

A Love Story

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[0 : 0 0] On Friday evening, we had the youth here, and we had a great discussion with them. We kind of opened it up to them, Ryan and I were there, to ask whatever questions they wanted about God, faith, the Bible.

And we talked about all sorts of things, from angels, to whether there's life on other planets, to how God created the world. And one of the things that they had questions about was basically the Bible in general.

What exactly is in this book? And as we talked about it, they were quite surprised to hear about the variety of different things in the Bible. And it got me thinking, you know, the Bible is, you know, it's a big book.

Of course, I got the extra wide margin, so it's not actually this big, most of yours. But it's a pretty large collection of writings. And summing it all up is not the easiest thing. What would you tell a child who asks you, what's the Bible about?

What would you say to them? Well, we might go into some of the details about how God created the world, and then the fall of man, and the flood, and the story of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and then the story of the people of Israel, and then to Jesus.

[1 : 1 8] And before you know it, you realize that this book actually covers a lot. Even just the first five books of the Bible cover several thousand years of world history.

But what's this big story that traces all through the ages really all about? I was reminded again this week of just how simple it could be to answer a question like this, as I was reading what Jesus said on one particular occasion.

If you have your Bible with you, open it up to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 12.

Jesus is in Jerusalem. It's the week before his death and resurrection. He's been teaching at the temple courts each day.

And we pick up the story in verse 28. One of the teachers of the law came and heard Jesus debating with the Sadducees. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, Of all the commandments, which is the most important?

[2 : 3 2] The most important one, answered Jesus, is this. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

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. Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. Of all the commandments, which is the most important?

Good question. We all know that the Bible is not just a story of what has happened, but that all throughout the Bible we're being taught and told about what God really wants from us.

And as we think of those first few books of the Bible, Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy, this is a big part of the story. What does God really want from us?

- [3 : 39] This is what Adam and Eve began to discover in the garden. It's what Abraham and his children and his grandchildren began to discover as God revealed himself to them.
- It's what the children of Israel began to discover as God gave them his ten commandments and the law. What does God really want from me? For some people today, when they think of the Bible, the first thing that comes to mind is that it's a big book of rules.
- A big book of do this and don't do that. And so this question is a great question. Of all the commandments, which is the most important?
- What is it that God most deeply wants from us? Of all the things that God has commanded people to do over the centuries, over thousands of years of history, what's the one thing that matters most to God?
- The one thing he wants most from you and from me? Does Jesus' answer to this question surprise you? It surprises me.
- [4 : 49] I've been a Christian since my youth, and again this week it surprised me to read this answer. It's all too easy to fall into a mindset where we think that what God wants most from me is to stop sinning and to live a holy life, or to stop being selfish, or to make progress with my anger issue, or to just stop worrying about things and to trust him more, or to just get better at doing what he says, or we might think that what he wants most of us is simply to serve him and to do the work of his kingdom with diligence and get things done for him.
- And so we wait with bated breath for Jesus to tell us the answer. Of all the commandments, which is the most important? Which is the one thing that he wants most from you and from me?
- And what Jesus says is surprisingly sweet. The most important one, answer Jesus, is this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
- Love. Hold on a minute. I mean, I can't have read that right. The most important one is this. Go and make disciples of all nations. No.
- The most important one must be this. Be holy as I am holy. No. The most important one is this. Fear God.
- [6 : 25] No. The most important one is this. Repent of your sins. No. Now, all these are important. Yes, they're all commands that come from Scripture.
- But the most important, says Jesus, is simply, love Yahweh, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- With everything you've got. Love Him. Isn't that surprisingly sweet? The thing that God wants most from you and me is a relationship characterized by love.
- This is what the whole Bible is about. From cover to cover. It's why He made us in the beginning. It's why He gave us a beautiful place to live, perfectly suited to our needs and delights.
- It's what we turned our back on that day in the garden when we broke faith with Him. And it's what God has been working to restore through the ages between Him and us. A love relationship.
- [7 : 28] It's why He sent Jesus, His Son, into the world. It's why Jesus came to suffer and die on the cross. And it's what Jesus has promised to bring about in its fullness when He returns.
- A love relationship with Him. With God. Forever. Let me read some of the words at the end of the story. Revelation chapter 21.

This is John talking about the vision that he had from Jesus. He said, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people and He will dwell with them.

[8 : 32] They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new.

I love those words. A love relationship. And I will wipe every tear from your eyes and fix all the brokenness and suffering and pain in this life kind of relationship.

These words describe God's great love for His people. And sometimes we lose sight of this in the busyness of life, don't we? that this is what it's all about.

It's all too easy for our relationship with God to become in our minds about what we must do for God. But beneath all that, what God wants most from us is love.

[9 : 45] Sweet, beautiful relationship. Friendship. Let's talk briefly about the kind of love that God desires from us. Jesus said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Those are some powerful descriptions. They speak of a passionate love. You might hear a few of these words spoken between two people in love today.

I love you with all my heart. From the depths of my being with my deepest of feelings. But then it goes beyond that and with all your soul.

From the very deepest center and essence of who I am. And then it goes one step further. And with all your mind. If the whole heart and soul didn't already capture it all, he includes all the mind where all of my inward thoughts are caught up in loving God.

The closest thing that I even can compare this to is that special relationship between a man and a woman. I still remember when I was first dating Jennifer how naturally all my thoughts were about her.

[11 : 10] Couldn't get her out of my mind. I was just thinking about her all the time. I was thinking about our last conversation. I was thinking about what she enjoyed. I was thinking about what we might do on our next date and when we might be able to do that.

I used to tell her I couldn't sleep at night because the reality of our relationship was better than my dreams. I was thinking about her as I lay on my bed. This is the kind of love that God desires from us where we love him with all our thoughts, our thinking, our planning, our intentionality.

And finally, God desires for us to love him with all of our strength. So not just a feeling love or a passion love but also a doing love. We misunderstand love if we think of it only as a feeling.

It is a feeling but it's also an action. It's something that we do to one another. It is felt but it's also demonstrated.

And it's not that we must prove our love through action. It's that the natural fruit of love is action. Just like if you love your son or your daughter and you see them in need.

[12 : 30] You want to act. You act because you love them. You help them out. Or if you have a friend and you know it's their birthday coming up. You do something special for them.

You give of your time and your energy and your strength. You go get a gift for them or a card for them. Action. John in his letter says it so well. 1 John 3.18 He says Dear children let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Action. Loving someone is not just a feeling. It's not just something we say to them. It's something we do to them and for them. And love requires strength.

Serving your kids. Serving your spouse. Serving each other in the church. Serving your neighbor requires strength. It requires energy.

And so we shouldn't be surprised when Jesus says that God desires for us to love him with all our strength. It's a full expressed kind of love that God desires from us.

[13 : 37] He is our God and we love him so we obey him. He's our king and we love him so we serve him joyfully from the heart doing the things that please him.

all of these things together describe the kind of love that God desires from you and me. A passionate love. A total devotion kind of love.

An all of me and all my life is yours kind of love. Not a fake love. Not a well it's my duty to love you kind of love but a sincere and genuine love from the heart.

Now we might read these words and tremble. We might think to ourselves well this kind of love is so far beyond what I could possibly give to God.

I fail to love him with all my heart and soul and mind and strength all the time. In fact I wonder if I've ever loved anyone but myself in that way. this may feel heavy and burdensome to you.

[14 : 47] Thou shalt not steal. I can do that but love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That's impossible. Maybe hearing Jesus' answer just makes you feel guiltier of sin because you know that God is worthy of this kind of love from you but at the same time you just feel powerless to give it to him.

Let me offer you a few words of encouragement this morning. Regardless of whether we can love God like this isn't it sweet and beautiful and wonderful that God the creator desires this kind of relationship with us.

That he created us for this kind of a love relationship with him and that out of everything he wants from us this is what he desires most.

isn't that sweet? That alone says so much about the kind of God that he is. He is a warm and personal and affectionate God.

So even if we fail to love God like this it still describes no less the perfect all-encompassing love relationship that God wants to have with us and that's good news.

[16 : 04] Here's my second word of encouragement. God knows very well that we have all failed to love him like this. He knows that even now those of us who do love him and believe in him will continue to fall short of his glory and continue to fall short of loving him like this the way that he's worthy of and it's not to say that we shouldn't intentionally make an effort to love him like that we should but God knows that we are all bent and broken and that sin and selfishness continues to be present in all of us and that's the whole reason why God sent Jesus into the world to save us.

None of us can come even close to loving God as we should and we could never have this kind of relationship with God unless God did something to fix that brokenness that bentness inside of us I love the way that John says it it's the verse that we have outside on the wall 1st John 4 verse 10 this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins this is how God showed his love among us he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him this is the good news of Jesus not that we loved God not that we must become good enough to have relationship with him but that God loved us even while we were still quite unloving and unlovely

Romans 5 familiar verse at just the right time says Paul when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly very rarely will anyone die even for a righteous person though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die but God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us even though we've all failed to love God as we should God has loved us so much so deeply he's done something truly amazing to fix the problem to fix what's broken between us and him and to make this relationship that he's describing possible for us loving God like Jesus said that we should really is impossible for sinners like you and me there's truly only one person who ever loved

God this way with all his heart and soul and mind and strength all the time and that's Jesus he was not bent like we are he was in a sinner like we are and so if we want to see what it looks like for someone to really live this kind of relationship with God all we need to do is read the gospels Matthew Mark Luke John but what's wonderful is this while we will continue to love God in a way that falls short of what God is worthy of one day God will so transform all of his people that this kind of love that all your heart soul mind and strength love will be the normal and the natural in our relationship with him we'll find ultimate joy we'll find happiness forever loving him like that how do we know that this is true back to

John first John three verses one and two see what great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are dear friends he goes on now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is so there's coming a day when all the children of God will become like Jesus when he appears when he returns there's going to be a great transformation of all of us who are in Christ and we will become like Jesus loving God perfectly the way that we should with all our heart soul mind and strength for the rest of forever Paul spoke about this transformation in his letter to the Corinthians I won't go there but he talked about how there's coming a day when in a flash in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet the dead will be raised and we will all be changed those of us who are in

[21 : 24] Christ will be given a new body will be clothed with immortality and we will come to bear the image the likeness of the heavenly man Jesus well when will this happen when Jesus returns as he promised to so what should our response be to all this we might look at a command like this and say well I guess I need to do better at loving God I guess I need to make a greater effort to love God more fully and deeply it's a command so we just need to obey it we need to do it but I'm not sure that's the way we're meant to respond to this I think if we want to grow in our love for God we need to discover and experience for ourselves more of how glorious and how worthy and how lovely he is and the more we know him and experience his goodness and see his greatness the more deeply and fully we will love him it just follows and so

I don't want to end this morning by telling you to just go out and love God more love him better I want to encourage you rather to seek to know God for who he really is and the rest will follow you won't be able but to love him with all your heart soul mind and strength I don't want to encourage you this morning just to love him more and deeper because it's your Christian duty I want to encourage you to long for and seek for the God who desires this kind of relationship with you how is your relationship with God going how is your relationship with Jesus Christ the king going are you enjoying him deeply are you growing in your love for him week after week are you spending time just praying to him each day throughout the day not because it's your

Christian duty or because you have to fill a certain number of minutes to feel good but just because you want to be in this love relationship with him same with reading your Bible has it become a religious task that you just I got to do this to be healthy as a Christian just like I got to eat my vegetables and my whole wheat bread or will you open your Bible this week at home on your own just to be in this love relationship with God and hear him speak to you in the way that he's chosen to in our day and so that's what I want to encourage us all with this morning God loves you he desires an all-in love relationship with you so deeply a passionate powerful relationship and he's done everything to make it possible this is what the Bible is all about this is the good news of Jesus are you into that let's pray father in heaven it blows us away that this is what you want with us compared to you we're nothing we're pathetic we're sinners we've blown it we've done things that we we know are evil are wrong and yet you love us and it's amazing

God I pray that in each of our hearts you would draw us deeper into friendship with you you know exactly what's going on in each of our lives the struggles that we have the challenges that we're facing the worries the doubts but we pray and ask in these moments Lord that you would pull us close that you would speak of your love to our hearts and that you would bring life and joy reveal yourself to us in the days and weeks ahead we ask in Jesus name amen all