

Watch out for...!

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[0 : 00] All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Where's that come from? Vander?

Prodigal son? Mary? Prodigal son? Luke 15? All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

The story of the prodigal son, he's the brother that we often neglect, the one at the end of the story, the firstborn, who measures his relationship with his dad by how well he carries out his orders. Relationship based on performance. He knows all about duty and obligation and shoulds and oughts and outwardly he is the obedient son, he is the submissive man, he obeys his dad, he does his jobs, he does all the externals.

And life for him has become slavery, not sonship. He relates to his dad like a slave, he treats his father like a grudging master and so he measures himself.

[1 : 25] And he's got this checklist of what a loving son looks like. And he doesn't even need to ask his dad what he thinks of him, he can self-assess because he knows that he's not a complete failure of a son like his brother.

It's actually not that different from what we do in our church families when we measure our children's worth by their performance.

Relationship based on performance.

Relationship based on rule keeping.

How we measure up. His dad offers him freedom and privilege and intimacy. But the son chooses to live with rules and obligations.

[2 : 31] He chooses to live like a slave. He's the opposite of his brother the prodigal. The younger brother has lost, he turns around, he comes to his senses, He turns back and he pursues his dad with absolutely nothing to offer.

He's wasted wealth, he's wasted privilege, he's wasted opportunity. He is brought low and he returns to his father absolutely empty handed, prepared to face the music, prepared to live as a slave.

He throws himself on his father's mercy and amazingly his father runs to meet him and welcomes him as a son. What is relationship with God like for you this morning?

Distant. Dutiful. Uncertain. A set of obligations. You live what you think is a Christian life because you think that's what God wants you to do.

A master that you fear, one that you dutifully obey. You go to church, you attend your community group, you give your cash, you serve in kids' church or music ministry or you visit people in need, you get Bible training, you get ordained, you do all the externals and you still feel barren inside.

[4 : 11] And on the outside, everybody's applauding. And encouraging. And on the inside you feel empty and a fraud.

All the right actions. Jesus speaks to our inner emptiness in the Bible passage that I'm preaching this morning.

Have your Bibles open. Mark chapter 12. Mark chapter 12. Mark chapter 12. We've preached this short series of messages over the last three weeks from Mark chapter 11 and Mark chapter 12.

We've seen that the religious leadership have determined that the easiest way to deal with Jesus, the Jesus problem, is to kill him.

And so the religious elite have begun to confront Jesus in public, something they haven't had the guts to do before. Some ridicule his ministry. They try to discredit him in the eyes of the people.

Others use all their evil intent to trap him in his words. They are trying to justify his execution. And Jesus confounds them with his answers.

[5 : 19] And in 1234 their questions dry up and it says, From then on no one dared to ask him any more questions. But in Mark chapter 12 verse 28, a teacher in the law of the law questions Jesus.

This is a man that doesn't seem to be part of the posse that's looking to trap him. He's overheard the debate. He has heard Jesus give an amazing answer to the Sadducees and now he steps forward and he asks his own question.

Teacher, of all the commandments, which is the most important? Now that was a current issue. The teachers of the law had discerned that 613 laws in the scriptures, they'd taken the Bible apart, they'd found 613 commandments, laws, and it was pretty common for them to debate which were the light ones, which were the heavy ones, what were the big ones, what were the ones that took precedence over others.

Sort them out for us, Jesus. Which is the most important? And I think it's an honest question. We looked at this in our small group the other night, the community group the other night, and I think some of us thought he was a bit condescending of Jesus, but I actually think it's an honest question. I think he is one teacher who is checking out another teacher. And he asks a really important question to figure out whether Jesus is a teacher who is worth paying any attention to.

[6 : 43] And it's like he addresses him as a peer. And Jesus answers his question with scripture. Verse 29. 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.

And the second is this. Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. The first part is a direct quote of Moses' words to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy, chapter 6.

And he adds a command. The second command is one from Leviticus, chapter 19. It's God's command from Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18. And Jesus pulls the two scriptures together and he calls them the greatest command.

There is no command greater than these. And he ties the love of God to the love of neighbour. He does not let us separate the two. You cannot say you love God and hate your brother or sister in Christ.

[7 : 54] Absolutely incompatible. The Deuteronomy quote was never a command of God's. It's not a command.

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.

It's the climax of Moses' sermon. He's just reminded them of the Ten Commandments in particular and he preaches with all the passion of a Billy Graham and he says to the Israelites, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one.

Love him with your entire being, your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength. Now the Ten Commandments were given by God to his people whom he had already redeemed.

They have a history with God. He saved them out of slavery in Egypt. God revealed himself to them with his personal name, Yahweh. He's constantly provided for them and he's protected them in the desert and he's continued to involve himself in their lives despite many moments when they have failed to trust him, disobeyed him.

[9 : 14] And so Moses calls, he exhorts people to walk in the relationship that they already have with God. Love him.

Love your neighbours like yourselves. Now I think love is a really tricky thing to define. It's not just a feeling but it will involve feeling and emotion.

It needs to have content. It will be seen in action. It's a great little play that's been acted out for us with Kids Church a minute ago. No good having words without delivery doesn't work in a marriage, does it?

We try. But I want to be very careful this morning not to reduce love to commandment keeping because as soon as we do that it all becomes about measurable performance.

The New Testament does not hold up the commandments as the attainable goal or the performance chart.

[10 : 33] Romans chapter 10 Romans chapter 7 verse 10 says to us that the commandment which was intended to bring life brought death and the commandments themselves show the depth of sin and evil which was within us when they are properly understood.

Sin seized the commandment and brought death. So when you start measuring performance it all becomes about externals and not about the heart.

I want to define love this morning by saying that it pursues and values a person. Love pursues and values a person.

It chases after relationship. So in a family God says husbands love your wives and the husband says I do love you.

I do. I love you. I bring home the bacon. I provide for you. I've set you up in this great house. I provide a wonderful standard of living. And I'm thinking from personal experience it does not work.

[11 : 49] That's not enough. It's not good enough. See I can tell you all the boxes that I have ticked from my point of view in our marriage.

But you ask Kerry and you're not permitted to but you ask Kerry you get a different story. And my wonderful wife said to me once not that far back a small number of years you do all these things for me but I do not feel loved by you.

And that led to a process of learning to listen to her again. Learning what mattered for her. Learning what she thinks and feels.

And I think I'm standing here this morning I've got L plates on still. She was telling me something the other day and I stopped listening in the middle of what she was saying and I showed that I'd stopped listening about what she was talking about because I talked about something completely different.

And I didn't even notice. And a few minutes later she said to me what had happened and said that she was hurt and rightly so.

[13 : 20] And I've been arrogant enough sometimes to presume that I know what goes on inside her and even not to even care about what goes on inside her.

To care about her hurt. Or to feel too threatened to be criticised for how I've treated her. So to not want to even open up the conversation and talk about it.

And so her love of me and mine of her has meant listening to the hurt and owning how I cause it. I hope that there's not one wife sitting here in church this morning who goes home and says to hubby I hope you were listening. But I hope husbands will go home and ask their wives if they feel loved.

And listen without defending. And maybe doing things that help to reinvigorate relationships. I went to a 60th wedding anniversary yesterday and a wonderful couple who had a what you have to say an absolutely steadfast walk and love of Christ for 50 of their 60 years of marriage.

[14 : 53] And somebody said they've had a perfect marriage. And the husband who's in his late 80s now mid to late 80s corrected them and said they haven't had a perfect marriage they've had a good marriage.

They have pursued Christ together since he first laid his hands on them. They have pursued relationship with Christ and they have pursued relationship with one another.

They have walked through some excruciating moments in their marriage bankrupted by a close relative late in life huge health issues pain with children and their own imperfections a very good marriage which began with a blind date and the blind date grew to further time together and now they have a rich history together which is longer than 60 years.

love of God will be seen in pursuing and valuing God over all things.

So even the other day there was something I thought God wanted me to do and I said no what did I say in that moment? I'm going to do what I want to do. I don't care what you want me to do in that moment.

[16 : 35] I'm pursuing my own self my own objectives and Moses here is practically screaming at the people of Israel when he gives this in Deuteronomy chapter 6 look at who God is.

Look at how he has saved you. He is the only God there is no other love him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And the teacher of the law gets it and he says well said teacher you are right in saying that God is one there is no other to love him with all your heart and all your understanding and all your strength and to love your neighbour as yourself it's more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

He doesn't actually quote the commandment back he quotes the intent of it. He understands that God offers real relationship with himself and he prizes it above all the religious ritual that they do at the temple there is something greater than temple sacrifices and he says to obey is better than

sacrifices he remembers what Samuel says to Saul the whole temple ritual pointed to what a holy God looked like but the teacher of the law knew that to know and love God was far better than all the stuff that pointed to him.

how absurd some of the things that we argue about at church when we argue about styles of worship and types of music and looks of building and we argue about those things as if those things in themselves were ultimate reality and don't think I'm picking oldies on this one I'm picking young ones as well the whole lot of us wherever we sit they are not ultimate reality the Lord Jesus is and we fall out over these things at peril because Christ calls us to love God and to love one another above all those things it's a call to pursue relationship with God and to pursue relationship with one another and Jesus says something which is absolutely wonderful he says you are not far from the kingdom of God what a wonderful thing to hear from the mouth of the Lord Jesus and I think the understanding that he still requires is explained in the next verses that

Jesus is the Christ see verse 35 while Jesus was teaching in the temple courts he asked his own question how is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David and the teachers in Jesus day they're teaching about the coming king the messiah who will be David's son David is the great hero of the past he beat all the enemies of God he brought about peace and they look back to him as this great one in the past and they're viewing the king as somebody who will be like him maybe not as great as him but he will defeat their enemies he will kick the Romans out he will restore their glory it's a little bit like Australians with the great it's not just Australians it's the world cricket community when they look at the Australian batsman Donald Bradman every cricketer in the world gets measured against Bradman's achievements it's inconceivable that anybody could ever be as good as him and so Jesus quotes this is how people thought about David it's almost inconceivable that anybody could be as good as

[20 : 02] David but Jesus quotes Psalm 110 and he asks a riddle which is designed to turn their traditional understandings on their head he says David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit declared the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet David himself calls him Lord how then can he be his son and the crowd listened to him with delight they loved him ripping into them he quotes David the great one himself David recognized the son who would be greater than him Bradman will have a descendant who smashes his records and will be greater than him a king is coming who is much bigger than David he is David's Lord he will sit at the right hand of God in heaven and all of God's enemies will be subject to him and so Jesus is not just a peer to this teacher of the law he is God's king who will achieve God's end time purposes and then

Jesus rounds off this body of teaching by showing what love of God doesn't look like and then what it does look like watch out for the teachers of the law they like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market places they have the most important seats in the synagogue and the places of honour at banquets they devour widows houses and for a show they make lengthy prayers such men will be punished most severely I've been in Christian ministry long enough to know what it feels like to be put on a pedestal and sometimes it feels great because of the perks that come with it and sometimes it feels absolutely lousy because you've been put in a place you should never be the religious elite have lost their heart for God they enjoy the perks of office they are great and important men and women in their community they are prominent they are privileged they stand head and shoulders over everybody else and they delight in it and Jesus says watch out for them literally turn your backs on them their destiny is God's severe punishment and the contrast there they've got all this stuff for themselves but they devour widows houses and then he turns and tells us a story about a widow he's watching people outside the treasury putting in their donations clang clang clang go the big donors lots of money and the poor widow comes along and she puts two small copper coins into the treasury chest unnoticed probably by everybody except Jesus and he draws attention to her and he draws it out and he says I tell you the truth that this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others they all gave out of their wealth but she out of her poverty put in everything all that she had to live on

I've only ever preached these words before in isolation and not in context we can say lots of things about them with regard to giving and money and attitude of heart that goes with it we can even say things like there could have been another widow there who put in two small copper coins that was right beside the first one and as she put them in her heart just grumbled and complained about what she was doing that's not true but what I'm trying to draw out is the notion that Jesus noticed her and Jesus as distinct from everybody else knew something that was going on in her heart her heart in

giving was a heartfelt response to God and she gave everything love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength everything not noticed but everything she gives all to Jesus and she's such a contrast to the religious leaders whose love is all about themselves and self indulgence and self love and self satisfaction God knows our heart even we can't judge one another's hearts we see a brother or sister do something and we may well be really encouraged by it and it's great that we are and it's great that we act in such a way that people might be encouraged but we really do not know one another's hearts and when we judge one another's hearts we may be making a grave mistake there are certain things that we see and judge that we ought to be warned about but in terms of motive God is the one who knows the motives of our hearts

I love the core values that have been that are the core values of our church family I don't know if you know them all yet we talk about them reasonably often but we talk about things like devotion to prayer we talk about Christ-centered bible saturation we talk about humble authenticity treasuring Jesus together servant leadership radical generosity and local and global impact I love them because they're relational and they are driven by a heart which loves God through his son the Lord Jesus Christ they're about pursuing God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength there's a wrong way of holding them the wrong way of holding them is to turn them into another set of laws you prayed today you read your bible today you've been honest in your dealings with people you've been to church on Sunday were at your community group have you done your duty with kids church or music or whatever it is how much money have you given lately that's the wrong way but these are very good principles because they can be held the right way they can be held by a heart that treasures

[27 : 19] Jesus and is hungry for Jesus that loves to speak to Jesus in prayer that earnestly desires to be in the word of God so that they might know more about what Jesus and God is like that they might know him a heart that is not proud and prepared to humble themselves and acknowledge their own failures and their mistakes with their brothers and sisters a heart that treasures being together in a gathering like this when we gather on Sunday when we meet in our small groups our community groups through the week a heart that bleeds for those who aren't amongst us and wonders where they are and expresses love and concern doesn't just say I notice they're missing but who goes to them and says how are you brother or sister how can I encourage you in Christ a heart that leads as a servant not about who I am but how can I honour the Lord Jesus in the way that I relate to you and serve this church family a heart that gives generously who sees what we that the earthly possessions that we have our money our possessions whatever it is as given to us as entrusted by to us by

God in the first place a heart that cries out to see the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ transform men and women and boys and girls in this community in this church family and in the world beyond there is a really good way to hold the core values of St Paul's brothers and sisters the Lord our God the Lord is one he has revealed himself to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul with all your mind with all your strength pursue him and love your neighbour as yourself pursue one another in Christ Amen Amen