

Sermon 28th June 2015

Deut 10:12-19 + Matthew 22:37-39

We are starting a new series today: Love God; Love our Neighbour

It's no coincidence that this series has been chosen as the staff and ministry teams have been considering the question: what this church is about? I mean if someone were to ask us to sum up what we do here – what would we say?

And this is what we decided: Loving God  Loving our neighbour (Matthew 22:37-39)

So this is going to become our 'strap' line as part of our branding/new look. It will go on all our literature; posters and leaflets; websites etc.

We are redesigning our website and we are having a page on the NT website – so we need to move forward with it.

So it is very apt that we should look at the teaching behind this command that Jesus gave when he was asked which was the 'greatest commandment:

Love God and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Now these commandments only make sense if we view the whole of the Gospel message – Jesus living, dying and rising again for each of us so that we may have new life. Then these commandments are seen not as orders to be obeyed in our own strength, but as 'invitations and promises to a new way of life in which, bit by bit, hatred and pride can be left behind and love can become a reality.' (Tom Wright)

I want to start in the Deuteronomy passage– Jesus is quoting his message from Deut 6:5 'you shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' and this verse is part of the Shema – the basic and essential creed of Judaism which is said at every service and daily by many. It means that we give a total love to God – a love which dominates our lives.

Let's look at the background. The children of Israel have been released from the bondage of the Egyptians. They've wandered in the desert for what seems an eternity. They are preparing to go into the Promised Land. Moses has just

given then the 10 Commandments from God and then he puts forth this question.

Question: What does the Lord your God ask of you?

-A question that still relates to us this day – 5 instructions are given to us:

1. GOD'S PEOPLE MUST FEAR GOD.v.12

When people are told to fear God, they may respond in this way; don't we have enough things to fear? - illness, disease, the state of the economy, they fear war, they fear for their safety, they fear for their families safety, they fear being ridiculed, THEY FEAR BEING REJECTED, they fear being alone and they fear death. With all these other fears why do we have to fear God to?

What does it mean to fear God? Is this the fear of terror or tread? No, the fear of God is an **attitude of reverence and awe** that His people show to Him because they love Him and respect His power and greatness.

In the book of proverbs we read that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge". Our fear of God is the starting point of our knowledge and of our relationship to God. When we recognize who God is, "The Almighty, The Creator, Our Saviour, Our Provider", we then will bow in humble adoration before Him.

Oswald Chambers wrote, "The remarkable thing about fearing God, is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, when you do not fear God you fear everything else.

You see when we fear God, when we trust in His Power and His Greatness, when we realize that He is our Help in times of trouble and our Shield in times of danger. We will then know and believe that God is with us and that nothing can ever hurt us.

2. WE MUST WALK IN ALL HIS WAYS v.12

We are to walk in all (not some of his ways or just the ways we like), we are to walk in all His ways. We are to imitate God.

How are we to do that? We can do that by walking like Jesus, we can do that by following in the ways/in the steps of Jesus.

So how did Jesus walk?

Jesus walked in love, He walked in compassion, He walked in truth, He walked away from the things of the world and he walked in obedience.

When we walk like Jesus, when we walk in His steps, the world will notice and we will make a difference. We can walk with Jesus in our private lives; by our personal prayer; reading of scriptures; spending time with God. But we also have to walk with him publically. We have to 'walk the talk' – we have to be in the world but not of it. In all we do and say, we should be reflecting Jesus' teaching – we should be his heart, hands, feet, eyes, ears and mouth here on earth. Some of us might not find it easy to evangelise – to talk openly about our faith but we can all show love to all we come into contact with.

In the hymn we sing - 'All for Jesus, all for Jesus, All my being's ransomed powers, All my thoughts and all my doings All my days and all my hours.

- What is meant by those words? It seems to me there's an awful lot of trouble in the world that somehow wouldn't exist if all the people who sing such songs went and lived them out.

Those who claim to live in Him must walk as Jesus walked. We are to walk in all of God's ways.

3. GOD'S PEOPLE MUST LOVE GOD.

Moses wrote earlier in Deuteronomy in chapter 6 about loving God. He said to God's people; "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all your soul and all your strength".

Question: Is your love for God based on what he does for you?

e.g. I'll love and serve God if he helps me out in my marriage, or he finds me a

job, or he helps me out of this difficult situation.

Like the children of Israel, every time things got a bit tough, they turned on God and wanted to go back to Egypt. The majority served God only when he was blessing them. And when God didn't meet their expectations they abandoned him.

To love God means to love being with God, It means to find our joy and delight in Him, It means to love His attributes: love, patience, mercy, grace, power. To love God means to love what God loves and to love what God is. It is to be **constantly willing to obey anything God says and to imitate his character.**

Moses says we are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all of our strength i.e. we are called/required to love God whole-heartedly, with our entire being, with all our energy. We are not to love God with only pieces of our lives, but rather with our whole lives.

When Jesus states in Matthew chapter 22 the commanded to love God, you will see that Jesus adds a word that is not in Deuteronomy, he adds the word "mind". We are to love God with all of our mind.

This is an extremely important concept to understand. We love God with our minds when **we hold deep sincere beliefs about God** and not by mere blind unthinking, unreasoning devotion.

We also love God with our mind when we dedicate our minds to God, striving to learn more about God and his Word all the time.

What a shame it is that many of Gods people, have devoted more time to and know more about hobbies and trivia than they know about God and His Word.

One writer said, "One of the major struggles of religion at that time was legalism. The problem with legalism is that the focus is on following laws instead of imitating God. They had taken the 10 commandments and the first 5 books of the Bible and came up with over 600 rules and regulations that they determined had to be followed in order to please God. The thing that made it

even more confusing, other than having over 600 laws to follow, was the religious teachers couldn't even determine which of the laws were the most important to follow."

We have fallen into the same trap today. Many people look at the church and God as being solely concerned with keeping rules and certain regulations. And when this happens, the rules and regulations become the focal point of our faith instead of God Himself.

We are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, anywhere, any time. At church, at home, while driving, while working, while playing, etc. We love Him by honouring Him as best we can and by talking to Him every chance we get.

4. GOD'S PEOPLE MUST SERVE GOD.

Serving God with all my heart and soul is basically putting his cares and wants above my own.

Service to God is not an option- it's a requirement. Both the old and New Testament readings bear this out. Moses says we are to serve God in the same way we love God with all of our heart and all of our soul.

Are we serving God? Are we using our time and energies to build up His kingdom? Are we serving God in the church, in our Homes, in our jobs and with our lives?

5. GOD'S PEOPLE MUST OBEY GOD.

The concept of obedience is the dominant theme of the book of Deuteronomy. - "OBEDIENCE IS ESSENTIAL".

Now I realize that obedience is not on the top ten list of most people in our society. People want to do what they want to do and no one is going to stop them or tell them any different.

Jesus said in John 14:15, "IF YOU LOVE ME YOU WILL OBEY WHAT I COMMAND".

Jesus is saying, "Don't tell me you love me, and don't tell me how great you think I am if you are not going to obey me. Because the test of your love for me is for you to be willing to obey what I say.

God's people must do what God says; they must not question why AND SECOND GUESS GOD. When God's word says "repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sin" we must obey

When God's says I want the best of you time, your talents and your treasure your money" we must obey.

When God's word says forgive one another, love one another, encourage one another, build up one another, we must obey.

And as I draw to a close - I do just want to touch on the second part of the Greatest commandment – love our Neighbour. We are going to spend the next 3 weeks considering this in detail but it is clear that we must love God and love our neighbour. Jesus' quote comes from Leviticus 19:18 – love others as yourself. 'It is only when we love God that other people become lovable – the love of humanity is firmly grounded in the love of God .' (Barclay)

Love is humble toward others. Love is patient toward others. Love is not self-centred. Love does not seek to control others or police others. Love does not require perfection in others.

Someone said, "It is no chore for me to love the whole world. My only real problem is my neighbour next door."

Sometimes loving those closest to us is the hardest thing to do. We can give money to feed starving people on the other side of the world, but to deal kindly with someone at work or our next door neighbour may be a different matter entirely.

The key to today's teaching is Love, love love.

And sometimes that isn't easy but let us always hang on to this:

1 John 4:10

'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.'

Let me end with this short poem:

God's Amazing Love!

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
Were every blade of grass a quill,
Were the world of parchment made,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor would the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.