

**Matthew 22: 34 - 40 The Most Important Thing**

<sup>34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Today is Pentecost, commemorating the coming of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate the Spirit of Jesus coming to live with us just as he promised. The Spirit, as a member of the Trinity, is God Himself. He comes to live intimately inside of us. The Spirit also changes our hard hearts to be able to believe in Jesus.

Also, the Spirit bears fruit, his wonderful character (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) in our lives. The Spirit of God gives to each one of us gifts (abilities) that are appropriate for serving him. The Spirit gives us purpose for living in doing God's work.

Also, together with Pentecost, today is Grace City's 10th anniversary. Ten years ago, on Pentecost, we began regular worship services in Ginza. We lifted up our voices, just like a baby's first cry, on the 11th floor of a long, narrow building, in a party space called "Caspa Ginza." It was on Namiki Street in the 5th district of Ginza. We have survived for ten years in downtown Tokyo by God's grace.

Praise the Lord! We are thankful from our hearts for the prayers and help of many people. Now, as we face the next ten years, let us serve together and believe that the Spirit will bring revival to Tokyo. What is the most important thing we can do as we seek to go from survival to revival? Let's go back to our initial enthusiasm and listen to God's Word.

**Matthew 22:34-40**

As it says in these verses, the most important thing for us is love. Without love, any good that we do is empty. So, first of all, let's look at what it means to love God. Secondly, I would like to learn from the Bible how to practically love our neighbors. And thirdly, let us receive the motivation to love. You can have the best engine in the world, but if you don't have fuel, it'll be like scrap iron. 1. Love God, 2. Love your neighbor, and 3. Motivation to love. These are the three points I want to look at in today's message.

**1. Love God**

Today's Scripture about the most important commandments of loving God and our neighbor was drawn out from Jesus through the question from a scholar of the law. However, the scholar's motive in approaching Jesus was not a genuine one. He asked Jesus a question in order to test him.

A group of leaders in Israel referred to as Sadducees failed in their efforts to trap Jesus. So they teamed with another group who resisted Jesus referred to as the Pharisees. Why was this question a trap?

In those days there were 613 commandments to keep. There were very important ones as well as less important ones. For example, "You shall not kill." and "Do not boil a baby goat in its mother's milk." (Deuteronomy 14:21) The one about the baby goat is not as important as the prohibition against murder. But they were both commandments from God and so were treated seriously.

There was a lot of lively discussion about which commandment was the most important. The trap for Jesus was to involve him in a debate that would never end. They wanted to make people think that what Jesus said wasn't that important or "He's just like the religious scholars or the rabbis," or "We can't really base our hope in Jesus" or "He's really not the Messiah."

Even though Jesus understood that it was a trap, he did not waver but declared the truth. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" And he said to them, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

Jesus is teaching us to turn our hearts to God, and to focus on loving him as the direction of our lives. In everything that we do, if we don't decide on a purpose, and therefore get out of focus, things will not go well. When we take on a new project at work, we don't do it haphazardly without a purpose or goal. Just like that, does your life have a focus that is clear?

Jesus takes this same commandment to love God from the Old Testament laws of Moses. Duet. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord 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."

This phrase "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one," called "Shema" in Hebrew was traditionally recited twice a day. They firmly taught it to their children. They wrote it on the doorposts of their homes and always kept it on their minds. However, Jesus was the first one to say that it was the most important of all.

Because there were 613 commandments, a lot of people were perplexed. They could not keep them all. The scholars of the law and the Pharisees called those who could not keep them sinners and discriminated against them. They condemned them as unclean and excluded them from heaven, even though they themselves could not keep all the laws perfectly.

These days the secrets and principles to success in life are widely and blatantly advertised. Which one is best? Which one is the most necessary? We don't know. We are trying all kinds of different things and giving them slogans that we like, and in this way trying to get over the rough waves of life.

Listen to Jesus. Turn your hearts and your thoughts to God, and walk with him who guides us in love. In regard to how you should live, think about what the Bible says is the will of God. Meditate on how to spend this day in the best way so that God's magnificence is revealed. Spend time letting God feed you, rest in Him and worship Him. I expect that your heart and your life will be renewed.

## 2. Love your neighbor

Okay, next after Jesus revealed the importance of loving God, he quickly shifts to loving our neighbor as clearly being the 2nd most important commandment. Matthew 22:39, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

In the place where we mutually love each other, peace will come to us. Broken relationships will be restored and those in discord can be reconciled. If this command of loving our neighbor is carried out, I would like to think that unimaginable things will happen. As you would expect, this command is also quoted in the Old Testament. Leviticus 19:18, 34

19:18 You shall take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

19:34 You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

What is the focus of this 2nd most important commandment? Who our neighbor is, is not restricted. It includes everyone. Normally, we can give love to those people we like or those who are our friends without being told to. But, once we begin to dislike them, we avoid them and treat them indifferently.

The people Jesus is referring to as neighbors are those people we distinctly dislike, those with whom we don't see eye to eye, co-workers with whom we have conflicts, a boss or superior we dislike, those who offend us, someone we would like to take revenge against and those who are rivals or enemies. In the sermon on the mountain, Jesus said this in Matthew 5:44.

5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

What a message filled with challenge! How do we love people whom we don't like or who are our enemies? If there is a place to begin, let's start by doing what Jesus said, "Pray for those who persecute you." Let's pray for them even though it isn't accompanied by affection. Let's pray for them as we would if we did love them.

C.S. Lewis, in [The Essence of Christianity](#), pp. 205-6 says, "Do not waste time wondering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you do. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."

One more thing I want you to focus on is how this 2nd most important commandment fits together with the first. It is possible that instead of loving God and seeking to please him that we will instead try to please ourselves by showing off in our love for others. We can put on a smile and cover up feelings of resentment and anger.

In order to boast about the way we are filled with love and forgiveness and in order to get the person to apologize to us, to make them feel a sense of obligation, we may put on an air of love. In that way, we want to show that we deeply love others. We want to be well thought of by others.

Or, conversely, we may give the excuse that since we are obeying the first commandment to love God that its okay not to obey the second one. That is a mistaken tendency for Christians to think that way. I am worshiping God; I am giving offerings and I am doing service. There is a tendency for us to imagine that we can exempt ourselves from loving and serving and witnessing to others because we are doing those things.

Jesus is saying here, "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." In other words, to love God and our neighbor fits together as one, and you absolutely cannot separate them.

### **3. The Motivation to Love**

So, till now we have looked at the importance of loving God and loving our neighbor. Why did I choose this Scripture and associate it with Grace City's 10th anniversary? Because I believe that in order to fill Tokyo with the gospel and transform it that we need to seriously wrestle with these two commands.

I think many of you are acquainted with the anime feature called "Spirited Away." It is the No. 1 box office pick done by noted director Hayao Miyazaki. In the movie is the character named "Kaonashi" who is a black form who has a face that is neither ghost nor monster. Kaonashi has no appearance and cannot speak its own words. It can barely put together the sounds "Ah, Ah . . ." It always says that it is lonely.

Kaonashi tries to win the favor of an employee at a public bathhouse - oil merchant by getting a hold of counterfeit money. He appears to be trying to satisfy himself with excessive drinking. Finally, at the end of a long process, it becomes this huge monster going berserk by swallowing people.

According to the director Miyazaki, this character is the embodiment of the darkness in the heart of people in current society. Through money or anything they can get a hold of, they ultimately are not satisfied. They don't know who they are. They are without identity. No matter what they get ahold of, it does not satisfy.

The character in this movie, Kaonashi, represents modern consumerist thinking. If I can get my hands on a lot of things, I will be happy. But, we are not satisfied. We don't sense joy or purpose. There is no community or mutual heart communication.

According to today's message, Jesus is saying that we need a reversal in our thinking. We want to be loved and blessed by God. We are constantly seeking to be loved by those around us, for people to be our friends and to help us.

Instead of that, conversely, we need to take initiative to love God and serve Him. We need to spend time building relationships with people and respond to their needs. The Lord Jesus says in another place, "It is better to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

If you feel a dilemma about loving God and people, consider the story of Abraham.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his own son, whom he dearly loved. God was testing Abraham to see if he loved God more than anything. At the same time, God was testing his love for

people. Isaac was an only child, and so all of Abraham's joy and future hope rested on Isaac. He loved his son. Abraham was greatly disturbed and conflicted.

However, Abraham goes up the mountain and decides to sacrifice Isaac. He prepares the altar. He ties Isaac to the altar and raises the knife to kill him. At that instant, an angel calls Abraham's name and stops him. A lamb is provided for the sacrifice.

Brothers and sisters, God's love is perfect and will satisfy our needs as a father does. We know love as that which fails and commits sin and is selfish, but God's love will not abandon us. Jesus accomplished the perfect love in the sacrifice he paid for us on the cross.

Jesus can ask us to love him first of all, and our neighbors as ourselves because his love for us is unconditional. He loves us who are inadequate in our affection, who are selfish and self-seeking, who forget to pray and who look down on others and envy others. Christ gave us his everything. Fill up your love tank with Jesus.

You probably know that when you love God and others, you feel that your love is inadequate. That causes us to need the love Jesus had on the cross, and to need his filling. As we have him fill us, we will love him even more. And then, we will want to share his love with others.