

Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength

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Date: 19 September 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, turn with me first of all to Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 12, and we're going to read from verse 28 to 34.

That's our first reading, Mark 12, 28 to 34. And one of the scribes came up and heard them, those who were disputing the resurrection, heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, Which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered, The most important is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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 strengths.

The second is this, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, You're right, teacher.

You've truly said that he is one, and there is no other 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 neighbour as oneself, is much more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

[1 : 23] And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, You're not far from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

And then in Deuteronomy chapter 6, Deuteronomy 6, And we'll read the first five verses. We have Moses addressing the Israelites in the desert.

He says these words, Now, this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you're going over to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

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

[2 : 48] Amen. May God add his blessing to these readings from his holy word. And as you see on the screen there, you see the sermon heading, that it would be obvious from what we've read, the response of the believer, how to love God, as Jesus says, with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

And really three aspects of what Jesus is teaching there to the scribe and teaching us. We see the searching question that the scribe asked Jesus, searching Jesus, searching his word.

the sincere reply that Jesus gives to the scribe. And then, maybe it's too strong to say a somber verdict, but certainly the verdict that Jesus gives to the man, the scribe, who asked him that question, what's the greatest commandment of all?

And when we come to this passage in Mark 12, well, we come at a particular time of year. We come at a time of year when actually serious questions were asked.

It was the time of year when Passover was celebrated. And at that time of year at Passover, very often particular questions were being asked in the homes where the Passover meal was being prepared.

[4 : 19] And these questions concern behavior, concern conduct, particularly conduct in relation to the law. And Mark's already in chapter 12 mentioned at least one, if not two of these kind of questions.

And the questions culminating in the question that the scribe asked Jesus about, what's the greatest commandment? And the way that Mark records these questions in relation to the law, and at this particular stage in Jesus' ministry, I think we can say this, it's a deliberate maneuver by Mark, and certainly under divine inspiration, to connect the Passover with Jesus.

what Jesus was about to do at that time, the time of Passover, that pointed Jesus to the once for all sacrifice for sin.

And in that time of Jesus' ministry, when Passover was celebrated, remember what Passover was all about. Passover was when the people of Israel looked back to that first Passover, when that meal of the sacrificial lamb was eaten, and the blood of the lamb was daubed in the doorposts and the lintels of their homes, so that when the angel of death passed over there in the Israelite homes in Egypt, that the firstborn in these homes would not die, because the blood was the sign of obedience of the people to the word of God.

And of course that first Passover pointed forward to the ultimate Passover, the ultimate Passover lamb. And the Lord Jesus came as that once for all sacrificial lamb, the lamb of God, when he came to give his life for sinners, when he shed his blood for you.

[6 : 08] But of course in the time of Jesus, when Jesus was on earth, those who ate the Passover lamb then, many of course, most even, didn't recognize that Jesus was that Passover lamb, that once for all Passover lamb.

They didn't recognize Jesus as the one who'd fulfilled what was done there in Egypt. They didn't recognize Jesus as that lamb, the lamb of God, but Mark did.

And Mark's recognizing that very time when serious questions were asked about the law of God. Mark's recognizing that particular time just before the Passover lamb's eaten.

And so Mark's writing down these questions to show that Passover's imminent. It's about to happen, but it's no ordinary Passover. It's going to be the once for all sacrifice.

Jesus, the Passover lamb. And so the answer that Jesus gives to that scribe about the greatest commandment, that answer's going to reveal what Jesus has come to do.

[7 : 18] What he's come to do as the Passover lamb. He's come to enable those who are his, you who are his, to give your life to him, to give your life, to truly love God, and to truly love your neighbor as yourself.

And so we're going to talk to see what Jesus obviously is saying about the greatest, most important commandment. Why do we do it? We do it, and we do it to worship God, to give him the glory, to give him the praise, and to be encouraged in your life to give God that glory and not glory to yourself.

And so, as it were, we're moving on from remembering the Lord's death as we did last Sunday morning. And pray this Sunday morning in worship that we seek to apply that remembering, remembering his death, so that, yes, you truly do love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

And the more unable to love your neighbor as yourself. And of course, we'll come to these details in a moment, but first of all, we need to look at the question that the scribe asked, which commandment, verse 28, is the most important of all or is the greatest of all.

Now, I think it's difficult to know exactly if the scribe who asked the question was absolutely sincere in what he asked.

[8 : 47] I mean, if you go to the other account of this episode, go to Matthew, and Matthew writes that the person who asked the question did it, excuse me, to test Jesus.

But certainly, as we see here in Mark's account, the scribe who asked this question, he was actually impressed with what Jesus had already answered concerning previous questions that were given to him.

Certainly, the questions that were given to him were asked in insincerity, questions asked to somehow try and trap Jesus to give her some kind of reply that would discredit Jesus.

But whatever the motive of this particular man, this scribe, this teacher of the law, certainly his question was a searching one. I mean, the Jews had, or the Jewish law had 613 commandments. Some were weighted as light commandments, some were weighted as heavy commandments. And there were constant debates about which of these 613 commandments was the most important.

[9 : 54] And no definitive answer had ever been found. So, maybe Jesus could give his answer. I mean, he's answered the previous questions that were given to test him, and he's answered them admirably.

But what about this question, the question that the lawyers had been asking one another? What's this Jesus, this rabbi, what's he going to say to this question?

But before we look at the answer, I think we do have to probe this question a wee bit more.

Because the question, when you look at it carefully, the question presupposes an answer of merit. In other words, what a person has to do to fully win favor from God. What could this scribe, this expert in the law, what could he reassure himself that he was doing, that he was doing right before God?

And in fact, there's nothing, there's nothing that anyone can do to win favor from God. You see, this scribe, this expert in the law, he wanted to measure his life alongside what was considered the greatest of all the commandments.

[11 : 11] But in fact, nobody, nobody apart from Jesus was righteous enough to keep the law perfectly. But nevertheless, Jesus in his grace, Jesus answers this question.

And as we'll see, the fact that, you know, as we'll see in that answer, the guiding principle, that God's not satisfied with anything less than the devotion of your whole life, your whole self, to him and to others, and to do it for the entirety of your life.

And so that really brings us to the sincere reply that Jesus gives. What does Jesus do? Well, he takes the scribe and he takes us back to what we read there in Deuteronomy 6.

He takes us back right to the time of Moses because Moses was speaking to the Israelites about their need for wholehearted commitment to God.

And then, Moses uttered the words that Jesus would many centuries later utter. We read in Deuteronomy 6, for hero Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[12 : 31] But why did Jesus mention these words, first of all? I mean, surely it was to emphasize that, you know, before we can even think about loving God, we have to know God as the one God, as one Lord.

And he has to be known as the one who is none other than God, the unique God, the God who is ours, the God who is eternal, the God who shows his covenant love to his people, to all who are his. And so with that truth that Jesus presents, first of all, that God is one God, that there's no other God but God, then Jesus comes to the greatest commandment, the greatest commandment about how you're to honor God and others in your life.

What do we find? We find that God, first of all, has to be the object of your devotion. In other words, he's got to be first in your life, not family, not any kind of cultural background, not money, not wealth, not possessions, not fame, not what the world sees as important or great, but what God considers great.

Putting him first in your life. And when you put God first in your life, then at the core of putting God first in your life, well, Jesus tells us, is love.

[14 : 05] Wholehearted love, complete love. That's what Jesus said, you shall love the Lord your God. Well, listen to his words. With all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

See how Jesus emphasizes the all here, the absolute all of every aspect of your being. In other words, it's to be a complete devotion to God. Not any kind of half-hearted devotion, not just once a week and only on Sundays, but whole devotion every day, every moment of every day.

Think of what Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, Colossians 3.23. Whatever you do, work heartily. Ask for the Lord and not for men. Apply that in your life.

Think of every communication you make. Whether it's by word of mouth, whether it's online, wherever you do it, your emails, what you write, the words you speak, what you communicate.

Is God at the center of each and every communication that you make? Are you witnessing to him in what you write, what you say, or is it simply to glorify self?

[15 : 19] Or think of the decisions that you have to make, even every decision, every decision of every day, every week, every month, every year, is your rule in these decisions to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Of course, we all fall. We all fail in that whole heart of devotion. And you know, the times that we fall and fail, and we fail to love God, and as we'll come to see and love our neighbor as ourselves, we do it when self interrupts, when the idol of self replaces that wholehearted commitment to the one true God.

And so each and every one of us needs to come before God with our repentance of all our heart, a wholehearted repentance for our sins of committing what we commit, what we omit, when we don't give him that wholehearted devotion that God alone is worthy of.

But then, what about these particular aspects that Jesus mentions here? Heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. Let's just have a look at them briefly. The heart. Love God with all your heart. What's your heart in this context here? It's the very center of your being.

[16 : 41] It's who you are, who you are, who you are in every aspect of your life, your thoughts, your desires, your motives, your whole life. Loving God with all your heart, what does that mean?

It tells of what the highest love that a person can have is towards God. That you give to him all your heart, your wholehearted devotion.

All that you are directed first and foremost to God. You see, the heart, when those who wrote at these times, the heart, well, it was considered the very center of a person's being.

And so if the heart was at the center of a person's being, then God had to be at the center and has to be at the center of your life and my life. In other words, there's to be nothing in your life, nothing in my life, in which God's excluded.

Is that right? Is that where you are? Is that the position of your life before God? That you love him with all your heart and exclude nothing from his sovereign love?

[17 : 50] But then we're told here to love God, the Lord, with all our soul. And the focus here seemed to be the focus of our emotions, our affections as believers, your desire to do God's will.

and in your heart, yes, to conform to every aspect of God's will in every area of your life. To have that inner disposition to love God and to love him with a depth that outdoes every other object of your affections.

Then there's the mind. Love the Lord your God with all your mind. In other words, your thought life. What you think. How you discipline your mind to think thoughts of God.

How you even train your mind to keep it pure from the sins of our human nature and to keep focused on God in your mind and your thoughts because our minds are so fragile.

You know, when your mind isn't focused wholly on God, it's going to be focused on something else. And you know, particularly, or very often at times in our worship, our minds stray.

[19 : 07] And when our minds stray, then temptations come in. And our minds can so easily wander from a complete and full focus on God. And when minds wander, sin isn't very far away.

Jesus tells us, he tells you, in fact, not just tells, but commands you to love God with all your mind. That's going to involve discipline.

That's going to involve meditating on God and his word. It's not the kind of meditation that you hear of so often in the so-called expectations of modern life.

You know, we empty your mind, just empty your mind of everything as so-called inner peace. No.

That is utterly, utterly wrong. because the meditation of the Christian is to fill your mind, to fill your mind with thoughts of God, to dwell in his word, to contemplate God, to know him as God has made himself known in his word.

And the more you practice that presence of God in your mind, the more you'll know him, the more you'll love him, and the more you'll live for the Lord who's done so much for you, the more you think and contemplate God, the more you'll grow in your love for him.

[20 : 31] But then there's strength. Love the Lord with all your strength. In other words, putting your whole self into your heart, love. Putting your whole self into every emotion that you have to come before God with.

To give your mind fully, wholly to think in him and to love the Lord. Because the opposite of loving the Lord with all your strength really is a sort of half-hearted, sloppy, we could almost say sloth-like attitude, a careless, couldn't-care-less laziness that comes when we don't exercise our all-in-whole-hearted power of obedience.

Now, of course, we're all aware of the many weaknesses in our own lives, struggles that we have, or limitations. you know, we can still rejoice that God's given you, given each of those who are his, he's given you that power.

As Paul himself spoke of that power when he said, when I am weak, I am strong. And when Paul could write, that he could do all things through him who strengthens me.

Now, put all this together. What do we see is command of all, to love God with all that you are. In other words, to love God with every fiber of your being.

[21 : 57] As I've mentioned before, I'll mention it again, that takes discipline, it takes self-denial, it takes single-minded love, it takes love for the Lord as you grow in love, as you grow in love for the one who first loved you.

That's not all that Jesus said. Because Jesus said there's an associated command that follows on from the first. As Jesus, as we read in verse 31, Jesus saying, the second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

And those of you who have attended the midweek meetings, you'll notice we go through 1 John. John very much emphasized this whole aspect of brotherly love. That evidence, that characteristic of a person who practices righteousness.

a person who obeys God, to love God and to love those whom God has brought into his kingdom. And of course, that loving one another, it's absolutely crucial, crucial in the life of any believer.

But notice here, Jesus goes even further when he tells that the greatest of the command, when he talks of, yes, loving God, all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, but he also speaks of your neighbor.

[23 : 17] That's yourself. But again, why? Why this particular command? I mean, how does love for God and love for your neighbor, and then following on, love for self, how do they all connect?

Think of what Jesus is saying here. Note this, he's emphasized love at the very core, the very root of your affections, your emotions, your conduct, your being before God.

So love for God, love for your neighbor, love for yourself. That love that accords God first place in your life. And if God has first place in your life, you'll want to love those who've been made in God's image.

And you'll want to love those who, yes, who've been made in God's image, whoever distorted that image is. And if you're going to love those who've been made in God's image, even though sin has marred that image, you'll want to love yourself, made in God's image.

And you see the thread that's running through the way that Jesus is speaking here. Love God. That's your first love. Then following on, you're going to love everything else that reflects God.

[24 : 31] You're going to love those who've been made in God's image, including yourself. Now, of course, that's going to be seen in so many different ways. It's going to be seen in compassion.

It's going to be seen in kindness. It's going to be seen in gentleness. It's going to be seen in making peace. It's going to be seen in forgiveness. It's going to be seen in care.

It's going to be seen when you rejoice with those who rejoice and weep by those who weep. It's going to be seen in the sharing of your resources. It's going to be seen when you're going that second mile.

It's going to have that good Samaritan care for one another, even at a cost to yourself. It's going to be that love that's full and whole and pure and selfless.

But what about loving yourself? I mean, is that not the same as selfishness, self-centeredness? Absolutely not. Because loving yourself means loving what God, as we've said, loving what God has made in his own image.

[25 : 40] Loving what God has, and then moving on from that, loving what God has given to you for your highest good. And so, yes, you love God, what he's given to you, to show his grace, his mercy, his salvation.

And loving yourself meaning that you're going to love God, you're going to love him. You're going to do that which is best for you. And you're going to despise all that would cause you needless misery and yielding to sin's temptation.

So Jesus declares, there's no other commandment greater than these. In other words, what he says, it's the sum of the law of God. That guiding principle in every believer's life to live that life of love.

To live that life of love beginning with God. Being wholly devoted to God in every aspect of your life. And then following on from your love for God. Loving others.

Yes, with the same kind of love that you love yourself with. That's how Jesus lived. The guiding principle that directed Jesus in his life. That principle that honors God.

[26 : 56] And surely each and every one of us needs to practice that life of devotion to God. Loving him. Loving others. Loving self. What about you?

Well, you like that scribe in the story when Jesus said, you're not far from the kingdom of God. Well, what about that verdict? In some ways, it's a somber verdict.

I mean, certainly Jesus is commending the scribe. Because the scribe agrees with what Jesus has said. He's agreed that it's so important to recognize that God the Lord is one.

It's so important to recognize that, you know, living that life of love to God and one's neighbor and self is far greater than any outer form of religion.

But of course, that's not enough. The scribe, you see here, he still hadn't reached that point of believing in Jesus as Savior. Now, he recognized Jesus as a great teacher.

[27 : 56] He could see that Jesus spoke well. But of course, in and of itself, that wasn't enough. He was certainly near the kingdom, but wasn't yet within the kingdom.

We don't know. We're not told if the scribe actually ever did believe in Jesus. You might say that his life story is beyond the pages of Scripture.

What about your life? Are you just going to admire Jesus without giving your life to him? Are you just going to think about, yes, the many good things that you know about God?

Yes, I know about Jesus. Without actually loving him with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. You're going to stop loving your neighbor as yourself.

You see, there are many who are almost Christians, who never, we might say, make that final step into the kingdom. And I pray that's nobody here in the building or watching online this morning.

[29 : 02] Nobody for whom it will be said on that day when the Lord Jesus returns, I never knew you. I never knew you. Depart from me. No.

Hear him speak to you. Hear him speak to you now. Calling you to himself. Calling you to come to him, all you who labor and are heavy laden. And Jesus says, I'll give you rest.

Will you come to the one who calls you in his love and return that love with faith and obedience as you give your life to the one who first loved you.

Amen. Let us pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, you who first loved us, we pray that your forgiveness for the many, many times when you have failed to love you as we ought, when we have failed to love our neighbor as we ought, and failed to love ourselves as we ought, and gone down roads and routes that we ought never have been on.

Forgive us, Lord, for these times when we have failed you. But hear us, Lord, as we commit again our lives to you in service in your name, that we may live lives to the glory and to the praise of your glorious name.

[30 : 18] Hear us, Lord, as we pray these things and continue in worship before you now, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.