangs on... That's the picture Jesus is painting for us here... This twofold love command are the hinges that everything else hangs on.

What that means is that this double command states the true purpose of all the law and the prophets in the **OT**, that everything that God did and established in the **OT** is revealed in, and points to the **love of God and neighbor...**¹

¹ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Vol. 3, pp. 245–246). London; New York: T&T Clark International.

And not only is this the basic foundation of the **OT**, but it's also at the core of the **NT**... And, in fact, it's at the center of God's redemptive plan for humanity!!

Which means that this is a **big deal!!** And if we miss what Jesus says here, or we don't know how to apply it, then we're missing what Christianity is all about!

So, let's dive into these **2 love commands** that Jesus gives so that we can wrap our minds around them, and ultimately so that we can embody them in our lives...

1. Fully and completely commit to loving God

Let me start with a more general statement to help us better understand this: **love is not just a feeling**, it is an action...

- *Side note: That may help some of you with your marriage*

See, the problem for us is that the word love is all encompassing... And we use it so generally that we get confused...

- **Example:** We love BBQ, we love our Alma Mater (*even when they lose because they can't make free throws*)... We love our pets, and we love our spouse and our kids...
 - o *Hopefully there is a difference in those for you...*

See, we use the word **love** in so many ways to mainly describe a feeling... **But here's the problem**, if love is **only** feeling them when the feeling is gone so is love...

But that's not how love works according to the Bible...

Love is not defined by warm bubbly, and emotional sensations... Now, you may have those as a result of love, but it's not the essence of love... Love isn't primarily an affection or an attitude, it's an action toward someone else, it's participating in something...

You could say it like this: **Love is when you actively take pleasure in something or someone...**

- **Example:** I love fishing, but the way I am able to love fishing is when I actually go fishing... It's the action of going fishing that allows me to participate in loving it!

Tertullian wrote, *that love is visible...* It's visible because it's an activity you participate in and not just an emotion that you feel...

John Calvin says: *It's the free service of our wills...* Again, an action...

Here's why this is so important, for many of us **our emotions lead the way in our faith...**

- We don't **feel** like we love Him...
- **OR** we don't feel like God loves us... We don't **feel** the love of God emotionally...
- *How we feel controls our activity... And it never really works for us... Because feelings fade...*

Listen to me, your emotions and your feeling **do not** dictate or determine the foundation of your faith, and it can't drive your activity long term, and they're **not** the basis of your standing before God, **Jesus is!**

Gospel:

You **experience** the love of God through His **intentional** and **active** love that He put on display through Jesus...

We have the ability to love God because He first loved us... And when you understand His love for you, **we respond to the love of God by taking pleasure in Him, and actively surrendering** to Him for who He is and what He's done...

Jesus says here that we're to love God with all of our: **Heart, Soul, Mind...**

- He's pointing to a wholistic love and commitment... A total allegiance, and loyalty... This is so much more than an emotion...

This is a holistic lifestyle that's characterized by our love for God that happens as we take pleasure in Him by remembering what he's done for us through the **finished work of Jesus!**

- We were sinners but we're now sons and daughters...
- You once were a rebel, but now you've been made righteous...
- You once were condemned in you sin, and now you are coheirs with Christ...

IOW: The way you love God is by taking pleasure in Him, by delighting in Him because of what he's extended to you through the gospel...

In its simplest form, here is what it means to be in a relationship with God, what it means to love God: If you don't hear anything else today: loving God is to be in active awe of the gospel...

And listen, it's through the gospel that you experience God over and over again, and the more you experience God through the incredible extension of the gospel, the more you begin to desire the God who extended the gospel to you, the more you want to Know Him...

- You begin to realize that the deeper you go, to more you want... You begin to see the vastness of who God is and all that he has to offer you...
- And it's then that you begin to feel the emotions that are a result of the love of God!

For some of you the reason why you don't understand Christianity, or why your life doesn't **emit** love for Jesus, or **display** your love for God is because you've never seen His love for you through the gospel!

You haven't surrendered to it- you haven't taken pleasure in it, you aren't delighting in it...

For you, Christianity's been more of an **emotional experience** where you prayed a prayer one-time...

- *Threw a stick in the fire, everyone cried... etc.*

The gospel isn't a one-time prayer that you pray, it's a continual trust and surrender to the person of Jesus... It's not about an emotional experience, it's about an active surrender to the gospel daily...

For others of you, you're looking for an **emotion to drive your faith**, and you can't find it and so you're stagnant... Listen, **emotions don't drive your faith, your active faith will drive your emotions...**

Now I want to take a few min and answer this question... If active awe is what it looks like to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind...

How to we cultivate active awe in our life?

I want to give you three things the Bible holds up for us as tools to help us cultivate **active awe of the gospel- Or ways we grow in our love for God...**

The first way you can do this is through being in

A. The Word of God

In order to really love someone, in order to commit to someone, in order to desire to be loyal to them, you have get to know them...

It's like when meet a girl or a guy for the first time, you don't just immediately fall in love with them... *unless of course you're a college school student... That when "love at first sight happens"*

You get to know someone first, you go on a few dates, you learn more about their personality and characteristics, and **the more you learn about them the more you love them**, the more you're amazed...

It's the same way with God. The more that you learn about him and the more you understand more about him, the more you are going to

be in **awe** of Him... The more it's going to orient your heart and mind around who he is...

And here's the thing, **here's what God's word does**: every time we get in it, God is constantly showing us our weaknesses, our inabilities, our failures and shortcoming...

But then He lift's our eyes **from** our weaknesses, inabilities, failures and shortcomings to who he is building our confidence in Him for who He is, that He is big, that He is mighty, that He is beautiful and that He cannot fail, and will not fail, that He's all powerful, and that His love is incredible and it's been extended to us through the blood of Jesus!

The word of God helps keep our emotions in check, it runs like a filter for us, it serves as a reminder for us, it breathes life into us, it renews us and it instructs us in what it means to actively run after Jesus.

- **Hebrews 4:12**: Word of God is living and active...
- **2 Timothy 3:16**:
- **Matthew 13:23**: But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word

The more you infuse the Word of God in your life the more you will actively begin to be in Awe of God!

The second way you can cultivate a love for God is through

B. Community

Hebrews 3:12-14

12 Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. **13** But encourage each other daily, while it is still called **today**, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. **14** For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start.

Hebrews 10:24

23 Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, **25** not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

We have to have people around us that are going to point us to God. We are sinners and we constantly need someone holding us accountable and walking with us through life. When our eyes are no longer focused on God we need someone to tap us on the shoulder and say *look, look at who God is, look at what he is saying to you in his word...*

Comes through relationships with other believers in the local church... We need this... I know this feels like a lot, but think **intersection not addition**... Do what you already do with other people...

Another important part of community is this: Check this out... So, God reveals himself to us through displaying different attributes of himself through the gifts and traits he has given to us, so when a Community Group comes together they get to see many of the different attributes that God has given each person and so in turn each person is able to learn a little bit more about who God is!

In order to cultivate **an active awe** for God, you have to constantly be pointed to God. Developing a love for God is a group project.

The third way that we can cultivate a love for God is through C. Prayer

God is a person; how can you ever learn to know and love him if you never commune with him.

Can you genuinely love someone and never talk with them?? Can you love someone and never tell them you love them?? Can you love someone yet never take the time to listen to them???

Prayer is dialogue with God, it's a time where you listen...

Prayer is an active declaration that ***I can't but that God can***... That we are needy and God is able... That we are finite, but He is infinite

Prayer is something that reorients our hearts around who God is in light of who we are...

To be in **active awe** of God we have to spend time communing with God in prayer.....

Here's the deal... To be actively in awe it means that you have to believe and behold who God is and what He's done over and over again...

- Word, Community and prayer help orient your heart to that end...

And watch this, as you orient your heart around who God is, and as you cultivate an active **awe** of God, he begins to transform who you are from the inside out...

- **Example:** when you buy a house...

Active awe in the gospel leads to activity...

- If we don't have awe in the gospel, then we will never be able to live out the second part of this twofold command that Jesus gives...
- You have to understand the foundation of this twofold command Jesus give here in **Matthew 22**...

Let's take a look at it:

Jesus says: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38** This is the greatest and most important command... *Then He says:* **39** The second is like it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

Here's the second part of what Jesus says:

2. Love you neighbor in the same way that you love yourself

Now I want you to notice how Jesus says this... He says **the second is like it...**

Which means that this **second element** of this twofold command is in no way less important than the first part... It is *like* the first, which means that it's of equal importance...

These 2 parts are unified together, the first gives way to the second...

OK but **what does this actually look like to love your neighbor??** If loving God is active awe, what does it look like to love your neighbor?

It's living in light of your active awe and loving others in response to the way God has loved you...

*The first commandment is the basis for the second, the second is a visible expression of the first.*²

Which means that if you're not loving your neighbor, if you're not loving others then it's an **indicator** that the first part of this two-fold command Jesus gives isn't being lived out...

- This is probably because your heart isn't Christ home...

Our vertical relationship with God should flow horizontally to others... If it doesn't, then that's a problem... *It's like the check engine light on your life...*

I am to saying this is going to happen perfectly all the time, but it should be happening regularly, and when you fail to do this, there should be repentance...

And when we're talking about loving your neighbor, we're not talking about being nice to them... *Yeah, you should be nice to them,* but that's not what it means to love your neighbor, Jesus shows us what it means to love you neighbor...

He says, **love them as you love yourself!** What does this look like?

Best definition: John Piper: Make your *self-seeking* the measure of your *self-giving*...

- Now how do we keep this in check, because we tend to seek unhealthy and sinful things... *is this promoting self-centered thinking???*

Piper continues: Before you make your own self-seeking the measure of your self-giving, make God the focus of your self-seeking. This is the point of the first commandment.

IOW: The first commandment changes the way that we view ourselves, it reorients our hearts around who God is... The gospel reprograms us...

The gospel changes the things that we desire... **The gospel takes us from self-centered to Christ-centered...** Which means that we have the ability to love ourselves in the right way and not in a self-indulgent way...

And it's through this **self-seeking paradigm shift that happens through our love of God**, that we're able to love our neighbor through that same vein...

- To the same degree that you seek wellbeing for yourself, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree that you peruse protection for yourself, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree you seek provision, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree that you seek care, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree that you peruse love, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree you seek stability, seek it for your neighbor...

² John Piper, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself Part 2*.

Here's the thing, I know for some of you this feels overwhelming... And I know what you're thinking... If we really take what Jesus says here *seriously* then inevitably what will happen is that we won't be loving others *as we love ourselves*...

We will be loving others *instead of loving ourselves*...

And this feels threatening, to us, it feels invasive of our own self-love... It feels like our neighbors have more of a stake in our time and resources than we do...³

We don't like that, it's hard, it's uncomfortable...

But I think that's exactly the tension that Jesus wants us to walk in... I think that's the heart of what He's getting at...

That we would step back and go wait a min... this love that Jesus is talking about for my neighbor is radical, *how could we do this*...

Gospel... Oh wait, think about the love that God had for me, how radical it was how crazy it was, that God would love me when I was unlovable...

I was stained I was tarnished, I was trash...

God sent His Son to die for that, he died for me and He died for you...

THAT'S RADICAL! That means that it changes the way that we view, God, ourselves, and our neighbor...

We are to love our neighbor in the same way we love ourselves but the only way we can do that is by remembering the love God had for us...

I know this is weighty this morning... I know this isn't a feel good... But it is what the bible teaches...

Conclusion

In the weeks to come we're going to be talking more about how this looks in a lot of practical ways...

But today I wanted to set the stage for this series, I wanted to lay the foundation for you so that we can begin to build on it together for God's glory!

Jesus said: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul and mind... And love your neighbor as yourself...*

Are you actively in awe of who God is and what He's done for you??

Active awe in the gospel leads to activity loving your neighbor.

³ Thoughts here from John Piper, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself Part 2*.