**The Lord is One, Love Him**

Mark 12:28-34 (Key verse 29,30)

*“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* 30Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”

In this passage Jesus is once again confronted with a question from the teachers of the law. Which was their last attempt in testing Jesus. However, in this instance the teacher of law ends up agreeing with Jesus. The question was about what is the greatest commandment of all the commands from God. The great commandment is to love God with all of our being and the second is to love neighbour as we love ourselves. This is the matter of the heart and cannot be achieved by any external works. However, this passage also reveals the foundational building block towards this command. The foundation to this command is embedded in the truth that, **the lord our God is one**. May the lord bless us to receive one word of God through this passage. May we have no other gods but worship one God, our lord and saviour Jesus Christ. Amen!

Look at verse 28a, “One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer…” Notice that this teacher of the law heard them debating, he is aware of how they had tried to trap Jesus with the question on paying taxes to Caesar and about marriage in the resurrection. It believed that this was a Wednesday leading to Easter Friday. There was also something bit different about this teacher of the law. He could acknowledge that Jesus had given a good answer. In fact a parallel passage to this In the book of Matthew 23:34-35, says that he had realised that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together one of them an expert in the law, tested Jesus with this question. Let us look at verse 28b for his question to Jesus, “…he asked him [Jesus], “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”” we already know that he was an expert in the law and that is why his test question is related to the law, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

Let us all read verse 29-30, ‘’The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The response Jesus gave comes right from Deuteronomy 6. And now let us look a little bit at the book of Deuteronomy. Because we need to understand the setting it was said as well. Moses is about 120 years old now and he’s at the end of his life. He’s about to die and he’s talking, essentially for the last time to the people of Israel. The whole emphasis in the book is a call to obedience, and it’s repeated through this entire book. And connected to this is, if you do that, God will bless you, God will multiply your families, God will multiply your crops, multiply your grain, and if you do that God will defeat your enemies. If you do that God will prosper you and bless you.” And these blessings will follow you into 1000 of generations if you but love Him and obey His commands. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy this is constantly emphasised. However, where then lies the motive? The reason to obey? The purpose to obey? The fire and energy to obey? Where lies the motive for this?

The motive is given in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And here comes the motive, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might**. And then, these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart**.” In other words, you’re never going to be able to be obedient if this is external. This has to be internal. It has to be something that comes from the heart. And notice the foundation of this extensive call to loving God. “The Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” It was a polytheistic world which means there were many gods, many nations, every nation had its own deities. There were gods all over the place, false gods, gods that did not exist, fabrications of demons and men. But there was only one true God. The Lord is the one true God.

Therefore, we do not need to worry about dividing our allegiance. We only need to love one God because there is only one God and we need to love Him with all your capacities. This is what drives this obedience. The word “love” that our Lord uses in the New Testament accounts, in Matthew and in Mark, is from the verb agapaō, which is the love of intelligence, the love of the will, the love of purpose, the love of choice, the love of sacrifice and the love of obedience, not phileō, which is the love of attraction.

And this comes right out of the Ten Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before Me”. That is the first commandment. Do not have any other gods, because there are no other gods. Don’t be led to think there are. The most basic Old Testament truth is there is one God. it is the basic of the Old Testament truth. The supreme, most comprehensive duty of man then is to love that one God for who He is, for what He has done. That’s why we are to love Him, with all our heart, soul and mind, as Moses put it in Deuteronomy. And our Lord in the New Testament, in our passage in Mark added another dimension, “strength.” The Lord added that, “heart, soul, mind, strength.”

Loving God is foundational to Christian life. Deuteronomy chapter 13, verse 6, reads, “the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” Verse 16, “In that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments, His statutes, His judgments, that you may live and multiply” Verse 20, “By loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, by holding fast to Him, this is your life.” In other words, foundationally, when someone asks you, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” It means to love the Lord your God with all your entire being. We know the one we love. He has disclosed Himself to us in the bible. He’s worthy of our love. He’s worthy of a far more love than we will ever be able to give Him.

The apostle Paul reminded us to let our love abound more and more in all knowledge. And I think our love for God is connected to knowledge. The more we know about God, the more there is to love. Our love is in direct correlation to the revelation of God we know. The more you know about God, the more there is to love Him. The truth of the matter was, the Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees and leaders of Israel and people who followed them were not anywhere close to this. Though they knew about it very well, problem was they could not do it on their own. Because it is a command to do something you can’t do on your own. It was a direct assault to legalism.

However, one big challenge we have is that, when we look at ourselves we find we do not love God the way we ought to. “How can we love God the way we ought to? We are sinful. Like the nation of Israel, we have a history of breaking God’s law even here in the wilderness for 40 years, how can we keep this law?” The whole nation could have fallen on its knees right there on the plains of Moab in those 30 days where Moses was talking to them and said what the Publican said in Luke 18, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” How can I love like that? Our God is not satisfied with the outside appearance of works, God demands the inward love. That’s what Moses taught. If we want to be right with God, if we want to be blessed by God, we must love God with all our heart. This is our motive or reason to obey and live a life of faith. And all of this rest on the foundational truth that, “the Lord our God is one.”

Look at verse 31, “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” A neighbour is anyone who may need our assistance. We already love ourselves, we may have different degrees at which we love ourselves. And so this is not about how we can love ourselves because our whole lives are consumed with taking care of self. What Jesus is saying here is that, we need to “Treat other people with the same detailed care you treat yourself.” It’s not a call for self-love, it’s a call to love others the way you already love yourself.

Why does Jesus come up with these two things? Firstly, It is because the lord our God is but one. Secondly, It is because there is no other commandment greater than these. And our Lord also said, “On these two, hang all the law and the prophets”--Mattew 22:40. The teacher of the law responded in verse 32, he expressed his full agreement with Jesus and even elaborated in verse 33, “33To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” That it is more important that burnt offerings and sacrifices. Now this was unique because it was that time of the year leading to the Passover, that there were a lot of burnt offerings and sacrifices. That is why Jesus could assure him in verse 34, which reads, “34When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” This teacher of the law was near because he understood that it is an internal heart issue, not a ceremonial ritual issue. He was not yet in kingdom but was near, to be inside is by faith in our lord and saviour Jesus Christ, something the teachers of the law were still battling with. At this point, this was the final shut-down at questioning Jesus. After that, no one ventured to ask Him any more questions. Nothing worked in trying to turn Jesus against the people and the people against Him.

Loving God and loving others, to some extent is a matter of priority or order to things. What should come first in our hearts. More like if our vertical relationship is right, our horizontal one will be alright as well. God should be the one we love first and foremost. There are many things to love: spouse, parents, children, friends, one’s nation, career, academics, art, music, sports, food and so on. These are wonderful, created things for us to enjoy. However, we must love God first and foremost. If we love something He created more than him, we become idol worshipers. If we love his blessing more than Him, we fall into idolatry. If we try to worship another person more than God, that relationship will end in disaster. But if we love God first and foremost, we can have a right relationship with God and others, enjoy God’s creation, and live productive, meaningful lives.

St. Augustine once said, “Love God and do as you please.” When we love God with our whole being, we can then obey God’s word and be freed from all other things, most especially principalities and powers that continue to enslave young people, the world to sin and disobedience. When we obey God’s word, we can find real peace and joy. Apostle John once said, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them” (1Jn 2:15). In short, God wants an intimate love relationship with us for our own good. He wants our love to reciprocate his own love for us. And one best way to love others is to share the gospel with them to help rescue their souls. That is why Jesus said, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15).

Preparing this message just once more revealed to me how I am so mechanical. Once I know what needs to be done, I just keep at how things work in order to keep the machine running. I am realizing that as much am leader in this ministry, my love for the word of God is lacking. I feel am like the teachers of the law. Who knew outwardly what should be done but inwardly did not have the right heart. They had all the religious mechanism such that even when they meet the real master, our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. They failed to see he was lord and king, creator of the heavens and the earth. Lately as a family we have been faced with something that requires a big fundamental shift In how we do things. Somethings that made us question the basic structures of our home. This fill me with so much fear and worry. Because it was something new to me, something neither of us had experience in. Though I prayed, my prayers felt empty with faithlessness. It was yet again a revelation to me of how far my heart is from God. It does not matter how well I keep bible study times, preparation of Sunday messages, conference prayer meetings and other religious activities. If all these works are not motivated by a heart that loves God, a heart that acknowledges that my God and lord is but one Lord. And he deserved all my heart devotion. Then my religious activities becomes works of performance and soon enough I will fall into despair and burn out. This is more serious especially to me because I stand before His people and ultimately will face the worst judgement upon His return. Moreover, how can I love and serve His people the right way, if am falling dismally to love him. Lord have mercy on me to obey and love your word. I pray that the lord may circumcise my heart, so I may love him. Love His word and obey. Amen!

**In conclusion,** Christian life is not a matter of following rules and regulations. It is not a performance based religion. We are not performing or in a competition. It is a life of obedience to God’s word. For God said, if you love me you will obey my commandments. And that obedience is founded on this basic truth, **that the lord our God, the lord is one**. There is no other God but Him. He is the one true living God whom the world witness in the person of Jesus Christ, who laid down his life on the cross for our sin. May the Holy Spirit circumcise our hearts to love God with all our hearts, mind, soul and strength. May we also love others as we love ourselves. Amen!