

Good morning!

It has been 20 years since I met my wife. Good morning! It has been 20 years since I met my wife. We met in a little room with his now just left the gym and filled with sports equipment but back then it was Sunday school room for the young adults. I was a university student, and she was working at the university at the time. Through the young adults and meeting up at the university we started to hang out and become friends. I realized very quickly that she was an amazing girl who love the Lord just as much if not more than I did, and knew her Bible well.

And it seems like a God thing, but when we wanted to do a young adults event, she and I would talk on the phone, come up with an idea like bowling or going to the movies, and she would phone the girls on the list and I would phone the guys on the young adults list, and once we arrived, it was often just she and I that would show up. Sometimes only one or two other people. It seems like a God thing, but I wonder now if she was actually phoning her half the list no, but I know I was phoning mine!

We ended up hanging out a lot, starting to date, and falling in love. Then after working hard and saving up a bunch of money I worked up the nerve and asked her dad for his and her mom's blessing to ask Andrea to marry me. And since then, I've been learning to love Andrea with every part of who I am.

Falling in Love is easy at the start, and costs you more and more as you go. At the beginning of a relationship it's easy to be attracted to the outward appearance physically and the outward appearance of their personality. You don't know each other super well, and both people are acting their best to try to impress each other. If this goes well, they want to know each other in a deeper way, and you start spending more time together. However, the more time you spend together, the more opportunity there is to see each other's sinfulness come out. They say love is blind and perhaps this is part of the meeting when the Bible says that love covers a multitude of sins. A couple

continues to get to know each other, the good parts and their difficult “growth areas”. Then they get married, or date long enough, being deeply in love, and the honeymoon phase begins to end. A deeper love takes its place, as couples see with more clarity, the persistence of sinfulness in the other person. And they continue, by grace, to love each other through each failure, and despite each shortcoming. Through persistence and loving others more than you love yourself, they continue to fall more and more in love loving the other person with everything that they are, to the point where they would lay down their life everyday for the person they love. This goes on until the Lord takes one of them home. There is a reason that Paul says in Ephesians that marriage represents God's love for his people.

In my relationship with God I want to love God like this, where I strive to lay down my life for Jesus every day, and every day pick up my cross and follow him. This is the desire of every Christian who has tasted the heavenly gift and has been rescued and set free by the love of Christ. We want to love God with all that we are, and we want to love others in the same way that God loves us. Easier said than done. We all know it is hard to love others this is why marriages are hard at times. This is why being part of a church community can be hard at sometimes. But it is so worth it, because when we love God and we love others we experience more and more of God's reign on the earth, and we experience the fruit of living out our purpose.

This morning were continuing through the book of Mark we're in Mark 12. So if you want to turn there in your Bibles on your device, we are in Mark chapter 12 with a familiar passage.

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’³⁰ And 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 strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”³² And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.”³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

This passage is profoundly interesting and meaningful. This passage appears in Matthew and Luke as well. Jesus is approached and ask out of all the law which one is the greatest. In the Old Testament that are 613 laws apparently someone counted. Likely at one point there was a larger law book that the Israelites followed, but by this point the 613 that were recorded in the Old Testament is what they had at this time, and Jesus gives a really interesting answer. Not surprising but interesting. You see the first command to love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength, is based on the Shema. The Shema is in Deuteronomy 6:4. And Jewish people would pray this every morning and evening. It says “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.^[b] ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” So Jewish people love the Shema. But what makes Jesus's response interesting is that even though he was asked what the greatest commandment singular is, Jesus responds with two Commandments. He says the Shema love the Lord, and adds a second one you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Then he says there are no greater commands than these. But why would he do this if he's asked for the greatest command? Why would he put them together like that? And why wasn't it surprising?

Well, Jewish people then and today know that the Old Testament is filled with commands to love God and to love others. This was not necessarily a giant revelation

per se, because Jewish people know the Old Testament is full of passages that talk about caring for the poor, helping those in need, and not doing wrong to others and not doing wrong in business to other people. For Jewish people law, service and kindness are vitally important. And not just kindness to other Jews, but kindness to Gentiles and even animals. That is important to all Jewish people then and now. In fact Jewish people are often dismissive of Jesus's words here and the importance of them, because they don't see Jesus' words as something new and revelatory, but very much an emphasis and synopsis on what the Old Testament teaches. Even here in Mark, the Scribe or lawyer says to Jesus, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." This guy gets it. If someone was there trying to catch Jesus saying something that was controversial or didn't line up with the Torah, this was not it.

But, we know from reading other parts of the New Testament, that the Jewish teachers had developed complicated machinations around the laws. Many of the laws are very general, so in order for them to know how to keep that particular law, they had to come up with other rules and regulations surrounding, so that it's almost like a fence that's around a hole so you don't fall in the hole, they would put these other rules in place. And overtime, it seems that many of the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus's day had lost sight of the heart of the law, and were focused on the minutiae of the additional rules. We see Jesus constantly going back to the heart of the law in Scripture. On The Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says things like the Bible says it's not okay to commit adultery, but I say to you even looking at a woman with lust is the same as adultery. Or when he says hating your brother is the same as murder, Jesus is getting to the heart of what matters. It's interesting that what matters most is not just simply ones devotion to God, but loving others along the way. And it's not just about loving others on its own, but loving others is how we express our love and devotion to God. So the second

commandment is so connected to the first. The scribe in this passage replies to Jesus with saying ‘you're right, these two Commandments are much more than burnt offerings and sacrifices’. And he could be very well referring to verses like Isaiah 1 11, and Isaiah 58.

Read Isaiah 1:11 and Isaiah 58

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

says the LORD;

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.

¹²“When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you
this trampling of my courts?

¹³Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—

I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;

they have become a burden to me;

I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁵When you spread out your hands,

I will hide my eyes from you;

even though you make many prayers,

I will not listen;

your hands are full of blood.

¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;

cease to do evil,

¹⁷ learn to do good;

seek justice,

correct oppression;

bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause.

Isaiah 58 talks about their attempt at fasting to please the Lord, but there was something more important to him:

Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed^[b] go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Passages like these and what Jesus is saying is that we cannot love God without loving others. Loving others is **essential**, **pivotal**, and **vital** in a relationship with God. And as Christians we all want this! We want to be able to love others with the same love that God shows us. And the Holy Spirit flowing through us creates a natural desire in us to love others it's one of the fruit of the Spirit. And while that might be our default desire to love others, often time our sin our pride our laziness gets in the way and we don't love others as we should. But individually the spirit continues to work in us and

collectively as the church we continue to strive to love others as we love ourselves and to love God.

As we follow these two commands as we live these out to love God with everything that we are and to love others as we love ourselves, we bring God glory. And that's no small thing. For Christians bringing God glory is the chief purpose of humanity. **It's the reason that we were created!** As the church, the body of Christ, we were tasked with the great commission, to go and make disciples of all Nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey and observe all that Jesus commanded. As we go with the message of the good news of Jesus Christ to our families and to our neighbors and co-workers and Friends and strangers and even our enemies, God will draw them to himself and make disciples, who will live out these two Commandments and bring God glory. And as you and I do this, and we collectively do this is a church, there will be more and more people who are living their true purpose, and God is getting more and more glorified.

And this is so exciting, because it's what we were made for. It shouldn't be a surprise to any of us, because newsflash, the reason you are here on this Earth isn't just to get up in the morning go to work come home eat supper with your family and do it all again the next day and try to make the world a little better place with your time here. The reason we are here on this planet, is to love God with all your heart or mind our soul and strength with every fiber of our being, to love others as we love ourselves, all to bring God glory in everything that we do. When we live with these two greatest commands at the forefront of our lives, we transform the world through the power of God. Did you notice what Jesus says to the scribe here? Jesus saw that he answered wisely and said to him you are not far from the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God in scripture or the kingdom of heaven, which are synonymous terms, is us living under God's reign and authority in our lives. And this is a beautiful thing. As God's great love flows through us through his church to the world we reap the benefits of living under and in God's

Kingdom reign.

As a church we look forward to vision 2025, as we strive to live out the great commission making disciples, calling them with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to come and live under God's kingdom reign. And the more people come and join us, the more amazing it will be! How amazing will it be to see our loved ones get saved and begin to glorify God? I didn't grow up in a Christian home. I had been a Christian for only a few years when my dad came to know the Lord. How beautiful and amazing it is to be able to have spiritual conversations with my dad, and to talk about God's amazing provision through our struggles and through our joys. Many of you have family members who don't know the Lord yet, and are spinning their wheels in life trying to figure out what the real purpose is, but how amazing will it be when they turn to Christ humble themselves and surrender to his reign in their lives. As we live these two Commandments out and share them with others people will come to be a part of even our local fellowship and we will experience loving devoted generous community. A community where people pray with one another, walk through struggles together, cry tears of sorrow and tears of joy with one another, we hold each other accountable, and even create a place where we can raise our kids together to be kids who love others, and who love God. And for those who come and are single, it will be a place to meet other single believers who are in love with the Lord and who love God as much as you do. When I first came to this church, I was struck by the kindness and sincerity of the young adults group as they were striving to love God and to love each other and others. My wife was among them! (Singles ministry?!? Hahah)

Being part of a church filled with believers who are living out these two Commandments and striving together to share the good news of Christ so that others will come to love God and love others, is a beautiful thing. And God can use us to

transform St. Albert! If you don't know what this kind of love looks like because you haven't trusted in Jesus – gospel.

Let's pray together

Romans 12: 9-13 benediction

⁹Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.¹⁰Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit,^[a] serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.