

Matthew 22:34-40 “Loving God, Loving People”

1.28.18

Today we're going to talk about LOVE. “Loving God and Loving People” is the title of today's message. It's rather appropriate, in that Valentine's Day is only 3 weeks away. Did you know Americans spent last year \$18.2 billion on Valentine's Day? Love is a big deal!

By the way, do you happen to know what the world's longest love letter is? According to Ripley's Believe it or Not, the longest love letter ever written was written in 1875 by a painter from Paris named Marcel de Leclure. It contained the phrase “I Love You” 1,875,000 times. Just that phrase!

However, the painter did not pen the letter with his own hand. Instead, he hired a scribe. Get this... He dictated the letter, saying the phrase, “I Love You” 1,875,000 and he had to the scribe to repeat it back to him as she wrote it down. All in all, counting the number that was written and spoken, the phrase was uttered orally and in writing 5,625,000 times. Is that crazy or what? They say, “Love makes us do crazy things!”

Love. Someone has said, that love may not make the world go around, but it sure makes the trip worthwhile. Amen to that! I would say to you this morning that the best of all experiences and the sweetest of all emotions is love. Whatever era, whatever age, whatever group of people you may be talking about, it seems to be the quintessential summation: LOVE has no equal.

Think of all the songs, the poems, the movies and the books with LOVE as the theme. I believe there is conclusive consensus among the inhabitants of the world that **to love and be loved is the greatest experience of life**...and we'll see Jesus make that point clearly today in our study of Matthew 22:34-40. Follow along...

Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Now remember, it's Passion Week and it's Tuesday. Jesus will be dead in three days. He's in the Temple courtyard and it's been public showdown. See the picture we've been using...



Group after group have tried to trip Him up. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians...they've all tried to publicly discredit Jesus. They're all intimidated by His popularity and His amazing wisdom and the people are flocking to Him. He's a threat to their authority, their popularity and the very doctrine they teach. He's exposed them all as frauds: wolves in sheep's clothing, bearing rotten fruit. And they're down to their last attempt to discredit Him. And who do they call for their final attempt?

A lawyer. A scribe. Scribes are the experts of the OT law. They know it inside and out like a lawyer knows the law of the land. This is their last shot. They've called in the big gun to try to take Jesus down, because the truth is: He has SHUT THEM UP. Look at it...

Matthew 22:34

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

The word, "silenced" means to gag someone! It sounds like it's pronounced...

Phimoo: (pron: phim-AH-oh)-to silence, gag

It's the same word used when Jesus silenced a demon in Mark 1:25. It's the same word used when He said to the winds and the waves on the Sea of Galilee, "PEACE BE STILL." Silence! It's an unwilling gagging. As intimidated in the Greek...the person wants to keep speaking...the demon wants to keep possessing but he can't...the storm wants to stirring up winds and waves, but it can't! Jesus says Phim-AH-OH). No more!

Listen church family, never forget who is in control of all of life. JESUS. The One who can say Phim-Ah-OH and gag any situation He chooses. Satan can't stop Him. Storms can't stop Him. Nothing can stop Him. The song we sing, "The Lion and the Lamb," says, "Who can stop the Lord Almighty!" No one! I pray you take comfort in that thought today.

So, these religious elites are stumped and so, they call another huddle, a "time-out"...

Matthew 22:35

³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

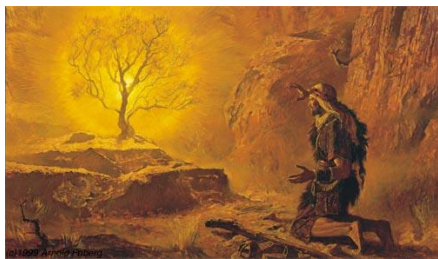
So, here comes the high-priced lawyer...the big gun... He's the best of the best...He knows the OT inside and out and he's going to try to text Jesus with another question that seems rather innocent to us. He asks: "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Now here's what we need to understand. These guys...

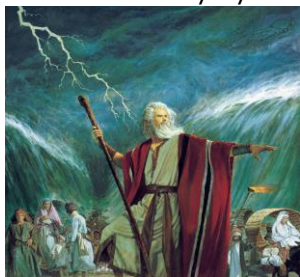


the religious elite...had a plan and the plan from the beginning was to discredit Jesus before the people. He had made them look like fools and so, they were going to try to get back to even in the eyes of the people by making Jesus look bad. But how?

Well, it's revealed in the question the lawyer asked. He asked a question about the Law. Through whom did they get the Law? MOSES. You see the greatest NATIONAL hero in all of Jewish history is Moses. Moses rises in the mind of the Jew as the premier ambassador of the nation of Israel. After all, Moses is the one that God spoke to in a burning bush...



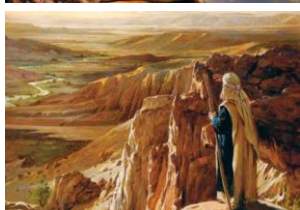
Moses is the one who delivered them out of Egypt as they escaped Pharaoh's army by a dry Red Sea bed...



Moses was the one who received the 10 Commandments, written by God's finger



And Moses was the one who took them to the cusp of the Promised Land...



It doesn't get any better for the nation of Israel than Moses. And this is where this lawyer thought he could trap Jesus. If He could just get Jesus to somehow say that didn't line up with Moses, then this would discredit Jesus among the people.

So that's where this highfalutin lawyer turned...to the TEN COMMANDMENTS. "Which is the greatest of the Commandments in the Law?"

I bet you could hear pin drop as those words rolled off the tongue of that man... **"What will He say? Will He somehow contradict the Law of Moses?"**

You see, the Pharisees had been telling everyone that the teachings of Jesus went against the Law of Moses. They wanted to label Jesus as a heretic and they had been seeking to do this since the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. And you may remember, Jesus addressed this misconception with the crowds on a mountainside in Galilee.

Turn back to Matthew 5:17 and you'll see this... Jesus clearly proclaims in His Sermon on the Mount, that He had not come to abolish the Law, but instead to fulfill it.

Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will

pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You may remember when I taught from this passage that I told you that the Pharisees had developed a system of 613 laws, 365 negative commands and 248 positive ones. And so, by the time Jesus came, this system had produced nothing but a heartless, cold and arrogant brand of religion, led by a bunch of righteous hypocrites...WHICH JESUS EXPOSED to the crowds, non-stop the entire day in that Temple courtyard, on Tuesday of Passion week!

Now watch how Jesus turns this lawyer's attempted trick to discredit Him on its ear...

Matthew 22:37-38

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.

You might say, "I don't get it. How did Jesus turn the tables on them?" Well, let me show you. **Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy, chapter 6.** We're turning to the writings of Moses. Moses penned the words of the first 5 books of the Bible, called the PENTATUCH.

What we're going to see in verses 4 and 5 is known as the SHEMA. The word SHEMA means: "to hear and obey." The Shema is learned by all Jewish children from the time they can speak... It's as familiar to them as the ABC song is to us. They recite it daily at the morning and the evening sacrifices.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Wow oh wow! Jesus has used the words of MOSES to give an answer back to this lawyer and his buddies! TOUCHE! This is brilliant! Everyone in that crowd packed in the Temple courtyards knew the Shema and here Jesus has used it to give the answer to what is the greatest commandment! Oh, the lawyer thought he could use Moses to convict Jesus of heresy, but instead Jesus used the words of Moses to show them He was no heretic...but, embraced the words of Moses.

Honestly, I believe the crowd must have been shaking their heads and laughing by this time. This was a powerful display by Jesus. **Go back to Matthew 22, verse 37 again.** It's a direct quote from the Shema.

Matthew 22:37

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Now what does it mean? Let's break it down. The word "LOVE" that Jesus used is the word: **agapeo**.

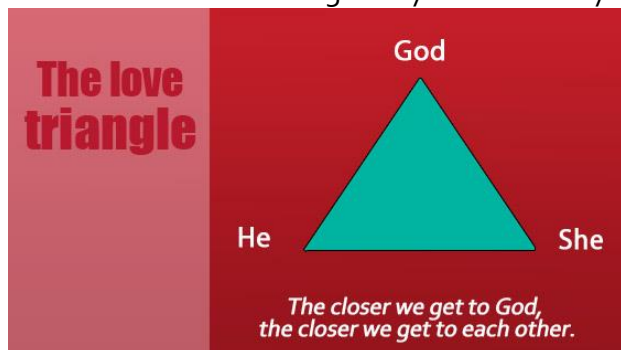
Agapeo-unconditional love

Now let's tie that back to the Hebrew word for love in Deuteronomy. That word is (pronounced Ah-Have). Written: A-H-A-B

Ahab-the love of will and action, expressed in dedication, commitment and purpose.

Now, this is so important to note and I'll tell you why... Because instead of making love a decision of the will...we've made love in our culture about emotions and feelings. Love in our day has been equated almost totally in regards to feelings. And it's feelings that drive a lot of what Americans think today. You know...if I feel like a woman, but I'm a man...then you've got to accept that or you are unloving. You have to accept what I feel about marriage...about a blob of tissue inside a woman...you name it.

And oh...If I feel like I love you, then we'll stay married...but, if those feelings wane...we'll, I'm sorry...you're out! Church family, this is not Biblical AGAPEO love...it's nothing close to agape love...a love that costs...a love that's self-sacrificing. Are you here today as a married couple and you've been struggling?



Might I remind us all that the love we are to have for our spouse is the love of ACTION, DEDICATION, COMMITMENT AND PURPOSE. And that's the kind of love we're to have for God. **It's a love that does!**

So how do we love? See it again. Three ways...

Matthew 22:37

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Let's take the first one...this is easy. It's the Greek word: **Kardia** (We get our English word: Cardiac).

So, what does it mean to love God with all of our hearts? Well, for the Jew, to love with the heart is to love with the core of your personal identity. The "heart" in the Hebrew understanding is how you identified yourself.

See this picture... Imagine this young lady, who grew up in Texas suddenly moving to and living in New York...



I bet she'll still wear her cowboy boots and jeans...maybe even her big belt buckle and hat. Why? Because she grew up as a Texan cowgirl! I bet she'll keep that southern accent... In other words, you may **"take the girl out of Texas, but you'll never take the Texas out of the girl."** It's **her identity.**

This is exactly the idea of what it means to find our identity in God. Do you find your identity in God? In other words, no matter where you go or what you do...do you act like a Christian, talk like a Christian and walk like a Christian. After all, "You can take a Christian outside of the church, but you'll never take Christ out of the Christian."

Do you identify with Him first? Yes, it's okay to identify as a cowgirl from Texas, or a Duke fan, or a Chocolate lover, but first and foremost as a follower of Christ, we should find our identity in Him and anything or anyone that we use to identify ourselves above Him has become an idol in our lives. Proverbs 4:23 says:

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Where is your heart today? Is it with the Lord? You can tell by how you act and what you're committed and devoted to.

Well, we're to love God, with our all our heart and then **#2...**

Matthew 22:37

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Now this is where we get the emotion. The word for soul means "from your gut." You feel it! It's like when Jesus was here...



In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter, James and John...

Matthew 26:38

Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

Jesus felt in His soul...in His gut...the emotional part of His being... that death was upon Him. That's He felt in His soul! And yes, it's okay to love God and to FEEL Him in your soul! I am reminded of the fact that Jesus was strong-minded and yet, warm-hearted...warm souled. And we should be the same!

You see, if you love the Lord, you are going to feel His Spirit bear witness with your spirit from time to time. You are going to feel joy that's indescribable when you are living with your heart in tune with Him and you're going to feel the conviction of your spirit when you are walking in darkness and sin. When you love God, you should feel Him in your soul from time to time.

#3. When you love God you'll not only love Him with your heart and your soul...you'll love Him with **your mind**...

Matthew 22:37

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

The word "mind" means to love God with all of your mental faculties. You see, contrary to those who say believing in God is a mindless, unintellectual activity; it's actually the opposite. There is no more stimulating activity that the human mind can engage in than to think on God and His character and His magnificence! Just to consider the fact that the universe is so large that we've not even found the end of it, and yet, the God of creation who made everything, loved me enough to send His Son to die for me and number the hairs on my head, is beyond my comprehension! But, oh the joy of pondering those thoughts!

We are to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind! So, we're finished, right? Nope! Jesus goes one step further...

Matthew 22:38-40

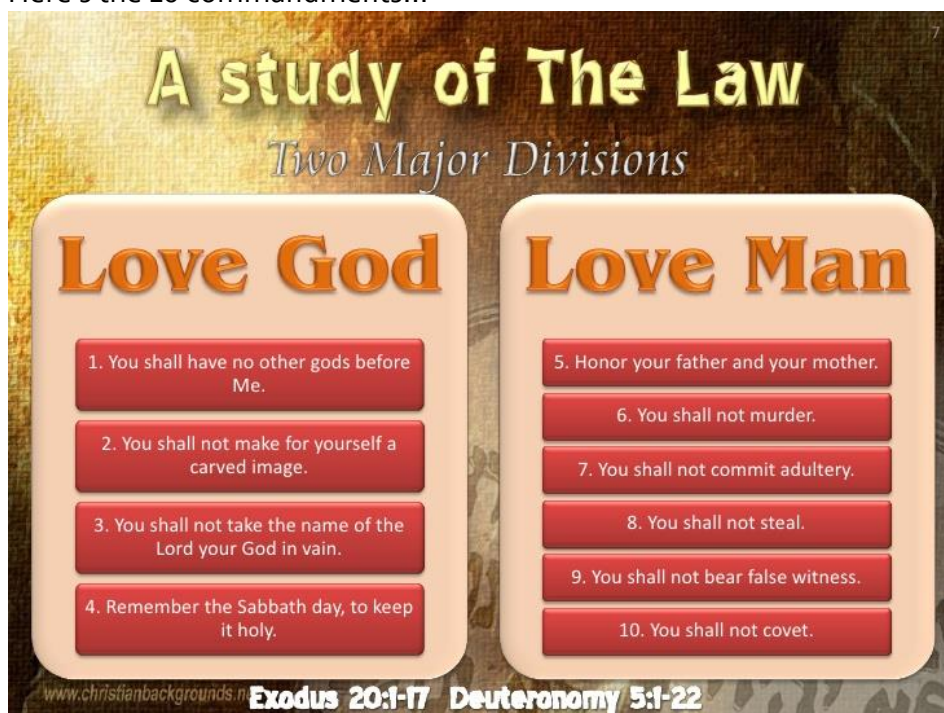
³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Do you realize what Jesus was saying to these bunch of hypocrites...



"If you will follow the Shema...the ABC'S of your faith, that will transfer to having a love for people...in other words...you'll stop standing up here away from the people...and you'll get down there with them." Why? because when the love of God is working through you...you will automatically love people too!"

You see this is why Jesus said everything hangs on "Loving God and Loving People." See the screens... Here's the 10 commandments...



Do you love people? Now, take note that I didn't ask if you loved people who love you back. I asked do you love people? That's everybody. That would include people who don't like you. People who get on your nerves. People who don't look like you or live like you or act like you? Do you love people? Jesus said we are to "LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELF." Who is our neighbor? Remember, Jesus told the story about this man...



A Good Samaritan helping a man he didn't even know. Listen, if you and I are going to love others...it's going to cost us time and money and it's usually going to be uncomfortable. You don't help others and it not cost you something.

Listen, loving others means we're willing to roll up our sleeves and get into the muck and mire of life with people so we can help them. It means we will show them the love of Jesus and just like the Good Samaritan poured ointment into the man's wounds, don't ever forget when we're sharing the Gospel with a hurting soul that (as one young man reminded me a few days ago) that... See the screens... Never forget that most often...

"The love of Jesus hurts before it heals."

Isn't that the way it was with you? You were convicted of your sin and you had a godly remorse. Listen, when we're helping people, and we give them Jesus, the true Jesus...give the medicine of the Gospel that Jesus did. For you see, His love demands repentance and obedience to His ways. Jesus said, "If you love (agapeo) me, you will keep my commandments." Yes, His love hurts before it heals! For true love equals obedience. Lack of love equals disobedience.

Church family, I've come to this conclusion: A true believer in Jesus Christ will desire to keep His commands. They will desire to live for Him as an act of their will...with their heart, with their gut, with their intellect... You show me someone who doesn't have any interest in keeping the commands of God and I'll show you someone who doesn't love God and someone who doesn't know God. Just like these guys...



You see, they refused to love Jesus. They wouldn't submit to Jesus and the love He offered. And so, instead of loving Jesus, they hated Him and would have Him on a cross in three days.

Listen, God is not looking for people who go through religious rituals. God is not looking for people who on the outside can make it look good and go through the motions... God is looking for people who will surrender their entire being to His Son, Jesus Christ and love Him with all that they are. That Jesus will be the priority of their lives. Why does God expect that?

Because...God...in His agapeo for us...gave His everything...Jesus...His Son...for us. He gave Him to become sin, who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

One last thing...as we close I almost missed this until I was reading Mark's account. See the screens...

Mark 12:34a

³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Did you catch that... "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Oh my goodness! This lawyer was almost convinced. Can you feel the tension? Would he receive Jesus...it will cost Him everything.

Did He accept Jesus? We're not told. I believe if he had...we'd probably know about...one of the Gospel writers would have said...because this would have been a miracle.

Have you accepted Jesus? If you will...you will receive eternal life and escape Hell. And that's more than anything this world can offer you! Yes, in three days...Jesus would pay the price on a cross about 1,000 feet away...so that we might LOVE Him!

Oh what love! What amazing love! A love that is so much greater than a French painter having the words, "I love you" written 1,875,000 times. No, this love is magnanimous that well...it could be summed up this way...



Our Savior on cross...with these words: "For God so LOVED the world that He gave His one and Only Son, to that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life."