

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
Executive Pastor Carey Dean
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What Commandment is the Foremost of All?
Mark 12:28-34

Since January, we have gone verse by verse through:

- the Triumphal Entry,
- Jesus turning over tables in the Temple,
- and the back-to-back confrontations with the religious authorities.

Before we look at today's passage, I want us to establish a critical truth to believe as we get closer and closer to Jesus dying on the cross. God accomplishes His plans and promises perfectly, exactly, and without compromise.

The week leading to Jesus' death can challenge our belief of whether or not God is in control of the situation. It could appear that the religious leaders are bullying Jesus as they would wish.

But it is God who is in control. God does not need plans B, C, and D. He has never met in a war room to assess risk factors or figure out His next plan of attack. Sin's entry and its created chaos in this world do not hurry God or make Him second guess His will concerning who, what, when, where, why, or how. This is true of Jesus' last week, and it is true of our today. Do you believe that?

Let me give you an example of how perfectly God's word is fulfilled and His will is accomplished in the timing of the Triumphal Entry. Do you know what day and month the Triumphal Entry occurred? It was the tenth day of the first month. Say that with me, "the tenth day of the first month." Let me take you back to the tenth day of the first month, about 1500 years before the triumphal entry of Christ.

We are now in Egypt, where the Israelites have been held captive for 430 years. God has appointed Moses to bring Israel out from their Egyptian captors. God displayed his power through nine plagues over Egypt, but God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let Israel go. That is until the tenth and final plague. Listen to God's instructions for Israel in preparation for their freedom.

Exodus 12:3, 5a, 6, 7a

3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this (first) month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old....6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this (first) month when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. 7 Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

That same night on the fourteenth day of the first month, the Lord would “pass over” every home he saw with the lamb’s blood. To those who were obedient and placed the blood on their doorpost, their firstborn sons would live. To those who refused, their firstborn would die. The lamb’s blood was their salvation. This was the first Passover, and God told them to celebrate it on that day for all generations. That included Jesus’ generation.

Please tell me you see where this is going! God’s redemption plan is so perfect it is even fulfilling itself on the exact day, some 1500 years later.

- On the 10th day of the first month, God presented Jesus as His Lamb in a triumphal entry as redemption’s price. And the world didn’t recognize him.
- From day-ten to day-fourteen of the first month, Jesus is kept for inspection by the highest levels of religious and governmental authorities. No fault could be found in him. He was the perfect, spotless Lamb.
- And on the fourteenth day of the first month, Jesus was crucified as our Passover Lamb so that his blood could be placed on the doorpost of the hearts of those who place their faith in Him.

I show you this not to go down a rabbit hole or share a fun fact of the day. I share the tenth day of the first month so you can see that things are not out of God’s control but very much in his control, even to the last detail.

Therefore, as Jesus moves closer to the cross’ violent death, let’s guard our hearts from thinking for one moment that God’s plans aren’t being accomplished perfectly, exactly, and without compromise. Without knowing it, the religious leaders are fulfilling God’s requirement for Jesus to be kept and inspected, proving him worthy to be God’s perfect Passover lamb.

Now go to Mark 12:28 and see how Jesus responds to His fourth inspection.

Mark 12:28

And one of the scribes came up and heard them (Sadducees) disputing with one another and, seeing that he (Jesus) answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

Jesus’ time in the temple on this day, most likely Tuesday, has been nonstop confrontation, challenge, and debate.

But this fourth challenge comes from a single scribe and seems to be from a place of sincerity. His question isn’t for Jesus to pick one command out of all to be first, but rather which command out of the 613 identified from the Mosaic Law is foremost from which all other commands arise.

This question comes from a scribe who made it his pride to know every letter of the law. The scribes were a group whose job it was to know it, transcribe it, and write commentary on it. Let me put it this way, you wouldn't want to play bible trivia against this guy!

Even with a respectful attitude, this professional scholar was blind to the fact that standing before him was the living word of God. Think about it: he was asking a question about the Scriptures to the Son of God, who, being God, was the author of everything the scribe had studied! But didn't know who He was talking to!

As I wrote that earlier in the week, I immediately felt a sense of conviction. How often do we do the same thing as this scribe? Even in our zeal and sincerity, we can forget who Jesus really is. He is the Shepherd; I am a sheep. He is the Potter; I am the clay. He is the Master; I am His servant. He is the Teacher; I am the student. He is Lord of all; I am lord of none.

Listen to Jesus' answer.

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."

Jesus answered the question by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and then added Leviticus 19:18. Moses wrote Deuteronomy as His testimony, instructions, and exhortations spoken to Israel before they entered the promised land.

I want us to focus on these commands in Mark 28:28-31 and for your heart to hear these words today. But before we do that, I have to ask a question. What day and month did Israel cross into the Promised Land? Say it with me..."the tenth day of the first month." (*Joshua 4:19*) You can't make this stuff up!

Now that it is out of my system, let's look at the commands Jesus says are the core foundation for all other commands. The first command is "HEAR".

command: HEAR

Before we can talk about loving Him, we need to get serious about hearing Him. Otherwise, we are loving someone we don't even know.

He has given us the Bible to know Him. It is His testimony to us. He has given us the living Word, His Son Jesus, who lives within us. He has given us His Holy Spirit to teach us all things.

The Hebrew word for "hear" is Shema. The word "Shema" has a much deeper and broader meaning than perceiving sound. "Shema" holds within its meaning the

ideas of giving full attention, taking heed, and responding with action to what was heard. Hearing and obeying are inseparable in the understanding of “Shema.”

That may sound familiar to you because Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is very special to the Jewish people. They pray this as a prayer daily, and it is called by its first word, the Shema.

Jesus would not have quoted the Shema in Aramaic or Greek. He would have spoken it in its original form, in Hebrew. I can't imagine any of these confrontations being done in Jerusalem, at the Temple with religious leaders, except that it be done in Hebrew.

This word “hear” is not just in the Old Testament. Jesus says over and over again, “He who has ears, let him hear.” Why is hearing so important? Because...faith comes by hearing.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Romans 14:23c

... whatever is not from faith is sin.

So, when we have a hearing problem, it means we have a sin problem. This was a core problem of Israel throughout the Old Testament and remains a core problem today.

When we turn our ears away from the truth of God's Word, it means we have turned our ears toward the lies of this world. Where our ears are directed is where our obedience will follow. Will we obey the truth, or will we obey the lie?

What specifically was Israel to Hear and Heed? The Lord our God, the Lord is one. This statement, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one,” is filled with the truth for us to believe that He is the one and only Lord.”

He is saying to us today, “Hear me, take heed to what I say. I am the Lord your God. You are my sons and daughters. Put away every idol. I am the one and only God. I am the one who has brought you out of captivity. Out of My great love for you, I have rescued you out of darkness into light. There is no other God besides Me.”

When our ears hear His Word and respond in faith, our hearts can open to receive His love and love Him in return.

command: LOVE GOD

“You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

God has not left us to live out of a misunderstood love. We love him not with our version of a distorted love but with the pure and perfect love He has shown us.

John 4:19 We love because He first loved us.

He never commands us to do something He hasn't equipped us to do.

1 John 4:9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

God is love and loves us with an agape love. This love is fully determined and committed and filled with joy. We love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. There are no idols in our hearts, no fear in our thoughts, no hidden places in our lives, and no half-heartedness in our obedience. It is determined, not unmotivated. It is committed, not wavering, and is filled with joy, not regret. Jesus continues and says the second command is this.

command: LOVE OTHERS

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"

The scribe asked for one command, but Jesus answered with two because the second flows out of the first. If love is authentic, they are inseparable. Our love for God will result in an outflow for a love for others. God loves people and His love within us will move us to love people as well.

1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

I've always struggled to understand the qualifier "as yourself" in this command. I kept trying to understand the idea of loving someone else as much as I loved me.

Well, I'm trying to love me less and Christ more. That would mean my love for my neighbor is decreasing not increasing. That doesn't work. I've come to believe the phrase "as yourself" means more for me to love my neighbor because they are no different than me. We were both created in God's image. We both need Jesus the same. We both struggle with flesh and are tempted with sin. We both need mercy and grace.

The more aware I am aware of who Jesus is to me and what He has done for me, my heart is moved with compassion for my neighbors.

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Before we read the last portion of this morning's passage, I want to ask you three questions:

1. Who does your heart listen to and follow?
 - If Jesus, then treasure His Word and obey His voice.
 - If not Jesus, will you allow His voice to speak to your heart right now? Remember, He said, "He who has ears, let him hear."
2. Who is your first love?
 - If Jesus, then abide in His love.
 - If not Jesus, will you lay down the idols of your heart and turn to Him?
3. Would those around you say that you love them?
 - Ask the Lord to allow you to see people as He sees them and to have His compassion for them.

Mark 12:32-34

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.

The scribe is standing before the King of the kingdom of God and doesn't see Him. The scribe is asking the Living Word of God a question but didn't hear him. This scribe reminds me of the other man, the rich young ruler, who also seemed so close but couldn't hear or see that the Son of God was standing before him.

Both of these men, the scribe and the rich, young ruler would have quoted the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 every day. But the words would give no life to them. But these are two moments in their whole life.

Could it be that the rich young ruler who was so close to repenting and following Jesus was one of the 3000 in Acts 2 that believed? Or could it be that this scribe was one of the many religious leaders whom Acts 6:7 says came to faith in Jesus? Jesus' pursuit of our lives is not held in a single polaroid snapshot. His love pursues us daily, year after year.

I want to introduce you to Jerry Rubin. Jerry is a Jewish man who, like the rich, young ruler and the scribe, also said the Shema every day of his young life. One day, he stopped saying it, turned away from the religious law of Judaism and turned to philosophers to discover life's meaning and purpose.

God brought a lady named Gayle into Jerry's life. They fell in love and got married. Gayle was a believer, and the years of not being one in heart with her husband were very, very hard. For 40 years, Gayle prayed for Jerry to hear the truth of Jesus and embrace the Good News of salvation.

At age 60, the miracle of miracles happened. Jerry met and surrendered to the real Jesus. He is a new creation and transformed life because of Jesus Christ. I bet you can't talk with Jerry for more than 5 seconds before he tells you all that Jesus has done in him.

I want us to end this morning with this Jewish man who loves Jesus saying the Shema just like Jesus would have in Hebrew. He says it not in rote fashion like the scribe or rich young ruler, but instead, he says it as one who has heard and now loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his soul, and with all his strength because of Jesus alive in him.