

# The Gospel According to Mark - Beyond Belief

July 21, 2019

Beyond Belief

Mark 12:28-34

“From the rising...to the setting sun, His love endures forever!” We love God because He first loved us and because His love endures forever!! Folks, real Christianity is not just about believing in a God, but knowing God personally and experiencing His love, presence, power and provision in our daily lives. It’s about moving beyond belief to living a life that reflects the reality of God’s love in our lives, our words, our attitudes, and our very reason for living. Let’s pray and ask God to help us discern how we can live beyond belief! Prayer!!

Let’s read our text together from Mark’s Gospel, chapter 12:28 -34...

Mark 12:28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"Mark 12:29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

Mark 12:33 To 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."

Mark 12:34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

## Introduction

This question seemed different from the other questions Jesus had been asked by the religious leaders. Most of the time they were trying to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against Him! However, this teacher of the law, probably a Scribe (Pharisee) was different! He seemed to be sincere, genuinely wanting to know the answer to the question.

This Scribe was pleased with the way Jesus had answered the Sadducees concerning marriage in heaven! If you remember, Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees didn't and Jesus had confirmed the reality of resurrection, so this Pharisee would have naturally been happy about that. But, again, this guy seems interested in knowing the truth. The fact that he was a teacher of law, it's no surprise he wanted to know Jesus' thoughts on what the most important law of all was. Jesus' answer comes from the Jewish Shema (which is sometimes called the Jewish confession of faith). A devout Hebrew would recite it three times a day! It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9...

## Shema

Deu 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Deu 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deu 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

Deu 6:7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deu 6:8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Deu 6:9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Jesus was so faithful to use Scripture in His teachings and interactions with people. Jesus made sure that His message was backed by God's Word that had already been revealed through the prophets of old. This gave Him credibility and authority and made it difficult for His teaching to be easily dismissed. We're going to unpack some wonderful things about the greatest command and the second greatest command in just a moment. But first let's consider the fact that Jesus told this teacher of the law that he was not far from the Kingdom of God! What is the Kingdom of God and why was the scribe not there? First of all, The Kingdom of Heaven is where God rules, is in control, and is Lord. This teacher of the law knew the right question and even the right answer, however, simply knowing the right thing is never enough.

Truth needs to be in your head and heart not just your head! If knowledge is just in your head and not in your heart then you will not be motivated to act on the knowledge and apply it to your life and day to day decisions. We talked about the importance of memorizing Scripture last week and hiding it in your heart that you might not sin against God, but if you only know Scripture but fail to put that Scripture into practice then you are sinning against God! James put it this way...

James 1:22 Be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Otherwise, you are deceiving yourselves.

The only way to become a doer of the word is to get it into your heart! Physically speaking the distance from the head to heart is about 18 inches, but spiritually speaking, for some folks, it's a million miles. Now I'm not talking about a legalistic following of a list of do's and don'ts. I'm talking about letting your love for God become the motivation for the way you live your life. Moving beyond belief! Many people believe in a God but do not know God personally. The problem with many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day was the fact they knew about God with their minds, but they did not know God personally in their hearts. In fact, God had actually pointed this out to the Hebrew people way back in the Old Testament...

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

The Hebrew people had failed to realize that a personal relationship is what God desires. The commands, the principles, the wisdom and instructions of God's Word all have the purpose of bringing us into a personal relationship with Him! It's the reason He lovingly created us in the first place and has spent all of history pursuing us! Many people believe in a God but it has little or no effect on the way they live their lives. In other words, we must go "Beyond Belief" in our relationship with God! Jesus quoted the Old Testament concept of Shema...

### **Love The Lord Your God!**

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

How in the world do we do that? Before we can start to love God we must first understand that He loved us before we were even born and that everything He does is motivated by that love.

Ray Steadman put it this way. . .

"If all we were faced with was a demand for love from a God up there somewhere, we would find it difficult to respond. He would appear to be our enemy or our judge or even our executioner. But the Scriptures never really start with our response."

I mentioned these words from John's first letter...

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

And then the writer of Romans tells us...

Rom 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Rom 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Aren't you glad? I talked about this last week as well, how God takes the initiative in a relationship with us. He seeks us out even when we're not looking for Him. He pursues us and thank God...

He didn't wait for us to get our act together before He decided to pursue us!

He didn't require us to become perfect before He would love us!

He doesn't hold our past over our heads, but forgives and forgets the sins of the past!

Jeremiah 31:3 The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

So How do we love God?

With all our heart!

With all our soul!

With all our mind!

With all our strength!

Jesus saying these four things separately does not mean a human being is divided up into four or five different pieces, but that each of these aspects should be considered as a part of the whole human being. In other words, Jesus didn't say there were five great commandments. He said there were two. The first one is explained in four ways, four aspects, four facets of our whole being and we can examine each nuance to understand the whole commandment.

### **Aspect One - With all our Heart**

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart...

What does "with all our heart" mean?

Our heart is the seat of our deepest desires. Our heart is the beginning place. It is where the motivation for all we do is born. It is inseparably tied to the soul as well as the mind, and sets the agenda for our actions. So the heart is at the heart of the matter and as such our hearts should be filled with an "Attitude of Gratitude!" He died for me I'll live for Him! We don't live for Him so that He will love us, but because He does love us. There is a difference! One is based on fear and never knowing if we've been good enough. The other is based on the grace, mercy and goodness of our God knowing that we have eternal life

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God:

Where's your heart?

What is your greatest desire?

Want to know how to find out what's most important in your life?

There is a simple test . . .

The Heart Test

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Do you treasure your relationship with your creator? Or are created things more important to you than the creator Himself? this leads us to the second aspect of loving God...

### **Aspect 2 - With all your Soul**

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...

The soul is the seat of the emotions and the will.

The soul is a spiritual aspect of our lives that should not be neglected.

The soul is the part of the heart where passion is born.

The foremost scientist and developer of AI Artificial Intelligence, Kai-Fu Lee was born in Taiwan, raised in the U.S., but works as a venture capitalist in China and has launched around 10 AI companies worth over

25 billion. Why do I mention this man? I want you to hear the words he stated when being interviewed on 60 minutes last week by Scott Pelley. He believes AI will change the world more than electricity. He says it's going to replace many jobs within just 15 years, maybe as much as 40 percent of all jobs in the world. He says drivers will be some of the first to go, and even chefs, waiters, stores, restaurants etc. But then Pelley starts to talk about the "Hype surrounding artificial intelligence." He talks about all the information AI gathers, but points out that it is specific information, but not general intelligence. In other words, a computer might be able to tell you how many people are in a classroom and what they are studying, and how attentive the students are, but it can't really understand why the students are in the room learning. Pelley then ask this very deep question: "When will we know that a machine can actually think like a human?" Lee responds with these intriguing and thought provoking words: "Back when I was a grad student, people said, 'if a machine can drive a car, by itself, that's an intelligence. Now we say that's not enough, so the bar keeps moving higher...If your talking about AGI, artificial general intelligence, I would say not within the next 30 years and possibly never." Pelley replies, "Possibly never? What's so insurmountable?" Lee says, "Cause I believe in the sanctity of our soul. I believe there's a lot of things about us that we don't understand. I believe there is a lot of love and compassion that is not explainable in terms of neural networks and computational algorithms and I currently see no way of solving them. Obviously unsolved problems have been solved in the past, but it would be irresponsible for me to predict that these will be solved by certain time frame." Pelley then says, "We may be just more than our bits." Lee smiles and says, "We may!

You see, we have a soul, a spirit. The very thing that sets apart from every other creature on this planet is found in the creation story at the beginning of our Bible.

Gen. 2:7 Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Hebrew word for being here is Nephesh which literally means air or breath. It is translated soul or living being, because this verse indicated that it was God who created us in His image and breathed into us a soul which made us living beings who are distinct from any other form of life on earth. Being made in God's image, we were given free will and the ability to make choices. And when humankind made really bad choices, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing with us, we all like sheep have gone astray, God did the unthinkable and made a way for us to be made right with Him.

Galatians 4:4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

Galatians 4:5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Galatians 4:6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Galatians 4:7 So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

This loving act of God should fill our souls with a contagious passion, for God! Did you know you were the passion of the Christ? Listen...

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

And this passage in the book of Hebrews that reiterates this in a powerful way...

Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What on earth could have been set before Jesus that would have caused Him to be willing to endure the cross, with all of its pain and all of its shame? It had to be something amazing because God's Word tells us "for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross." What was that joy? You were that joy! The possibility of your salvation was the joy. The fact that "Whoever will believe on Him will have everlasting life, was the joy! The power to forgive the sins of anyone who is willing to genuinely confess and repent of sin was the joy! Since you were and are the passion of Jesus, shouldn't Jesus be your passion? It should be a contagious passion to want to know Him more and more day by day! And this takes us to the third aspect of loving God...

### **Aspect 3 - With all your Mind**

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...

Your mind is the seat of knowledge and wisdom. Your mind is where you set agendas, priorities, and goals in life. Your mind is easily swayed and must be guarded. Your mind must be trained to make the good

decisions. Our Minds should be filled with “Godly Wisdom!” Godly wisdom and knowledge causes a person to turn to God for guidance in decision making. Godly wisdom and knowledge guides a person to trust God’s leadership!

Remember, He wants what is best for us even more than we do and He knows how to achieve the best even when we don’t!

Prov 2:1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,

Prov 2:2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,

Prov 2:3 and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,

Prov 2:4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,

Prov 2:5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Prov 2:6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Prov 2:7 He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,

Prov 2:8 for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

Prov 2:9 Then you will understand what is right and just and fair--every good path.

Prov 2:10 For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

Prov 2:11 Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

When you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, it will naturally follow that you would love God...

#### **Aspect 4 - With all your Strength**

Our strength could be translated “actions” because it has to do with the way in which we live out our faith. We are not talking about actions taken so that God will love us, but actions taken because God does love us and we desire deeply to love Him in return. Not because we have to but because we want to.

Our Strength should be spent on “Gracious Giving!”

He gave everything for me so I’ll give Him my time, talents, and anything else He ask of me

Paul put it this way . . .

Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

If our heart (our desire) is right, if our soul (our passion) is right,

If our mind (our knowledge) is right, then our actions will be right and we will gladly give all our strength to serve our Savior and our fellow man.

In other words, when we get the first commandment right, the second one should come much easier!

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Oops, It says love your neighbor as your self! Some of you can’t love others because you’ve never given yourself permission to love yourself. Self hatred and self condemnation are tools in Satan’s hands. God made you and loves you as His very own child. To hate yourself is to hate someone that God cherishes. To hate yourself is to hate someone that Jesus died for. It’s okay to understand you are a sinner, and in desperate need of a Savior, but it is as wrong to hate yourself as it is to hate another person. It’s okay to hate sin, but not the sinner! Some mistake self hate as humility. They are not the same thing. If you’ve fallen into this trap, ask God to forgive you, and know that He will forgive you because your are His child and He loves you.

Once you’ve learned to love God, and yourself, your ready to move on to loving your neighbor.

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

1 John 3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Let's get beyond belief by putting our faith into action by loving God and others with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. I want to conclude with this story that beautifully describes someone learning to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. I had a little book given to me some years ago and I didn't really think much of it. It wasn't an author I had heard of, Rosalind Rinker, so I set it aside. Then one day I picked it up because the title caught my eye. "Prayer: Conversing with God" As I read, I was amazed at the insight in this small 124 page book. I have since discovered that "In 2006, it was named by Christianity Today as the most influential book with evangelicals over the last fifty years." (source: Wikipedia.) In this book, Rosalind, describes an experience she had when she was a missionary to China. She was visiting a temple and saw a little lady bowing before a 50ft idol, praying and then waiting as if hoping to get an answer. She then writes...

"Suddenly I knew that the God I worshiped was alive, that He was a Person who responded to me and to whom I could respond. But did I worship the Ever-Living One? Did I really know what worship meant? Suddenly I wanted to get out of that temple and go home. I wanted to go into my own room and close the door and lock it. I wanted to get on my knees with my face to the floor, like that little Chinese woman. But unlike her, I wanted to worship the living God who created and sustains all life, and who has revealed Himself as He is in the Person of Jesus Christ. I wanted to be quiet and let all the love and adoration and worship of my heart go out to Him in a way that I had never done before. Worship to me had meant 'Sunday morning worship service.' I wonder sometimes now what that means, for I have learned that it is in silence, holy silence, that my heart pours out its best love and worship to my Lord and my God. I have learned that worship is that honor, respect and adoration a small earthling like me can feel and give to the Almighty Creator. My concept of worship has grown and deepened, and this is now the most important part of my Quiet Time. It is out of this personal worship that I find myself ready to share and be a part of a group of God's children. It is when I am worshiping God that my heart is cleansed, that I am assured of His great love which has taken full responsibility for me. It is then that the Cross and the sufferings of Christ arouse my heart to know more and more of the depth of His love. It is when I am worshiping and lost in wonder, and my conscious and unconscious self pours out love, that I become a whole person. It is when I have thus worshiped God that I begin to know the meaning of 'Abide in me and I in you.' Before I grasped this there was endless self-effort, now it is a matter of resting in Christ."

Rinker, Rosalind. Prayer (pp. 52-53). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Let's pray!