

Sermon - 10/25/20
Ps 1: Lev 19:1-2, 15-18, 1 Th 2:1-8: Mt 22:34-46
Living Out Loving God

Jesus has been preparing for His encounter with the hostile civil and religious powers. They hate Him. They oppose His presence, His teaching and His kingdom. The power of the temple establishment – His very own people – will join together to bring the Roman sentence of death down upon Jesus. This is the tension in the atmosphere of Jerusalem. It was also necessary for God's will to be done.

I understand that you may want to keep the narrative of Jesus' sacrifice on the page – just a story – just history. But I came here today to say the entire universe was rocked when the only Son of God intervened between the powers of darkness and God's beloved people – to cleanse sin and give real life – eternal life – His own resurrection life to all who believe Him.

It's passionate – it's profound – perhaps too enthusiastic for some to confess. It is also the truth. Living out God's love is full engagement and full confession of Christ as Lord.

The plot against Jesus has grown and his enemies are looking for any charge to bring against Him. We have been following this dispute the past few weeks. The score is Jesus five, Pharisees zero. They just cannot argue Him into a legal corner.

Notice Jesus goes all the way back to the Books of the Law – Leviticus and Deuteronomy – to formulate His extraordinary answer to the Sadducee's question, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus announces again the Hebrew call to worship repeated at any gathering in the temple or the synagogues: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Dt 6:4-5 NASB)

Then, the Lord Jesus links that foundational call to a law stated in Leviticus. Please open your Bible to Lev 19:18, "but you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus boldly presents His teaching to this stiff-necked crowd. He links the love of God with the love of our fellow human beings and says that the entire Law of Israel is summed up in this two-fold call upon their hearts. With this pronouncement and the probing question Jesus asks them, the argument is over. More about the question in a moment.

Jesus will not face these religious leaders again until He is hauled before the high priest in the middle of the night during the Passover feast.

What does it look like when we obey this greatest commandment? This is certainly a lot simpler than all those social laws written in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Being simple doesn't make it easy, does it? Long ago, the Lord promised us this:

"But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put My law in their minds and inscribe it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they will be My people." (Jer 31:33 & Heb 8:10) When I walk into the church, I am aware that even though I love God and God's Word, I still don't live out His perfect plan for me. Only with the Holy Spirit living in us can we begin to live out His love. It is a process, isn't it?

In his letter, the Apostle Paul is showing the church at Thessalonica his vulnerability. "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." (1 Th 2:7-8) In the next paragraph, Paul compares his ministry to the encouragement of a father. He loves them like a mom or like a dad.

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In the harsh atmosphere of our 2020 public discourse and manners – or lack of manners – we don't find much vulnerability. It's scary to be vulnerable in such a world. Paul models godly care for the people of the church he is writing to. And he calls us to this same open, caring attitude as we relate to those around us – brothers and sisters in Christ – family and friends – also strangers, those who differ with our values and worldview and especially those who are hostile toward us. Living out God's love as we go.

We are coming to that season when even the secular culture celebrates the birth of baby Jesus. One thing we can do in these weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year is speak about the reason Jesus was born into the world as a human being. Tell the story – or better yet tell the Good News of the difference Jesus makes in your life – and in the life of the entire universe. Share why you love Him so much.

I mentioned Jesus' question after He revealed His Greatest Commandment. He turned to the Pharisees and asked, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They answered quickly, "The son of David." Jesus corrects them by quoting Psalm 110. It is a royal psalm – a poem about the king.

In it, King David tells of a future "Lord" or king. Jesus quotes the first two verses: The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet."

So, Jesus shows that Messiah is above the king of Israel. Christ, that is Jesus, is the Lord of all – all people and all things. These religious leaders have taken the narrow view of the psalm, teaching that it is about the king of the nation – a position they now hold through the Sanhedrin, governing Judah under Roman occupation. Jesus demonstrates that we serve the God whose love is so great He sends His Son to make us holy – the commandment in Leviticus that seems so hard to live out.

Let us remain vulnerable and share what gives us hope – what encourages us and makes us able to face the struggles of covid-19 – of social injustice toward people of color – of the disappearance of whole species of animal and plant life – not a what but a who: Jesus Christ, our Savior and the Savior of the world. Each day is another chance to live out the love of God in Christ. Amen.