

*“Leading everyday people to love Jesus and make Him known.”*

**January 3, 2021**

**Matthew 22:36-40; 28:18-20**

**36**“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

**37**Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2022%3A36-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23910a)] **38**This is the first and greatest commandment. **39**And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2022%3A36-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23912b)] **40**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

**18**Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

**COMMENTARY**

**Matthew 22:36**. The Pharisees and Sadducees had been assaulting Jesus with a variety of difficult questions (Matt. 22:15-33). They were hoping to trap Him in a point of religious law or to make him give an unpopular answer. When the first two attempts failed, a Pharisee tried again by asking Jesus to name the most important commandment. He hoped Jesus would answer in a way that would provide a reason for destroying Him or His credibility.

**22:37**. To answer the Pharisee’s question, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9) that Jews recited twice a day. Instead of “strength” in Deuteronomy 6:5, Jesus used mind. He probably wanted to emphasize a person’s need to make all life decisions based on love for God. Love translates the Greek verb agapao that refers to God’s unconditional love. God loved us enough to send His Son Jesus to live, teach, minister, die, and rise again for us (John 3:16). Jesus’ answer was not what the Pharisees hoped for and indeed trapped them. Instead of trapping Him, they had to agree with Him.

**22:38**. Having quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, Jesus announced loving God with one’s entire being constituted the greatest and most important commandment. Recognizing God’s lordship and love and loving Him through worship and action in daily life comprises God’s greatest expectation from His people.

**22:39**. Jesus then added a second commandment and quoted Leviticus 19:18. He stated the second commandment was like the first, meaning both commandments complemented and completed each other. Both commandments begin with the same call to love directed at individuals. Jesus expected each believer to love God and others with every aspect of their being and life. One cannot love God without also loving others (see 1 John 4:7-12,20-21).

The Jewish religious leaders basically would have agreed with Jesus here, accepting the importance of the commandment to love others (although perhaps not seeing it as equal to the first commandment).

**22:40**. Jesus stated these two commandments summarize the entire law and the teachings of the prophets. All the law and all the prophetic teaching flow from the commands to love God and others.

**Matthew 28:18**. Matthew noted that Jesus came near or approached. Here was no case of mistaken identity. The disciples could look Jesus in the eye and see that this One was the same Person whom Pilate had arrested. They could hear the voice clearly and know it was the voice they had listened to for several years. Jesus’ claim made the need for decision even clearer: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” The kingdom Jesus talked about (4:17) had been established. The King had received authority to reign. This kingdom far exceeded the size of the Roman Empire. Only God could make such a declaration. Only One who ruled in heaven as well as on earth could claim such power.

**28:19-20**. On the basis of His authority, Jesus issued the Great Commission. Disciples had to accept the authority if they were to accept the commission. The commission is intricately formulated in the Greek. Stated somewhat literally as translated from the Greek language, the Great Commission reads as follows: “Therefore, having gone, disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep (or to persistently obey) as much as I commanded you. And look here, I am with you all the days, until the completion (or perfection) of the age.” The introductory “therefore” connects the Great Commission to Jesus’ authority established in verse 18. The phrase “having gone” assumes obedience to the Commission. This phrase is not so much a call to go as it is a command to do certain things on the way. Disciples who recognize Christ’s authority have one major task. The only imperative verb form in these verses formulates that task. Disciples under Christ’s authority disciple the nations. That is, they share the gospel and help believers grow in Christ. Building the church by discipling the nations expands the disciple’s journey. It sends them to the nations. Here is the universal nature of the gospel made explicit and clear. Disciples under Christ’s authority must leave their comfort zones and the people with whom they feel at home. They must expand their horizons to incorporate every nation of people on earth. The church must devise plans and strategies to use the talents, gifts, energies, and resources of every one of its members. Every member must be on the move, discipling the nations.

In addition to going, discipling involves two other actions. The first is baptizing, which is to occur only after a person has acknowledged Jesus, the risen Savior, as his or her personal Savior. Baptism incorporates the new believer officially into the church. Baptism is also one means of making a public confession of faith. Baptism pictures or symbolizes what Jesus did and what the new Christian is doing. Jesus died for our sins. He was buried in the tomb. God raised Him from death to life. Baptism also pictures the believer’s having died to sin and being raised to a new life in Christ, a life that is eternal through the ages.

The second action in discipling is teaching. This instruction reaches back to the earthly ministry of Jesus. It takes every parable, every sermon, every word Jesus said and teaches them to the church. It seeks to develop Christlike individuals. The teaching ministry begins with the New Testament accounts of the life and death of Jesus Christ. It expands to the rest of the New Testament and then incorporates the Old Testament as the foundation of who God is and what God planned long before He sent Jesus to fulfill Old Testament prophecies. This entire Word of God is the curriculum each disciple is charged to teach to new believers.

**MAIN POINT**

Both the church and individual believers should express love for God through worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship.

**INTRODUCTION**

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

We are all familiar with the Golden Rule: love your neighbor as you love yourself. But although this phrase might easily roll off our tongues, we may not often consider what it really teaches us about the kind of love that Jesus commanded us to practice as Christians.

**In what areas of life are we often tempted to paraphrase, alter, or altogether ignore the Golden Rule to suit our own purposes? Why?**

Explain that while in some cases loving our neighbor might seem impossible, Jesus did not command us to only love those who are easily lovable or to share His love with only those whom we have decided “deserve” it. Jesus’ commands on how we are to share His love with others, both as individuals and as the collective body of Christ, are direct and clear: our love for others must be a direct expression of the love He has shown to us.

**UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

Jesus’ commands are not only intended for individual believers but also for His entire body of believers, the church. In the Book of Matthew, Jesus provides His church and His people with guidelines for daily living through the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

* ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 22:34-38.

The Pharisees, having heard that Jesus “silenced the Sadducees” (see vv. 23-33), decided to question Jesus, hoping to trap Him in an unseemly answer. The one who asked the question, “an expert in the law” (v. 35), was not sincerely seeking truth, but was testing Jesus’ knowledge of Scripture. Nevertheless, Jesus used the opportunity to teach about how to follow God’s Word with all of our being, not just in outwardly actions that meet the letter of the law.

**What do you think it means to “love the Lord”? What kind of love utilizes our hearts? our souls? our minds?**

**What actions could suggest that we don’t “love the Lord”?**

* ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DEUTERONOMY 6:5.

**In what ways can we as individuals love God with our “strength” (CSB)? In what ways can our church love God with its “strength”?**

**How are both Matthew 22:37 and Deuteronomy 6:5 not only suggestive strategies for our individual walks of faith, but also for how we are to practice our faith corporately, as part of a congregation?**

**In what ways is “loving the Lord” a form of worship? What aspects of your church’s worship services allow the congregation to express love for the Lord?**

* ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 22:39-40.

**What’s the relationship between loving our neighbors and loving God? What other Bible verses point to this?**

**Why do you think the command to love our neighbors follows Jesus’ order to love our God?**

* ASK TWO VOLUNTEERS TO READ JOHN 13:34-35 AND 1 JOHN 4:19-21.

**What do you think Jesus meant by “as I have loved you” (John 13:34)?**

Although Jesus spoke these words before His crucifixion, we can read them in light of His death and resurrection and interpret these words to suggest a form of love that is selfless, compassionate, self-sacrificing, forgiving, and so forth.

**In what specific ways have you experienced God’s love for you personally? for your church?**

John expounds on what he calls “this command from him” (1 John 4:21), indicating Jesus’ love commandments. In this passage, John sheds further light on the relationship between our love for God and our ministry to others.

**How do we show our love for others as Jesus showed His love for us as individuals? as a church?**

While the Great Commandment teaches us about love as it is defined by worship of God and ministry to others, in the Great Commission Jesus commanded His followers to carry out this love through evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship.

* ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 28:18-20.

**What do we mean when we use the term “evangelism”?**

**When Jesus commanded, “Go, therefore, and make disciples” (v. 19, CSB), what do you think He wanted His followers to tell others about Him?**

**In what way is baptism a form of bringing someone into fellowship with the rest of your congregation?**

**In what ways does a church express love for its community by offering fellowship and discipleship opportunities? In what ways do your church’s ministries demonstrate your congregation’s love for those in your community?**

**NEXT STEPS**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**In what areas of life are you tempted to simply go through the motions of living out a perceived love for God?**

**Who is “your neighbor”? To whom can you be a better neighbor this week?**

**Discuss the ways in which your church or small group demonstrates Christ’s love through evangelism, fellowship, and/or discipleship.**

**How can you participate in at least one activity or outreach opportunity this month?**

**PRAYER**

Ask for God’s help in following through on the principles of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in both your church’s ministries and your personal outreach opportunities. Ask the Lord to show you ways you can put yourself aside and sacrificially love others this week.