

## **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength**

### **Introduction**

This morning we want to look at a very familiar passage of Scripture. It is taken from Mark 12: 28 to 34). The story begins by telling us that one of the Teachers of the law came around and heard a debate going on between the religious authority and Jesus. And this teacher of the Law asked, of all the commandments, which is the most important? (Mark 12:28)

And Jesus replied *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your souls and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this, love your neighbor as yourself.*

This morning I want to share with you 3 reflections from Jesus' reply to this teacher of the law.

### **(First point)**

The first thing we learn from the reply of Jesus is our relationship with God.

The first part of Jesus reply is *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* As people we tend to want to do something to show our love for God. But before we take action we must understand that there is a basis for our action. And the first part of Jesus reply provides the basis.

(All our action must have a basis in order to give it meaning. For example, we have parents in our midst. You work very hard, and often time go beyond yourselves to attend to the needs of your children. Why? What is the basis for your doing that? The reason why you do that is simply because they are your children. They belong to you. There is no other reason. They are your children is a good enough reason.)

Jesus said *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* These words are taken from Deuteronomy 6: 4-5, which says, *Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

Deuteronomy 6 expresses our relationship with God. And this relationship is a covenantal relationship. That is, the people belonged to God and the Lord is the God of His people.

And so the first of the 10 commandments says, *you shall have no other gods before me.* The Almighty God is the only God that the people must have. The Lord is one. He is the only one they must have. It is important to note that they lived in the midst of people who worship pagan gods. And the call is that they only have God, Yahweh as their God. The Lord must occupy the first place in their lives.

For us today, there are many things that can take the place of God. For example, we have responsibilities. We have to be responsible to our family, our work, our church. And even our

volunteer work. But all these must not take the place of God because the Lord is our God and the Lord is one. Not the second or third place.

Once our position is Christ is established then the second part of Jesus reply will make sense. I mean if there is no relationship with God then even if we express that we love God it will only be merely a sense of duty and it is not long lasting.

**(Second point)**

We must now look deeper into the second part of the Lord's reply. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

As believers of Jesus, and as people that belonged to God, the most important thing required of us is to love the Lord. Notice here the question is asked *Of all the commandments, which is the most important.* And the most important, Jesus answered, is to love God.

To love is a command, not an option. It is a command that must be performed with all our hearts, our life, our mind and our strength.

The opposite of love is hated or dislike. And so we see in our world today there are people who oppose God instead of loving Him. They have decided to be enemies of God. You can try to share the gospel with them and they have shut their ears and their hearts.

We have read testimonies of individuals who once hated God. They ridicule Christians and harass God's servant and gave them a hard time. They deliberately went against God. But somehow, God broke into their lives and they turn their hearts to Jesus. Some even have become pastors, missionaries and full time workers. There are countless such testimonies in the Salt and Light Magazine.

Paul, before his Damascus experience, was an enemy of God. He persecuted believers severely. He really did a good job and people were fearful of him. But after his conversion experience he realized what he did was wrong. And in one of the letters he declared that he is one of the worst sinners.

There are some people who are not enemies of God. They know and acknowledge God but they have simply neglected God. It is possible that they have neglected the Lord due to their busyness and other commitments. They have relegated God to a low priority in their lives and no longer love God with all their hearts, soul and mind. For them maybe their work is more important. Maybe enjoying life is more important.

They have forgotten God. They have not been praying. They have stopped reading the bible. They have failed to acknowledge that God is the source of all the blessings.

Then of course there are those who assume that their love for God is already quite high or very high, when compared with others. They feel that they are spirituality very high, like the early church fathers. They think that there is no comparison for their love for God.

By the way, you know in the bible there are different words to describe love. In these verses, the word love is agape. It means to love, to cherish. It means devotion and there is an element of sacrifices. And the perfect example is God's love revealed to us in Jesus.

### **(Third point)**

I want to now look deeper at these 4 words. Heart, Soul, mind and strength.

Firstly, we are to love God with all our heart. To love God with all our hearts means we are to give our whole heart to the Lord. When we serve, we are to do so wholeheartedly. We are to be totally committed to him. To love God fully means to be devoted to Him 100% of our time. Not part of the time, and definitely not some times only. Or when we feel like it. Or worst we only seek and Love Him when we have gotten into trouble.

There is a hymn, that we sing on some Sundays. The Hymn title is I Surrender All. Notice it is Surrender all, not some. Not even most. But all.

Psalm 27:4 says - One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.

The Psalmist desire is to seek after the Lord. To be inside the house of the Lord, not just for a few moments, but all the days of his life. And to gaze into the beauty for the Lord. Scripture urge us to Come to the Lord with sincere hearts.

Secondly we are to love God with all our soul. When God created man, he breath into his nostril the breath of life. And he became a living person. In other words, to love God with our souls is to love God with our whole life.

We thank God that in Singapore we can come to church and worship God freely every Sunday. We do not experience physical persecution for our faith. But in parts of Asia and some parts of the world it is not easy to be Christians. Being a Christian means you must be prepared to lose your life or to spend time being lock away. We read from church history that during the 18 century Christians in Japan underwent severe persecution. Many people died because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

If one day we have to choose between Christ or the preservative of our lives, then what are we going to choose. Are we willing and ready to lay down our life for Jesus?

Jesus was ready to give up his life in order to fulfil the mission that God has given him. He said the Son of man came to serve and not to be served. Are we ready to do the same.

It is not written in the bible but from legends and tradition says that many of the original disciples died terrible death. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. James was beheaded. Thomas, who likely went to India as a missionary, was speared to death and buried in Madras. Only John seems to have died of old age. But even that the emperor exiled him to an island in Patmos.

We may never have to shed blood for our faith, but is there something we can do to demonstrate that we are ready to lay down our lives. In some churches back home, the church conducts a blood donation drive.

I see blood donation as a way of laying down our lives in our modern situation. It is service to others, with a life-giving gift to the person that needs it the most. And we may likely not know who we are helping. And the person has no way of repaying us. Are we ready to lay down our lives for Jesus?

Thirdly, we are to love God with our minds. We are to love God with all your understanding. And the understanding comes with filling our minds with the word of God.

The Psalmist in Psalm 1:2, says, But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. This person is meditating on the law of God every moment of his waking hours. It goes to show what he fills his mind with.

Once I was attended a retreat for full time workers. And the sharing that day was on spiritual exercises, such as, prayer, bible reading, fasting, etc. So the facilitator asked the participants to share what each other what hobby they have. Or something they enjoy doing. (Can share with your neighbor what you like to do.)

So one person shared she likes to listen to music, another said he likes to knit. A brother and he knits. Someone mentioned he goes to the gym. Can tell because he is quite well built. One person mentioned that she likes to walk around the supermarket and look for any new products.

Nobody said they enjoy reading the bible. I mean all these people are full time workers. So everybody in the room are serving God.

When we love God with our minds it is important to remember what we full our minds with. Romans 12:2 is very helpful. It says, *do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

And so we must pray always for the Lord to fill our minds with His word and His truth.

We must pray and ask God to open our minds so that we can understand the things of God. Understand his will and his purposes. Remember we love God by following the will of God.

Fourthly, we are to love God with all our strength. In other words we do not just love God merely by saying yes, we love you Lord. There must be accompanied by action. We are to show it by our action and activities. And taking action requires strength. James 2:14 says, faith without works is dead.

For those of you who have been actively serving the Lord, you will know that doing the work of God is actually hard work. We have to attend meetings, and do all the preparation, etc. Before I was the pastor of Kum Yan MC. It is quite near to Short Street Tamil MC. They have a outreach programme with the migrant workers in the dormitory and I help out by driving the church van to bring the people to church. And after the programme send them back. The dormitory were in Woodlands and Tuas and very far away. By the time I get back it is already past midnight. And usually it is on Easter or Christmas. So all these public holidays burnt.

But serving God requires physical strength. The work of missions and evangelism is hard work. It requires a lot of strength.

Yet there are those who are standing firm, and holding on to the biblical understanding of marriage and family. And this group of people believed that God has called them to the task of defending the faith and to hold on to what the bible says on such matters.

And in the midst of their work, they get ridiculed, attacked, they get cancelled. People post nasty comments about them. They call them names. To stand firm they need strength and lots of it. Love

God requires a lot of strength. Remember in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus spent time in prayer. And Scripture says, Jesus prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

### **Conclusion**

I want to end by drawing one conclusion. And this is found in v34. it says, *When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God.*

From the way our story develops in Mark, this story has a good ending. Jesus commended that this teacher of the law was very near to the kingdom of God.

And so I want to ask you this question - are you far away from the Kingdom of God or are you not far from the KOG?

When you read the bible you will find that we have people who have become far away from Jesus. When Adam sinned against God he ran away from God. It was God who took the initiative to come and look for them, and to call out Adam Adam where are you.

In the parable of the lost sheep, the sheep had strayed from the fold, and if not rescued will continue to go further and further away from the shepherd.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son, having gotten what he had requested, started on a journey into the far country. A journey that will take him further and further away from his father.

I think we all know of people who, once loved the Lord. Who once served the Lord with great devotion. But not anymore. They have drifted further and further away from the Lord.

And so this morning the call to all of us is to come near to Jesus. James 4:8 says - draw near to God and he will draw near to you. How do we draw near to him. We do that by Loving him with all our hearts, our soul or life, our minds and with all our strength. And to love our neighbour as ourselves.

As a response we can reflect quietly

### **Reflection questions**

1. What are some practical ways to show we love God with our hearts, soul, mind and strength?
2. What is keeping us from coming near to God?