

Our Love Supreme

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning, everyone.

I'm Isaac Lee, and I'm a part of the youth group at Christ Church. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 4 through 25, as printed in the liturgy.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

These commandments that I gave you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

[1 : 10] Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you a land with large, flourishing cities.

And you did not build houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide. Wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.

Then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Fear the Lord your God.

Serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the people around you. For the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God, and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.

Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massa. Be sure to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you, and you may go in and take over the good land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors, thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the Lord said.

[2 : 36] In the future, when your son asks you, What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees, and laws the Lord our God has commended you? Tell him, We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Before our eyes, the Lord sent signs and wonders, great and terrible, on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors.

The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.

The grass withers and the flowers fade. The Lord for us stands forever. Good morning, Christ Church.

What a beautiful baptismal service today. I'm not sure if we even need a sermon, but here we go. My name is Pastor Jonathan. If you're new with us, we're delighted to have you. And, you know, human relationships are complicated.

[4 : 05] Anyone agree with that? It seems like they've become maybe even more complicated over the past two years. I don't know if anybody else experiences that. But when you think about how people feel about each other, there's a wide spectrum of experience.

You know, on the one end, we might so dislike someone that we'd say, we'd go so far as to say, you know, I actually hate him. And then there's others, you know, we'd say, well, I kind of am indifferent about that person.

I don't really care one way or the other about them. And then there are people that we say, you know, I like him. I like her. They're good people. And then there's those in our lives we'd say, you know, I love, like I love my mom.

And I love my dad. I love my siblings. I love my kids. But then, you know, there are those really special people in our lives where we say, I am in love with them.

I am in love with her. I am in love with him. And if you've ever experienced that, I don't need to explain it to you. You just know what that means, right? Well, the same is true in the way we feel about God.

[5 : 14] You know, some people look at their lives and they say, you know, my life is so messed up. It's been so hard. My situation, my circumstances, if there is a God, I hate God. And other people say, you know, I'm kind of indifferent.

I don't really care if God's there one way or the other. He's not that big of a deal to me. And other people say, well, I like God. I sometimes say thank you. You know, sometimes I ask for help.

And others say, you know, I love God. God's my protector. He's my provider. But then there are those people in the world who say, I'm in love with God. I am in love with God.

And, you know, Jesus was one of those people. Jesus said, I am in love with God. And that's what I want for anybody who's going to come follow me is I want to help you fall in love with God.

And as we think about Jesus for a minute, I just want to help you imagine three scenes from his life as we open up here. I want you to imagine Jesus as a kid in those hidden years of his life.

[6 : 23] You know, what were the first words that when Jesus could talk, what were the first words that he learned to say? When he was six years old or 10 years old or 14 years old, when he was there with his mother Mary at home helping her make the daily bread, when he was out on the construction site with his dad Joseph helping build stone houses, when he was there at the Sabbath in the synagogue helping with worship services, what was Jesus thinking?

What was his foundation and framework? What centered him and grounded him? Well, Jesus, like all first century Jews, was praying the Shema.

Those are the first words he ever learned. Shema is the Hebrew word for hear. Deuteronomy 6.4, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And with the setting of the sun and the rising of the sun, the rhythms of the creation, all the people of God would start and end their day praying these words.

And when they did, they would embrace the yoke of the kingdom of God. When they prayed these words, they would commit themselves to God's purposes on earth as it is in heaven, no matter what the cost.

They were pledging their loyalty to the God of the Exodus who was giving his people their inheritance. That's Jesus as a child, as a youth, as a kid, right?

[7 : 52] Now I want you to fast forward and I want you to imagine Jesus as a 30-year-old at the start of his ministry. He's just been baptized and now he goes out to the Judean wilderness and he's there fasting and praying for 40 days in this barren, howling wasteland.

And when he's there, he's being tempted by the evil one, tempted by this dark power that's trying to question his identity as the beloved son of God, trying to get Jesus to move off his course of going to the cross.

And how does Jesus respond to this? What is he meditating on in the midst of his trial, in the midst of his temptations? What book of the Bible does he quote to drive evil away from him?

We know that he quoted Deuteronomy 6, 7, and 8. In fact, he quoted here one of the scriptures in our text today, verse 16.

He said, Do not put the Lord your God to the test. In other words, trust in the Lord, love the Lord, Yahweh our Father, with everything you've got.

[9 : 05] And now I want you to think about Jesus not only as a child and not only as a man being tempted in the wilderness, but I want you to fast forward about three years to the end of his life.

It's the final week before he goes to the cross. And Jesus is teaching in the temple courts. And somebody comes up to him and they say, Rabbi, tell us what is the greatest commandment in the whole Bible?

And Jesus, without hesitating, without even having to think about it, he goes, Deuteronomy 6, 5. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

That is the number one priority of every human being. Jesus, from his earliest days until his final week before the cross and beyond, Jesus was a man who had fallen in love with God.

He was in love with God. And he wanted everybody to fall in love with God as well. He wanted people to fall in love and to stay in love with God.

[10:17] And so that's what we're going to be talking about here for the next few minutes from Deuteronomy 6. And what I want to say today is that our love supreme is the life-giving Lord.

Our love supreme is the life-giving Lord. And I want to think about our love supreme because Jesus quoted it. He said in verse 5, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And kids, I've given you these 10 fingers to kind of remember that before. Maybe you remember, love the Lord your God because he loved us first.

Right? Let the loyal love that God has for you be mirrored back to him. And it says here, With all, all, all.

All your heart, which is the seat of your thought and your will and your intentions. All of your soul, which is your inner self, with all of your desires and affections.

[11:20] All of your strength. Literally in Hebrew it says, With all of your very muchness. Love him to your utmost. All you can muster to excess. Be over the top with your love.

Don't waste your time being half-hearted. Don't waste your time going through the motions. Give it everything you've got. Go all in and love with God to your whole capacity.

At the deep roots of your life with the totality of your being. Have you noticed that this word love can be such a slippery word?

It can be so vague and abstract that it becomes kind of meaningless. And so it's defined for us here. It says, Let your love be deep and let it be wide.

Let your love for the Lord be deep in every aspect of your individual life. Verse 7 says, In other words, in your private life and your public life.

[12:26] The Lord is someone to be loved. Not just in here with your family and with your church. But also out there with your colleagues and with your neighbors. Love him at all places and with all people.

It says, It says, Talk about the Lord when you lie down and when you get up. In other words, From breakfast to bedtime and all of your waking hours in between.

The Lord is not someone to love on Sunday and then to do something else Monday to Saturday. He's not someone to love in the morning and then the rest of your day is just kind of wide open for whatever.

It says, Love the Lord your God at all times. And in all places. With all people. And then it says in verse 8, Tie these things about the Lord.

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. In other words, Let the love of the Lord guard your thinking and your head and what's on the inside.

[13:26] And also let it guide your acting with your hands and what's on the outside. And let there be no division between the inner and the outer. Love the Lord with your whole self, body and soul.

In every nook and cranny of your thoughts and your mind and your actions with your life. Let it be affected by your love for the Lord.

Love the Lord in a deep way in every aspect of your individual life, it says. But also love the Lord in a wide way with every aspect of our corporate life together.

It says, it doesn't say, Hear, O Jonathan. Though it does include me. It says, Hear, O Israel. Plural. All the people of God. And it says to us, Verse 9, Write these things about the Lord on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.

[14:26] What does that mean? Well, the door frames of our houses means that the Lord is someone to be loved within the collective whole of our family and our extended family and our friends and all the neighbors that we want to draw into that circle of love.

And then it says, Write these things about the Lord on your city gates. What does that mean? It means that this is the place where people daily pass through. And public affairs are being deliberated.

At the city gates, legal agreements are being made. And markets are being set up. And justice is being served. And this tells us that the Lord is someone to be loved socially.

He's someone to be loved politically and economically and legally and commercially. In the ways that we conduct our businesses. In the ways that we engage the daily news cycle.

In the ways that we interact with people that have different points of view and different lifestyles from us. It includes the way that we treat people who are the least and the last in society on the margins.

[15 : 34] It includes the way that we care for the weak and the poor who are sitting at the city gate. And this is kind of jumping ahead a couple weeks. But Deuteronomy chapter 10 says that the Lord defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow.

And loves the foreigner residing among you. Giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners. For you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. What this says is that we're to let our love for the Lord so spill out and overflow onto this quartet of the vulnerable.

Orphans. Widows. Immigrants. And the poor that are sitting at our city gate. Now where does all this love begin?

Where is it that we would fall in love with the Lord in the way that's being described here? The place where it all begins is in the heart.

It's in the heart. It says in verse 6, These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. That tells us that this is not about a legalistic conformity to a cold external code.

[16 : 50] But what it's about is an awakening of the heart. A warming and a softening and the centering of our hearts. If you're single here or if you're recently married or you've in any recent time been on the dating scene, you know that you can tell when the person that you're dating, their heart's just not really into it.

Amen? I mean you can kind of see if they're just sort of going through the motions. They're trying to get through this date as fast as possible. There's clearly somewhere else, maybe someone else they'd rather be with.

But when you fall in love with someone, you don't have to, you know, nobody has to tell you to spend time with that person. You just do it. You spend time with them because you can't imagine doing anything else.

Your heart has become all about that person. You are preoccupied with them. Nothing makes you happier than to please that person.

Nothing fulfills you more than just to be with that person. What you want when you've fallen in love is you just want to hear your beloved's voice. You just want to know what are you thinking?

[18 : 07] What are you feeling? You want to share with them your deepest thoughts and your deepest concerns. That's what it means to be in love. And that's the way in which Jesus was in love with God.

And that's what he's inviting all of his disciples to be. To be people who've fallen in love with God as their love supreme.

In a love that's deep. In a love that's wide. In every aspect of our individual life. In our corporate life. Wow.

Well, how do we do that? How do we do that? Well, our love supreme. That develops to the degree that we've experienced our life-giving Lord.

Our love supreme develops in us to the degree that we've encountered the life-giving Lord. And that's why it says in verse 4. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[19 : 10] And Moses is not giving us an abstract statement of monotheism. An abstract statement of the simplicity of God. Rather, Moses is talking to the Israelites on the edge of the promised land.

And he's reminding them of what God has done for them. It is so very easy for God to do something in your life and then to forget about it. Has that ever happened to you?

It happens to me all the time. And so Moses is reminding the people of God that he called Abraham. And he called Israel to be his special people in the world.

And he didn't choose them because they were better people or because they were more clever or they had deeper insights or they were more committed. God just chose his people because he's merciful.

And out of that mercy, he's just incredibly patient with his people. He's exceedingly kind to his people. And Moses tells the story. He says, remember how we ended up in Egypt.

[20 : 16] And for 400 years there, we experienced the tyranny of a pagan empire. We were, we as a people were crushed. We were crushed every day.

And we could do nothing about it. We could not get out of that place on our own. God came and he rescued you, Moses says.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And he says in verse 12, be careful that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

God is not an abstract principle. He's not an impersonal being. He is the Lord of history who took on the gods of Egypt.

He's the one who took on Pharaoh himself. And he said, let my people go. And he's the one who came and decisively dismantled the power of an entire empire.

[21 : 13] And he set free a people upon whom an oppressive slavery had been inflicted. And having allowed his people to escape, they ran to a body of water.

You remember the story. They got out there. They were being chased by an army. And they had nowhere to go. And so they cried out to God. And again, God delivered his people.

And then you remember for 40 years, they wandered in the wilderness with no strength in themselves to survive. And what did God do?

God provided for them. And then he provided for them again. And he provided for them again. He gave them water and manna and quail and shade and all the things that they needed to live.

He did for them what they were helpless to do for themselves. Has anybody here ever felt helpless before? Ever felt like you just were robbed of absolutely all your strength?

[22 : 14] What this is telling us is that Christianity is not a can-do religion. It's not a faith where we say, you know what?

I think I've got this on my own. What this tells us is that the reality is you are helpless to help yourself. I am helpless to help myself.

And what I really need and what you really need is for God to act for us, to come through for us, to show up on our behalf.

And I think we could probably admit this just even in the natural realm, that in this very moment, God is the one giving you life. Right?

We sang earlier, it's your breath in our lungs. Every breath we take, that's not automatic. That's not accidental. It's God giving us breath.

[23 : 12] Every beat of my heart right now is happening because God is giving me life. Every neuron that's firing on my brain, which some of which are firing, some of which are not.

Some of you, your neurons are even slower than mine. God is the one who's giving us life and we are totally helpless without God giving us life.

But more than that, we are totally helpless without God mercifully acting on our behalf to save us like he saved Israel. Look at verse 13.

God says, Fear the Lord your God, serve him only, and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you.

Moses says, look, everybody's going to be bowing down to counterfeit gods. People are going to worship various beings and things and ideas that they consider ultimate and absolute.

[24 : 10] Everybody around you is going to give their allegiance to power and to the state and to their tribe or their race or their class. Don't do that. Everybody's going to give their allegiance to money and to the markets.

Don't do that. Everybody around you is going to bow down to sex and romance and relationships. People are going to look to their work and to their achievements and to human approval as if that is the highest good in a human life.

And God says, there is only one Lord. And he alone is to be our God. We did not invent him.

We did not construct him. He constructed us. And we depend totally on the one Lord. I want to just point your attention to verse 20.

I love this because it assumes that kids and youth are in our midst asking questions. It says in verse 20, in the future, when your children ask you, what is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees, and laws?

[25 : 15] The Lord, our God, has commanded you. In other words, mom and dad, okay, I see that you take this seriously. I see the way that you're living your life.

And I know what you believe. I know that you're trusting God unconditionally and that you're loving him wholeheartedly. And you're worshiping him and you're obeying these 10 commandments. But why? What's the meaning of it all? Where's your motivation coming from? And what follows is simply the gospel.

It's simply that God broke into history to save us by his grace. Look at verse 21. Tell them, when your kids ask you these questions at the dinner table, on the commute to work, when they're going to bed, when they ask you this question, tell them, we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Before our eyes, the Lord sent signs and wonders great and terrible on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors.

[26 : 25] That is the best and the most advanced version of the gospel that was available at that time. Tell your kids that the God of the Exodus broke into history with 10 plagues, which were terrible acts of judgment on human sin and oppression.

But we Israelites who were also sinners, we got out from under that terrible plague of death by the blood of the lamb.

On the night of that Passover, when all the people were dying because the judgment of God was coming down, we hid ourselves under the blood of that slaughtered lamb and we were saved by God's grace.

And friends, that's our story too. John the Baptist points to Jesus and he says, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And when he says that, he's saying that the Passover lamb has always been a signpost. That one day, the Lord himself, the one and only Lord who's giving you breath in your lungs, the one and only Lord to whom you're to bow down, one day he is going to come among us himself, among us slaves to sin, and he is going to take our judgment upon himself.

[27 : 55] He is going to absorb our death into himself because he's come to set us free. He's come to set us free from our sin and death.

He's come to give us eternal life. He's come to stretch out his mighty hands on his cross and to become the lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world.

When our kids ask us, why is God your love supreme? Why are you so crazy?

Why have you fallen head over heels? Not just liking God, not just loving God, but like Jesus, fallen in love with God. What we're to tell our children is that we have been saved by the blood of the lamb, and that is why we are in love with the Lord.

Our love supreme, Christ Church, will grow deeper and wider to the degree that we ourselves are experiencing the Lord as our life-giving Lord.

[29 : 12] And that's what we're going to come to do now at this table. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.