

The Highest Priority in Life

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[0 : 00] Good morning by God's wonderful grace in the book, The Gospel of Mark.! Once again, I have one other message I want to bring to you that kind of relates to this new time of year, a new year that we're all trying to celebrate and move into so that we'll talk about the highest priority in life.

Now, there are certain places in the Bible where we can find these wonderful summations that give us this really succinct definition of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to follow Jesus in the highest way so that we're making the most of what it means for us to be saved, born again, to be true believers, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone for the forgiveness of our sins.

This is one of those passages. By definition, Jesus will tell us that this is the main thing. So as Greg and I shepherd the church, as Suzanne and I, in our own married life, try to move through life getting the most bang for our spiritual buck, we might say, we turn to places like this to keep us reminded of where we need to put our focus so that everything about life becomes measured by whether or not we are adhering to, holding to, and nurturing these kinds of things in our life.

The passage, as you see, is Mark chapter 12. We're going to jump right in with verse 28. One of the scribes came and heard the people around arguing and then recognizing that he had answered them well, that is that Jesus had provided in a previous test from the religious leaders.

Jesus had answered well and it had created this firestorm of argument among the people that were there. seeing that Jesus had answered them well, this particular scribe thought that he would come and insert himself and he would do a good job of testing Jesus.

[2 : 16] And so the scribe asked Jesus, what commandment is the foremost of all? Jesus answered, the foremost is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, 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.

The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. What a statement. Now the scribe said to him, Right, teacher, you have truly stated that he is one and there is no one else 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 neighbor as himself is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Well, when Jesus saw that the scribe had answered intelligently, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. After that, no one would venture to ask him any more questions.

Then it goes on to talk about how Jesus was dealing with the scribes and the religious leaders as it related to the temple.

[3 : 41] So this is a time in Jesus' life, in his public ministry, where religious leaders are beginning to ratchet up their attempts to discredit Jesus as an upstart rabbi, as nothing more than a passing, fleeting fad as it relates to religious life in Israel.

The religious leaders are jealous of Jesus. The religious leaders are shamed by Jesus every time they try to do something like this and trip him up. Jesus answers them with much grace and wisdom.

And it catapults Jesus into a greater, as it were, sphere of respect among the people, while at the same time discrediting the religious leaders.

And they're doing it to themselves. They're taking on the Lord of glory who wrote the Scriptures. And so if they're going to test anybody about the meaning of the Bible, they've come to the right person.

The problem is their hearts are hard. Now I want to ask you a series of questions as we move into this together to help you own this material and not see it so much as, well, those scribes and those Pharisees, they're knuckleheads.

[4 : 54] I want us to see how this relates to the life that we're living with the Lord Jesus and how these same questions that are being put to Jesus are the questions of our heart.

And Jesus' answers have everything to do with what it means for you and I to make the most of our spiritual life with Him. Here it is, folks. This is the main thing. There's nothing more important than what I'm about to say to you this morning from this passage of Scripture.

Now, if someone was trying to understand the very essence, or we might say the very heart or the very core of the Christian faith, how would you answer them?

How would you help someone understand what is the essence, heart, and core of the Christian faith? Perhaps someone from Islam would ask you that. And they would ask you, what's the main difference between your faith and mine?

We even read some of the same portions of the Bible and share the same sections of the Bible. We both believe in Abraham as a real person, etc., etc. What if they ask you to sum up for them the deepest, most important expression of your faith as a Christian?

[6 : 06] How would you do that? How would you sum up the deepest, most important, inmost expression of your own faith as a Christian? Could you do that in a succinct way?

What would you tell them? Would you answer them with a phrase? A catchy saying of some kind? Maybe a poem that sums up Christianity that you came across?

Maybe a verse or a passage from the Bible itself? How would you verbalize or explain your heart's deepest expression of your Christian faith?

How would you tap into the core of your own relationship to God and explain that to someone else in a concise way? How would you do that? If I pass out a piece of paper right now and ask you to write that down in three sentences or less, could you do it?

It's quite a test, isn't it? Now, I'm going to let out of the bag here what I'm asking you. I'm asking you to express to me what Christians typically refer to as your testimony.

[7 : 11] I'm just asking you to give... Isn't that what a testimony is? You're helping people understand the origin, nature, and foundation of your own faith in Jesus Christ? That's your testimony.

How did God save you? What did God do to bring you to faith? How do you know for sure you're forgiven for your sins? What are you putting that faith in or whom?

All of these questions that I'm asking you now about the core of the Christian life, you need to be able to articulate first for yourself. You've come to some kind of an understanding about what the main thing is because that's how you measure how you're living in relationship to God and other people.

You see? Being a Christian is so much more than just getting up every day and trying to get through life. That's what unbelievers do.

Unbelievers flit from one thing to another to try and keep them going because at some point they realize how mundane life is, how empty life is, how lonely life is.

[8 : 17] And so they've got to look forward to the next thing to keep them going. We're not supposed to live like that. We have the joy of Jesus, the God of the universe, living in us.

He is the one animating us for life so that when we get sick and so when we face death and so when we face trials and disasters and all this kind of things and wars and tumults, the foundation of what helps us face all of that doesn't go away because He lives in you.

He's the rock. He's the one sustaining you and giving you life. And so you're not flitting from one thing to another. That person lives in you.

He is the one that is your life. Let me ask you another question or two as we move through this and then I'll show you a couple slides as we do the outline together.

Another way of thinking of this, what is worth giving your entire life to? Now think about people all around the world and what they're giving their lives to.

[9 : 26] What is worth your life? Can I just give you a quick illustration? I want you to think about because my heart has been aching and breaking for the people in Iran right now.

Now I know they're unbelievers. I know they're pagans. I know that for almost 50 years they've been under a totalitarian regime that is from the pit of hell. I absolutely understand that.

That doesn't stop me from seeing millions and millions of people massing together over the basic issues of life. But make no mistake, brothers and sisters, this is about religion.

This revolt is about religion, whether they know it or not, whether they claim it or not. Because everything about that regime has been built on the idea of God made in the image of man. And the Bible has a lot to say about what will happen to societies when we do that. And so there's no surprise at all that things are collapsing in the way that they are and things are happening in the way that they are.

[10 : 30] But I want you to think about all of those people. Many of them are losing their lives and will lose their life. And I want to ask you, why are they willing to do that?

What is it that they're laying their lives on the line for right now? Because they're risking their lives. You understand that? You've seen this, right, in the news? They're willing to die.

To get what? For prices to come down. For basic necessities to be given to them. For certain freedoms to be attained. This is what we're being told.

What is worth giving your entire life to? What is worth losing your life for? Think of it. Every day that you live, a little more of your life ebbs away so that you're one day closer to the close of your life on this earth.

Every day, that's the truth about us. Every day, you're spending your life on something. You're investing your life's resources and something. What is it?

[11 : 36] It's got to be more than just making a living. That's a good thing. And the Lord wants us to do that. But is that the point of your life? Are your houses and your material goods the point of your life?

Is that the stuff and substance of who you are? In your retirement, as you look forward to your retirement, is that the end all, best all of life on this planet?

If I could just get to retirement so that you can do what? It can be a helpful and revealing exercise to ask yourself some sobering questions, and I'm going to put it up here on the screen, about what is the most powerful or influential motive behind what you're doing and why you're doing it with your life.

What is most influencing you to live in the way that you live? Is the thing that's most influencing you in the way that you live fear?

Is that what motivates you most is fear? So you run to things that will give you this sense of security? Because the most important thing in your life is that you feel secure.

[12 : 53] You can't stand the unknown. You want to manage as many of the variables as possible. That's a trust in God issue, isn't it? I'm not saying that we shouldn't be prudent.

I'm simply saying that this tests what we put our faith in. So practically speaking, our passage reveals to us the highest priority in life as a Christian.

The highest priority you can have as a human being. And it shows us the highest reason for doing all that you and I endeavor to do in this life.

So you have the highest priority and you have the rationale, reasoning, or motives that are behind living out that highest priority and Jesus gives us both of those.

There's no guesswork. We can know what it is. I'll put it up here again. The highest priority is to love God. There is no higher priority as a human being than for you to show love to God.

[13 : 52] There's no higher priority for you to live in this way than to show that love for God.

So your life becomes a living, breathing example of what it is for you to live in the highest priority that you have as a human to love the Lord. Your life becomes an example of that.

That is it, folks. Am I living in a way that shows the love of God at work in my own life? You can't get any higher than that.

That should have more to do with defining you and the way that you live and the way that you're married and the way that you parent and the way that you work. I am very fond of asking you and asking particularly the people that I counsel because I do this in my life this particular question as we're facing the issues of life.

The Bible tells us in Proverbs that we're constantly making meaning about the matters of life, the issues of life that come at us, right? And so I'm very fond of asking this question.

[15 : 04] What does Jesus have to do with that? That, whatever it is. That issue, that matter, that situation, that season. Where is Jesus in all this?

I'll ask people in turmoil that. And typically what you will find as you think about how you're responding to these issues is we try to compartmentalize.

We kind of put Jesus back here. We kind of forget about Him. We don't think about Him much or we don't understand how He's supposed to make a difference in that issue. So we keep Him back here and we just try to manage it ourselves.

And when people do that, they get in trouble. That's last Sunday's sermon. We start getting into issues where we doubt. Last week, this is what I gave you. We start getting into issues where we're doubting God, we're discrediting God, we're demeaning God because of something going on in our life and it kind of builds and it kind of builds and then we get to a place where something hits us, some issue of life hits us and we're not prepared to trust God in that situation because there's been all of these lesser situations that have drawn us away, deceived us and robbed us of that trust and so we're not ready.

We're not ready and our life looks like we're not ready. The wheels start coming off as it were. We get angry at God. These are all symptoms of this slow train wreck that's been building.

[16:38] That's what Jesus said. So when Jesus last week confronted his disciples and he said to them when they came to him and said how come we couldn't cast this out all full of pride? How come this is their question?

How come life is not working the way that it should for us? And then Jesus said well this kind can only come out through much prayer. And what Jesus was answering to them was this kind can only be dealt with with much dependence on me because that's what prayer is.

And so what Jesus was telling them you have struggled back here with these issues of trusting me in smaller things and when this bigger thing hit you you weren't ready.

You were not ready and this showed it. You've been successful before here but you let these little things rob you and get to you and cause you to question.

And so when those things began to bring you down and this thing hit you you weren't ready. Now this is life is it not? This is life. And Jesus put his finger right on the issue.

[17:46] This is precisely what we're dealing with here as Jesus tells us you better keep your eye on the main thing. You need to remember what it is that you're doing as a Christian and what God has called you to and there is no higher priority for you as a Christian than for you to show love to God and to be loved by God.

And God is constantly getting you ready for the next thing and your ability to handle the next thing has everything to do with your love for the Lord. The tenderness of your heart the submission of your heart the obedience that you're committed to no matter what the repentance that you're willing to move into whatever it costs you I will turn away from self and sin and I will move to replace it with honoring you.

What matters most to me in this situation is not that the situation gets handled Lord what matters most to me in the situation is that you are pleased in the process of me going through it.

I want to please you in all things. Are you with me? Your pastor's up here trying to help you understand that the main thing is for you to love Jesus and make it about him. That will never change.

Every Sunday you're going to hear us say this. it's everywhere in the Bible. So practically speaking again our passage is giving us the highest priority in life and that priority as you see on the screen is to love the Lord.

[19:18] When we're done with all of this we should be able to ask and answer this question. Is God's highest priority in life my highest priority in life and what am I doing about it?

How am I working to keep the main thing the main thing so that I'm not like the disciples where I'm being slowly pulled away and distracted so that when the thing the next thing hits I'm not ready to face it in the Lord.

It's one thing to struggle folks. It's one thing to strive. You know we're never going to get this stuff perfect. It's another thing though to be preoccupied with self and sin and the stuff of the world to a point where you're not in the game anymore.

You're not a good soldier. You're not a good warrior. This is what Paul called us to. Be a good soldier he said. Be prepared. Stay focused. Some of my brothers have taught me switch on.

You need to stay switched on as a Christian. Right? There is no off switch in the well I think I'll just turn the Christian thing off for a while so I can go do my thing.

[20:25] You switch on and you stay on. Now you say Jeff that's hard. No it's impossible. That's right. That's why loving Jesus is the way you stay switched on.

Love is the most powerful force in the universe. I'm preparing another message where I'm going to talk to you more in depth about what this love is because the world has no idea. So do I have a God honoring motive behind all that I endeavor to do with my life?

Do I have a God honoring motive behind all that? All right? And so God first centers our attention in this passage on this very interesting person.

Now I'm going to refer to this guy as the listening lawyer. That's how we're going to outline this together this morning. The listening lawyer. Notice what he's saying. Now one of the scribes in the midst of this situation that Jesus finds himself in where the Pharisees and the Sadducees are coming and attacking Jesus trying to trip him up, ask him something that he can't answer and then discredit him.

This guy walks up and he obviously is a brainiac. He's probably one of the brighter of the group. He comes up to Jesus in verse 28. He hears the argument going on and the Bible gives him some credit here.

[21 : 45] The scribe recognizes that Jesus had answered them well. So he has a certain admiration for Jesus right now. And so then he is motivated to ask Jesus what commandment is the foremost of all.

This is his question. This is his question in verse 28. The scribe is asking in effect what is my greatest duty to God? Now this is a big deal among the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, the religious leaders of Israel.

This question has for centuries plagued these men and they have fought over the answer. So he goes right to what he thinks will most trip up the Lord Jesus Christ.

This guy isn't factoring God out of the equation. He's simply trying to get Jesus to tell him something that he doesn't think is answerable. The commandments now were the exclusive domain of God himself.

God issued them. God alone stood behind them. So to break even one was to break God's entire law. This is not about man's law.

[22 : 57] The question that's being asked is about God's law. So it's a question about life, but about life the way that God defined it. Now is the scribe coming at it that way?

I'm not so sure. I think he's just trying to trip him up. I'll tell you more about that as we go. The next thing that I want to deal with is this guy's baggage.

baggage. This guy's baggage. If you notice what's going on here, if you look at verse 32, the scribe said to Jesus in terms of his answer, right, teacher, you've truly stated that he is one.

So he's acknowledging, yes, the Bible teaches us, the scriptures teach us, God is one and there's no one like him. The Bible also in verse 33, he says, teaches us that we're to love God with everything that we have and to love our neighbor and that that is more than all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices we could make.

Now he's making some good progress as he talks about what the Bible actually teaches but he's not applying it very well. Who is a scribe? A scribe was a member of the Pharisaic party and he acted, as you see on the screen, as an official interpreter or an expounder of the law of Moses.

[24 : 08] So particularly the first five books of what we know as our Bible or the Hebrew scriptures, the first five books. A scribe then was a highly trained specialist in the Mosaic law.

He was a Pharisaic lawyer, a member of the Pharisee party, and as a Pharisee he believed there were 613 commandments in the law of Moses.

248 they determined were positive and 365 were negative. So the Pharisees were constantly debating among themselves facets of these laws as they applied to the daily religious life of the Jews.

So much so that they came to the point where they added so many other different kinds of qualifications and clauses and caveats that Jesus would later say you have done so much of that to my word that you've invalidated it.

You have invalidated my word. In fact Jesus has already told them this if you go back to Mark 7 Mark chapter 7 verse 6 and Jesus said to them this is the Pharisees and the scribes look at verse 5 of chapter 7 the Pharisees and the scribes asked Jesus why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders but eat their bread with impure hands the tradition of the elders were something that these men added to and invented and so Jesus said rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you not notice hypocrites hypocrites this people honors me with their lips but their heart their heart is far from me in vain they worship me because why they teach as doctrines the precepts of men

this is what he's talking about you have added so many of your own prescriptions and precepts to my word that you've made this so burdensome for my people they can't carry it neglecting verse 8 the commandment of

[26 : 20] God see that's the first thing you have learned to set aside you hold the tradition of men Jesus was also saying to them you are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your own traditions well that's scathing Moses said honor your father and your mother now here here's one of the laws that come out of those first five books of the Bible that these guys would have listed!

Moses said honor your father and your mother that's a that's pretty stringent stuff but here's what you say here's how you've invalidated that if a man says to his father or his mother whatever I have that would have helped you is Corbin what does that mean well that I've given it to the Lord I can't help you with that because I've dedicated it to God I know it's sitting in my bank account but it belongs to the Lord so I can't help you mom dad verse 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother and what's the result thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition folks can you understand what an indictment that is the way you've learned to live your life and interpret God's word actually serves to invalidate that word which you have handed down to others and expected them to understand and do and you do many such things as that wow now we're all the way over here in chapter 12 and

Jesus is dealing with these same men this same issue and so now this guy is asking Jesus the question that these men in their sex have S E C T S that these men have debated and argued over and not been able to come to an answer for for decades if not centuries and so he thinks ah I'll ask him the question here's the trump card and Jesus doesn't even hesitate see again they forget who they're confronting and they don't believe who they're confronting they don't believe Jesus is the Messiah they don't believe he's the God who wrote all that their particular delight was arguing over which of these commandments was the greatest which one carried the most weight because then they could use that as their ace in the hole as they confronted people about sin in their life now notice

I want you please to notice Jesus response to this trap that this guy is trying to set for the Lord we can see it in verse 32 the scribe said to Jesus right because Jesus has answered and said you shall love God with all your heart the!

response then that this guy makes to Jesus I think is interesting it suggests that he was receptive and that he was teachable because of what he says you're right teacher you you said something true you stated something right out of the word that we all know and have memorized he's saying but folks to understand the real situation we have to weigh this out carefully because in another of the gospels in Matthew we are told that this man came to test Jesus with this question this is a setup he's trying to trip up the Lord the scribes remark oh you're right teacher it would be better translated this way beautiful answer teacher the guy did not expect this his answer seems to be a mixture of astonishment and admiration for Jesus as a rabbi you're doing something that none of us have been able to do and it sounds right it's ringing true how come we didn't think of that that's the kind of response he's getting what was it about

[30 : 32] Jesus answer that brought about this kind of reaction from the scribe well this is where we see our passage transition from the lawyer this listening lawyer to the loving Lord so let me put that up for you the loving Lord in Jesus response that we've been looking at the foremost again no hesitation I can tell you that I can tell you what the chief highest priority of all the commandments is I can tell you what that is the foremost is and he begins with this this is very very important for this man hear oh Israel the Lord our God is one Lord and then he continues with his answer continues in my introduction I asked you what would you say to someone who wanted you to tell them your inmost deepest expression of your faith how would you sum up devout

Jews had a way of clearly communicating the inmost expression of their faith did you know that they did it was called the Shema now I don't know if I'm saying that correctly that's the way I've heard it said as I've been taught all of this the Shema or Shama and what was that well Jesus answers described by quoting from a portion of the Old Testament Shema and what this is is a compilation of Old Testament verses namely it comes from several of them and I want to throw them up here for you because I want you to look at them if you go to Numbers 15 now remember we're talking about what constitutes the Shema and Jesus goes right to what these particular religious leaders would have had a very very devout loyalty to so Jesus is going to meet them where they are!

Numbers 15 beginning in verse 37 and I'm going to go down through probably the end of the chapter there so the Lord also spoke to Moses so God is now speaking and giving instruction to Moses and this is the instruction you need to speak to the sons of Israel and here's what you tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments you ever wonder where that came from throughout their generations and that they shall put on cord of blue so now you've got these tassels coming off the corners of these flowing robes and they're to be blue now why verse 39 it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember remember what all the commandments of the Lord so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes you see that after which you played your harlot so that you may remember to do all my commandments and be holy to your

God I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God I am the Lord your God wow this is so powerful so he is making this tassel thing about the issue of their heart you're to look on those tassels and see that blue color and it should make you remember that you do not need to give in to your own heart and live according to your own wisdom but to look to me in my wisdom in scripture and live as holy people to me so this so this is not about just doing stuff this is not about just keeping the rules and then ticking it off while your heart is wicked toward the Lord no no no no this is a response of obedience from a heart that says I want to honor God if you go to the book of Deuteronomy Deuteronomy go there with me and we'll look at the next one Deuteronomy chapter six

I'm going to pick it up in verse four hear oh Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is one that sounds a lot like what we just read you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your what church heart look these commandments have always been about the heart of a human being it's always been about your soul in relationship to God always this has never been about sheer duty it's been about obedience out of love for God for being your God for saving you for choosing you out and making you his child so obedience is your response of love it's one of the most important ways that your life shows love to

[35 : 59] Jesus Christ or to God in this situation he goes on to talk about how you need to teach these to your kids diligently in verse 8 bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead so that's where the phylacteries the boxes that they have with certain scriptures in them that's where all that came from you shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates why I'm trying to help you remember that I've told you that for you to live this way I will bless you and honor you I will enrich your life as you live in my wisdom then I'll take you over to Deuteronomy chapter 11 I think that's is that the next yeah Deuteronomy 11 it shall come about if you listen obediently to my commandments which I'm commanding you today to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul that he will give the rain for your land in its season the early and late rain that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil see all these physical blessings come as a result of spiritual living he will give grass in your fields for your cattle you will eat and be satisfied beware that your hearts are not deceived your hearts are not deceived beware and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them or the anger of the

Lord will be kindled against you he will shut up the heavens! so that there will be no rain on the ground and it will not yield its fruit and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord has given you you shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead and you shall teach them on and on to your children on and on and on he goes with this if you look back at chapter 10 one last one it's not up on the screen but look back at chapter 10 and notice what he says in verse 12 now Israel what does the Lord your God require from you he's telling them here's the main thing of all the other things that you might do in your service to me here's the one thing that you need to make sure you understand and live by to fear the

Lord your God that is to have a high reverence for him to walk in all his ways! and notice love him love him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul to keep the Lord's commandments and statutes which I'm commanding you today for your good in verse 16 he says circumcise your heart that means faith look to me in faith all all of this is captured in this

Deuteronomy 6 4 through 9 passage now let me tell you why Deuteronomy 6 4 through 9 hear O Israel and then he begins to move through the passage this is a shortened version of the Shema so

let me show you what I'm talking about here Shema is the word for hear and that's what starts that passage in verse 4 hear O Israel

Shema and that's why they call it that Shema it's the first word used in Deuteronomy 6:4 the Jews this combination of verses represented a strong heartfelt soul felt confession of their faith this is where they would turn to communicate the essence of Jewish belief in this one God who has delivered them and chosen them to be his people it was a way of capturing what they felt in this covenant relationship with God to be the essence of relating to him so these verses summed up the Lord's expectations and commands on Israel now how important was the Shema in the life of Israel the Jews would begin every single synagogue service by reciting the Shema together every synagogue across the land as they moved to other regions through persecution they would always begin their service this way a devout

Jew would say the Shema at least two times a day in addition to this morning and evening when they prayed they would wear a small wooden box called a phylactery on their foreheads and their wrists and it contained written copies of the Shema itself so the devout would place the Shema in a small box called a mezuzah literally in Hebrew it means door post and so they would hang it on their door post if you seen Jews do this you watch a documentary and you see the Jews and as they walk in their home what do they do they touch it and kiss it they might do that several times as they go in that's the Shema in that box so this is how important it was and how does Jesus answer this man Jesus answered in verse 29 the foremost is this hear oh Israel he drives right into the heart of what Jews considered to be their most devout expression of faith in

[41 : 44] God hear oh Israel but now but now I'm going to blow your mind Jesus says I'm going to tell you what hear! oh Israel is all about it's about loving the Lord it's about loving God with everything that you are no matter what your other duties are no matter what your other spiritual things that you do happen to be if you're not loving the Lord and all of that then you're missing the point and it means nothing in the economy of the Lord this is this is revolutionary stuff for these people Jesus is affirmation of God as the only true God and as the God of Israel that was a welcomed and familiar testimony to the scribe I just think this is Jesus meeting this man where he is he starts with something very familiar to him and very important to him and then he builds on it and he says you know you're not interpreting that very important thing well you're devoted!

Do you understand this man's lost? He's going to hell people who love God don't go to hell people who love God have been changed by God they've been transformed into a new spiritual creature this man does not love God and yet he's standing in front of God and debating him do you see the irony here isn't this rich this is why when you study the scripture slow down take your time let the richness of what is being communicated here through these people's lives slam you let it humble you let it then bring you up in your worship of the Lord here's what was not so familiar in terms of what Jesus said next when Jesus enjoined!

love for God from Deuteronomy 6 with love for neighbor from Leviticus 19:18 Jesus was offering a very brilliant understanding of God's word to the man that they had never put together before in all their centuries of studying and wisdom so Jesus was doing what the brightest of Israel's religious leaders were always unable to do to distill the law of Moses to a simple concise!

intended to convey they couldn't do that and Jesus did it in just seconds why? because he wrote it because he's God the scribe recognized immediately that Jesus had succeeded and it astonished him he had never heard such truth and wisdom before he was just awestruck by Jesus immediate answer and incredible wisdom and so that takes us to Jesus wisdom Jesus his answer cut right through the fog the baggage of religiosity the scribes warped notions about knowing and relating! to God so the religious leaders they were all messed up in their understanding of the relationship between law keeping and loving and this is where so many religions!

[45 : 08] get in trouble you guys so many so many fellowships get this wonky it's so easy to do they are real heavy on the law keeping so ladies don't you dare show up in pants what are you doing wearing pants ladies what are you doing wearing makeup adorning yourself on the outside wanting everybody to look at you and call attention to you you better get that dress on and wipe that lipstick off and they get heavy what do you call that you call that legalism!

right? but I know pastors who live under this I know congregations we've met them and talked to them we went on a retreat one time to a place at a house where we got away for a little while the people that did it were very gracious to us through another church!

and there was a pastor there who I think he oversaw the place a little bit and tried to keep it up some and all that and we met him on the front porch and here's what he told us it didn't matter in the middle of the summer in Georgia his congregation expected him when he was out mowing his grass on his riding lawn mower he better wear his three people thought he was presenting a wrong image of a pastor in labor doing manual labor and he couldn't do it on Sunday he told us that and he told us that without any kind of reservation or hesitation I think he was kind of proud of it and I thought oh dear brother I didn't say that I just thought it I know what it's like in Georgia in the middle of what it meant to show faithfulness to

God and I can only imagine the congregation these people are missing the point of Christian living God always intended law keeping in the life of Israel to be an issue of each person's heart of love and devotion to God I just put that up on the screen for you and there are passages of scripture that speak to this and I just showed you some of them I could take you to several others well let me do at least one let me take you back to Deuteronomy Deuteronomy real quickly I need to get you busy you're starting to fade don't fade on me so Deuteronomy!

chapter 5 so we're right before what we were looking at in chapter 6 and this this is the cry of God's heart Deuteronomy 5 beginning in verse 28 the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me the people the people were responding to God when Moses brought them God's instructions and the Lord said to me I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they've spoken to you Moses they have done well in all that they've spoken because the people pledged we will do as you've said we will follow the Lord right now verse 29 oh that they had such a heart in them that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always that it may be well with them and with their sons forever see this has always been God's heart it is the fear of the Lord and love for the!

[48 : 50] that births the duty of the Christian life as we would call it from the New Testament or walking with God it's it's not about rule keeping it's about loving the Lord enough to be faithful and obedient to him because you love him not getting those reversed alright so here's the challenge why do you want to be a godly wife well keeps my husband off my back or whatever to honor God why do you want to be a godly husband the answer needs to be because I love God because I know that being a godly husband honors God and pleases God and I want to please God because I love him I owe him everything why do you want to be a faithful worker in your job why do you want to be a person who doesn't complain!

grumbly kids walking around saying I love Jesus but I hate everybody in the world and hate my life oh but I love Jesus he doesn't want that that's such hypocrisy this has always been about loving the Lord I have several others but I think that's enough for you to see the point now look question up here on the screen where does obedience to God's laws fit into loving God with your whole being and I'm going to answer that for you right now no hesitation humble obedience reveals a surrendered loving and worshiping heart for God period above all things the Jewish people were exhorted to have a holy reverence that is a fear a holy reverence a fear of God so that they would follow him in heartfelt allegiance to fulfill or obey his commands for their life fear follow fulfill listen think about that now fear follow fulfill that's

God's prescription the fear is not a terror that makes you run away and hide like that happened in the garden this is a reverential trust that draws you into the presence of the Lord to seek him and worship him and know him and follow his will then you follow up on that worship with obedience the worship of God inspires you to obey the Lord you want to you desire to do!

and in the process of that worship what does God do withhold from you be grumpy towards you no in the process of that God blesses you he helps your life be fulfilled even in the struggles look people around you are still going to suffer and die this doesn't guarantee you some out of life on this planet what it helps you do is it helps you navigate all of those issues in the fear of the Lord in faith and so you meet those things and you're ready for the next thing as God gets you ready for the next thing you're ready to meet the next thing in faith so you're not caught doubting the Lord discrediting the Lord arguing against the Lord taking your marbles and going to play somewhere else because God's not doing it the way you think he ought to do it see that's what you're fighting and the fear of the Lord will help you fight that we all face this folks all right now here's the question as I move toward what's the issue what are we seeing in this now

I know I haven't! taken! apart all the love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength I know I haven't taken that all apart that's that's coming what's the issue here the issue in Israel's religion was how they came to neglect heart holiness in their worship of God they're

neglecting heart holiness before the Lord you can't have a local assembly thriving in the Lord apart from loving the Lord and they will only love the Lord as you preach the gospel to them as you hold them accountable to walk with Jesus in a way that keeps them repenting and replacing it is not rocket science but it's impossible to do apart from the spirit I can't make you do this I can only encourage you to do it I can build you up in the doing of it as a shepherd and a you and [53 : 37] I have the need to repent every day and we try to help you understand what that repentance looks like then you come over as you repent and you begin to replace what you're repenting of with what pleases the Lord and you're in a constant process of doing that for the rest of your life as you walk with Jesus this is a process you were not interested in before Christ you just wanted to live your life and do your thing now you've been called out of doing your thing to do God's thing and God wants to do that through your life and that will always involve you in the process of repenting turning away from sin and then replacing what that sin was that displeasing stuff with what pleases him you're in a constant cycle of learning that no matter what your role or season or age in life you're always doing that so if you're a ten year old and you're saved and you're in the Lord this process of learning to repent as a ten year old and replace what you're repenting from with what pleases the

Lord that is just as relevant to you as it is to a 70 year old you see this is this isn't a Baptist thing this isn't a Presbyterian thing or a charismatic thing this is a Christian thing this is what it means to love Jesus and to make Jesus in loving him the priority of your life what happened in the way of the Israelites is this as soon as they began replacing God's truth with their own religious traditions and ideas they cut themselves off from the work of God's word to transform their heart so their worship became very man centered that's how easy it is to slip into this if your shepherds are not very very careful in their own walk with the Lord in their own shepherding life with the people this is super easy for a whole group of people to drift to see a lot of the work of!

shepherding is managing the drift this is boy and it's insidious they call it deceitful for a reason it's very deceitful these people over emphasize the outward aspects with little to no dependence on the Lord and that can happen so quickly in a life they over emphasize those outward aspects of worship while giving little heed to their inner spiritual condition they ticked the boxes of religious stuff they showed up and ticked the box that it wasn't about serving God this is very dangerous the danger is that it ceases to be about your heart condition before God and you slip into this facade of security about your spiritual life because actually you're doing the right things I'm reading my Bible I'm going to church I do some praying I give and so all that stuff is supposed to be what makes you a spiritual person when

God says all throughout no do you love me when he said to Peter do you love me Lord you know I love Peter check your heart bro do you love me is all that you are about and all that you do about loving me all right to close it out now notice Jesus' encouragement and invitation in verse 34 when Jesus saw that the scribe had answered intelligently that's a very interesting word it has to do if you put it in a phrase from the Hebrew it means this mind having mind dash having mind having so it's your mind having or possessing whatever it is that it's been set on it's another way of saying that he was wise he was understanding he was taking it into his mind he was owning it he was beginning to see and this is why

Jesus will make this comment when Jesus saw that the scribe and answered intelligently that mind having that awareness that's beginning to dawn in him Jesus said to him you are not far from the kingdom of God you see why he would say that now you are so close but you're still a step away and it's a step away from hell it's very precarious here's the edge and you're right here one more step in the wrong direction and you plummet you better 180 this thing and go this way not that way see that's where he is he's trying to help this this is the same thing that the Lord did with the rich young ruler you remember that story okay this is the same!

[58 : 41] this is so gracious of Jesus to do this what is Jesus impressing on this man what is he speaking to the life of this man in the way of the truth well he is simply saying the whole of your life is governed by one relationship and that's true for every human being on the planet every human being who's ever lived that's true you are either right related to God through faith in Jesus Christ or you are separated from God by your sins what I'm saying to you is this is either about distance from God and disobedience as a result or this is about closeness to God with obedience as the result and that's the measure of the character of your life it's either measured by disobedience because of distance or separation from God or it's measured by closeness!

and obedience those are the only two options for every human on the planet I say again your whole life is governed by one relationship and it's the relationship you have with God everybody has a relationship with God everybody it's either distant and disobedient or it's close and obedient our lives constantly reflect that condition now I'll say this one other thing look we are most human when we are most like Jesus sin sin is what causes us to be inhuman this is why some sins are more grievous than others and we say oh that's only a monster could do that right only monsters could do that oh the evil of that where do you have to be in your heart to do something like that we say things like that we are most human we're like this scribe is near to the kingdom he's near to the rule of God in his heart but he's not there why not listen because his heart isn't yielded to Jesus in faith he is not looking to his savior and his lord in saving faith he's not doing that he is very religious he probably knew more about the old testament than any of us will ever know or probably all of us combined but none of that saved him that knowledge did not save him the story ends with the man affirming that religious ritual is not as important as knowing and loving God that's verse 33 but also still in rebellion about Jesus being the son of God I hear this all the time I hear people want to talk about God God God God God God God God God you know what you never hear out of their mouth Jesus as soon as you turn the conversation to Jesus as Lord and Savior you see them shut down and that's a huge red flag alright let me show you this one loving God is a total life response to God you can't segment or compartmentalize your religious life doesn't work that way your soul is your soul there's not parts of it it takes in all you are and so I'll share this final quote with you it does not take much of a man to be a believer but it takes all there is of him ladies I don't want to leave you out you could have said it does not take much of a woman to be a believer but it takes all there is of her it a!

your response to God is a soul response it's a core personhood response and then your life should look like that if the core of who you are responds to the Lord the life that you live in that response should look like it came from the core of your personhood everything about you is being redefined reshaped Reformed!

[62 : 54] And we need to live like that! Well thank you for your kind attention again this is one of the most important answers Jesus ever gave about the priority for relating to God especially as we understand it in Christian living will you join me in prayer well Father God we thank you for the joy that you have set before us in Jesus as our God as our King as our Lord as our Savior and in him and in him alone we find the forgiveness for our sins we find the strength for godly living we are challenged each Sunday with thinking carefully about our spiritual walk and so I pray that you will take what has been said today and use it to energize equip your people for godly living this week they will take this message into their heart and it will actually serve to inspire them in loving you more deeply!

putting off sin the sin that so easily entangles them so that they can run the race with endurance and persevere in faith as they serve you this is my prayer for my beloved friends in this congregation Lord that we would look to Jesus and make it about him this week and that we would help others do the same may you be glorified!

in our lives as we love you and as we are loved by you in Jesus name we pray amen