

“Are We All In?”

Deuteronomy 6:1-19

In the Gospel of Mark we read this interaction between a Pharisee and Jesus in the last week of Jesus' life.

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?”

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

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

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.”

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.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 and the teacher says He gave the right answer. Jesus' response, “*you are not far from the kingdom of God*”, meant, you know what it says but do you live it? The Jewish teachers loved to debate this question. Sadly, the reasons they wanted to debate this question was so they could prove they knew their Bibles better than others. Having the right biblical answer does not mean you are living right with God.

Another reason they wanted to debate this question you will have to wait until next week when we talk about loving your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus' answer concerning the greatest commandment incorporates both our devotion to God and to love one another. To do the one is to do the other, there is no dilemma. The two are intertwined. The two statements also come from two contexts within the Law. When Jesus or a New Testament author quotes a verse, he also quotes the context of the verse. This week we will look at the context of Deut. 6 (love God) and next week the context of Lev. 19 (love others).

The word ‘Deuteronomy’ means ‘second law’. Not that there are two laws but the second time Moses reiterates the laws of God to the nation of Israel. Why a second time? Because we are 40 years after Ex. 19 when they first arrived at Mt. Sinai. Now they are at Mt. Sinai again after wandering in the wilderness for almost 40 years. They are weeks away from arriving at the east side of the Jordan River at Mt. Nebo from where the Israelites will finally enter the Promised Land. This is the next generation of Israelites. All the men aged 20 and over since they entered the land have all died except Joshua and Caleb. These here are their children and grandchildren. Moses repeats the laws of God for these ones who will go into the land. But the land is full of cities and people about whom they will need to defeat and are warned not to follow their gods and their way of life. Deut. 6 is the constitution, the code of life, the orders from God that you must always refer to. And it's all about loving God.

Why then should we love God?

God Wants Us to Enjoy Life **(6:1-3, 10-12)**

Had the people of God enjoyed life since God saved them? No. Why not? Because they disobeyed. So then God reminds them you will obey life more

By obeying His words (v.1)

They hadn't enjoyed life so far because they rebelled and didn't trust His words. When life got hard they complained instead of trusted. When God fed them miraculously they whined because they wanted something different. When He first led them to the Promised Land, they got scared and didn't believe that He who sent miraculous plague after miraculous plague on the Egyptians could help them defeat a few big Canaanites. Could it be that they didn't obey because they had to do something this time. In most of the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea and the manna, they had very little to do. Just watch God do it. Now, God says go in and fight and watch what I will do through you. 'Well, I wish God would just send another plague and wipe out the Canaanites so we don't have to get our hands dirty'. Sometimes God does all the work as we trust Him but many times God says hear and do and then watch what I'll do then.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says

Matt. 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock"

And doing is the emphasis here:

v.1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,

"Observe" doesn't mean look at, it means do. It literally means labour at. Obedience is not easy. There is work involved. We don't work for our salvation but we work out our salvation. Hear God's Word and then we do it. God wants us to enjoy life by doing what His word says and the more we obey Him the more we get to know Him and find out He's right; obedience does produce joy in my life and as a result

We marvel at and grow in awe of His greatness (v.2-3)

Obey the words of God,

² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.

"So that" – here's the reason why we should obey – that our kids and grandkids will fear Him all their life and enjoy a long life. Don't take this as a direct promise from God that if I obey God faithfully that's a guarantee that I won't die until I'm 100. Think of the context of this passage. What would live a long life in the land mean to the children of the parents who died pre-maturely because they rebelled against God's goodness and promises? What's the flip side of the coin of obedience and enjoyable life? Disobedience and loss of enjoyment of life. They lost out on the blessing of tasting

the honey and milk in the land [God's provisions] because they failed to believe God knew better than they did. I'll do it my way always means I lose out on God's blessings.

What does it mean to fear God? Ecc. 3:11 says

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. ¹³ That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

That's very positive isn't it? You fear God the way you fear the parent you love and respect even though you know they have the power to not give you what you want but you do what they ask because you know they have your best interests in mind and he/she is good and loves you. It's a fear that makes you run to God not away from God. Look back 39 years prior when they first received the 10 commandments in Ex. 20. Moses has just received the 10 commandments and come down from Mt. Sinai. There's all this thunder and lightning and smoke and earth shaking. Then we read in Ex. 20:18,

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." ²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

A healthy fear of God will keep you from sinning more but will also embolden you to trust God even if its hard, knowing God is with you. God is holding out the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey to the children and grandchildren of those who heard the same promise but failed to believe it and act on it. The phrase 'land flowing with milk and honey' means the blessings of God's provision is right there for the taking. You hardly have to work for it, its that fruitful. The irony is, for 40 years God miraculously provided manna every morning as if the desert grew it overnight. Now He's saying, go in there and possess the land and you'll have all kinds of blessings you didn't have to work for. He brings this up in v.10

¹⁰ When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Love God because He wants us to enjoy life and we'll enjoy it best when we obey Him. We should also love God because

God Wants Others to See Him Through Us **(6:4-9, 13-19)**

Vv. 4-5 are known as the *shema* because that's the Hebrew word for 'Hear'. Shema means hear to do; it is synonymous to obey. We don't listen and read the Word just for knowledge. That's what the Pharisees were known for. They thought God was pleased more with them because they

could recite it backwards and forwards. But they loved the word for itself, not God who gave it to them. They didn't understand grace and love.

The shema is an anthem, a call to covenant loyalty. Hear Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Others will know God through us when they see us

Staying loyal to God in an anti-God culture (v.4)

Israel came out of Egypt. In Egypt they were inundated with Egyptian gods. They would have built many of the statues of these so-called gods. When God sent the plagues, they were a direct indictment to Egypt's most powerful gods. You worship the Nile? Let's kill the Nile and turn the water to blood. You worship frogs and gnats and cattle? Let's make you sick of them or kill them. You worship the sun? I'll take it away for awhile; oh but I'll let Israel have some sunshine. You think Pharaoh is a god too? Well, I'll take his son, the next god in line for the throne, leaving Pharaoh himself to admit Yahweh is the true God.

Israel is going into the land of Canaan. They have different gods and they'll be tempted to worship them too. Look at v.13,

¹³ Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. ¹⁴ Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; ¹⁵ for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. ¹⁶ Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah. ¹⁷ Be sure to keep the commands of the Lord your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. ¹⁸ Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers, ¹⁹ thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the Lord said.

The Lord our God is Lord alone – that's what 'one' implies. One also implies plurality within. Like one cluster of grapes. So we see an allusion to the Trinity here also but the purpose here is that he is alone and unique among all the so-called gods of our world. Don't let any of those run your life; including the most influential false god, yourself. The message of our world is love yourself as Lord with everything you've got. And sometimes we do love ourselves more than God, which is why we don't love others as God says. Jesus said both commandments sum up the whole law. When I love God I will love others.

⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Love God with everything you have (v.5)

Because this was properly recited by the Israelites over and over, it became common place. It became the right answer. They took vv.6-9 literally and put a tiny copy of the 10 commandments in a box called a mezuzah and stuck them on the sides of their doors. They made phylacteries – again tiny boxes that contain tiny copies of the commandments – and tied leather straps to them and wrapped them around their wrists and arms and foreheads; even to this day. As if wearing them is what God wanted or hollowly reciting them by reflex not heart.

No, God says love Me with everything you have! Your heart – the center of your being, what drives you, why you get up every day. Love God with all your soul – your very breath, your emotions, your passions. And love God with all your might/strength – not half-hearted but fully committed, not just when it suits you and you have a clear moment on your schedule.

I like how Bible teacher Ray Vander Laan paraphrases this: are you all in? Are we all in – that's what it means to love God. Meanwhile, sons, daughters and grandsons and granddaughters were listening to this without their dads standing beside them and realizing dad & grandpa weren't all in otherwise he would be here. Didn't mean they didn't have any faith in God but when those moments came in life where you have to choose whether you're all in for God or not, they chose fear over faith. They chose familiarity over hope-filled risk. They chose comfort over blessing.

When we choose to obey God when we feel like it or on our terms, we miss out on the blessings God had for us had we put Him first. If you want an illustration about what it means to be all in, all we have to do is think back a few nights when many of us were watching Canada play Chechia. And we cheered when Canada scored and we groaned when they got scored against. We were invested. We were locked in. We were all in.

Do we ever give that kind of attention and passion to God? He did send His Son to die for you. He did send the Holy Spirit to live in you and equip you with His gifts. Jesus is building an apartment onto the Father's palace for you. You will spend all eternity marveling at and in awe of God and Jesus and the Spirit. And there will be rewards lost because we weren't convinced God is worth giving our all to.

We still can invest more time and energy in making God our priority so that we will be ready to

Share God wherever we are (vv.6-9)

When God and His Word are on our heart we will talk about these things with our families in the natural flow of our days. When we're sitting down in our homes for meals, when we're going about running our errands and going to work and school and when we come back and home and go to bed and when we get up again. When the Word of God is on our heart it will be evident in the words we speak by how we're thinking (foreheads) and will be seen in our actions (hands). It will be a natural part of our life whether we are at home (doorposts) or away from home (gates).

As we'll see in the next few weeks, the Shema became the 'right answer' for how Jews identified themselves. The Word of God became a symbol to wear and a good luck charm to kiss at your door and an intellectual measure of how you're more special to God because you can find the right verse faster than the person beside you. As if this is what pleases God.

'Shema.' Listen and do. Remember those times when your parents or your teacher or your coach or your boss repeated "listen please. Are you listening to this?" God repeats this in v.3 and 4. He's already said it in 4:1, and He's going to say 'Hear Israel' in 5:1, 9:1; 20:3; and 32:1. How do we love God with all our heart? How do we move closer to being all in? It has to start with spending time with God listening to His Word. If I'm just reading through the Bible to check off boxes to say I read it, maybe I shouldn't worry about getting it all done in a certain time frame but just read it so I actually listen. Ask God when you're reading it, 'Lord, show me one thing I need to do today from your Word.' And then meditate and think about that for the day, looking for ways to apply it at home or at school or at work. With your family or your neighbours and co-workers.

Make better smaller choices. Don't settle for the comfortable and avoid people, try to be more engaged with people during the week or on the weekend. Don't ignore those appeals from those bulletin announcements needing help or inviting you to fellowship or study, see them as God's ministry opportunities for you to use His gifts for His purposes. Don't let your children's activity schedule be the bible by which you live by; say 'no' every now and then and show your children God is more important than your schedule.

And when we make more smaller choices to be more in for God, we'll discover the blessings we have been missing out on and marvel more at and be in awe of the only God, who loves us enough to sacrifice His Son for us.

* * * * *
If you have any comments or questions about this message please
contact us at olivet@rideau.net