

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Passions of Christ – The one thing!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - March 8, 2015

What if you knew that there were people plotting to kill you? What if your friend had just told you that you had made someone really mad and that they had taken out a contract for someone to murder you? If you learned that it would be soon, maybe even in just a few days, maybe even Friday. Would you change the way you live on a day to day basis? Would you avoid places where they might be found - maybe move out of the state or the country so they might not find you? What if you accidentally bumped into them at the mall or the post office? Would you run, would you try to turn them in to the police?

This is kind of a hard exercise for us. I don't think anyone here could make someone that mad, and we don't really run in circles where people might be inclined to kill us. That just seems so incredible.

But this is what is happening to Jesus in our story today. If you think about it, I don't think that Jesus handles the threat on his life the way we would. He went out of his way to find his killers and to confront them - he even had arguments in the most public of places. And as we read this story we are going to see what is really important to Jesus, what he is really passionate about. We are going to see what is worth dying for.

Prayer

Let's dig in. Like I said in the intro, Jesus is not hiding from his would be murderers. He is in Jerusalem and teaching and healing, doing all the things he usually does - the kind of things that have placed him in bad standing with the religious leaders. Jesus is fearless! He is surrounded by Pharisees and Herodians, Scribes and Sadducees. They are trying to trip him up, asking trick questions in an effort to have him arrested. This passage is sometimes referred to as the *Great Commandment* and you should make a note of it in the margin of your Bible. Let's look at it together;

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall 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: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

In this short story Jesus gives us a premise, a command and a hope. He is asked "What is the greatest command?" and this is not such a question out of left field. The rabbis and scribes argued about such matters all the time. There were some 613 laws in the Old Testament, and 365 were identified as negative laws or lesser laws and there were some 248 commandments that were considered the greater laws. Many hours were spent debating which were the heavy commandments and which ones light, which were great and which were small. So when this scribe, a teacher of the law, heard Jesus answer these jackals of the temple so well, I think he came to ask an honest question of this impressive young rabbi that had taken Jerusalem by storm.

Jesus answered by going back to the Shema, the great prayer of the Hebrew nation. It is a prayer that God himself gives Moses to strengthen their resolve in their task of claiming the promised land of Canaan after their escape from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Then Jesus, who seems to always have this wonderful grasp of the Scriptures, also finds another obscure verse from Leviticus and ties it to the Shema;

Lev. 19:18

¹⁸You shall not 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.

In the gospel of Matthew as he described this same account he finishes Jesus' words by adding, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Everything hangs on these statements of God. This is the premise I was talking about:

The Premise: There is One God and there is one Truth

The premise is that there is a God that is above all gods; there is an absolute truth that we can calibrate our life from, a truth north that sets the direction for every human that has ever lived. It doesn't seem like a politically correct way of thinking in the 21st century. The premise is not that there are no other gods, but that there are no other gods who are supreme and sovereign and all loving and all powerful. Jesus agrees with the laws by saying that there is no other way to come to peace with yourself and to come to peace with creation and its Creator except through this God Jehovah. Jesus is saying not all roads lead equally to ultimate peace and mercy and purpose, and salvation. There is one and only one. And that we can know this God. This is the premise Jesus is making. He is passionate about it. He is willing to die for this premise.

This is hard for those who want to hold to a moving standard. To rules set by the majority or an evolving social standard. You can no longer say to anyone with confidence, “You should live an unselfish life. It's good for society and for yourself,” the world can simply say, “Who says so? I'm happy the way I am and I will live my life as I wish. I will live as selfishly as I want. Without the one God, you can't appeal to a moral standard where my opinion has more authority than yours. It is not a popular premise here in 2015 Denver, because if there are indeed lesser and greater laws, then there are also lesser and greater religions.

And some don't like the idea of religion and moral law at all. Steven Weinberg, Nobel physicist and author of a [The First Three Minutes](#); A Jewish Zionist and a confirmed, even angry atheist yet he still seemed to want it to be different. When asked by an interviewer how in a cold and impersonal universe we could find love and hope and purpose he wrote:

“We have to do it by loving one another, by discovering things about nature, by making great works of art. We may not be in any great cosmic drama, but faced with an unloving and impersonal universe, we can nonetheless create for ourselves a little island of warmth and science and art.”

Steven Weinberg, *[The First Three Minutes](#)*

Really, why? Interestingly, the interviewer says to Dr. Weinberg “For an atheist you sound an awful lot like a religious person.” The reality is that it is difficult to live in the real world without at least acting as though there is a universal moral compass that is largely the same for all humanity.

The fact is that if you want to understand you and the world around you, you must embrace this premise. It puts the edge around the puzzle; “On this all other laws find their connection.” The Psalms tell us over and over the Law is God's way of loving us;

Psalm 19:7-8

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;

the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;

[See notes on the Masada scribe]



Then with this premise in mind, *Jesus gives us a commandment to live into*, also from the Shema

The Command: Love with all your Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength

Jesus turns the attention of the scribe to love - the love of God. You see it really is true! All you do need is love. But love can be misplaced. You can be misguided into believing that loving God is simply living according to a set of rules and do's and don'ts. Let me draw your attention to a verse that is not in our story this morning but is in the same conversation. Just a bit earlier in the conversation, one of the combative Sadducees tried to embarrass Jesus on the topic of the resurrection and we see how Jesus responded to their lifestyles and values:

Mark 12:24

²⁴ Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?"

OK, they knew the letter of the law, but God was far from their hearts. Rather than loving Jesus as the God and Messiah that they were longing for, their eyes were instead closed to Love. Love in the flesh - Love standing right in front of them. David Bisgrove at Redeemer Presbyterian in NYC said it this way when he was looking at this passage:

"We will never understand the law without love and we will never understand love without the law."
David Bisgrove, Redeemer Presbyterian

When the religious leaders read the Shema, they got distracted from the first command by looking at the second. Let's look at the passage from Deuteronomy again picking up where Jesus left off;

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

These words were meant to *be descriptive* of a person who is in love with God. Instead the Jews saw them *as prescriptive* of a life obedient to God.

Descriptive* not *Prescriptive

Orthodox Jews then and now would place small pieces of the torah or law into a small box or leather pouch that they then tied to their foreheads or forearms. This is sometimes called "**laying tefillin.**" The word "tefillin" is usually translated "**phylacteries.**" The word "tefillin," is etymologically related to the word "tefilah" or prayer. Also on the doorposts of traditional Jewish homes you will find a small case of carved wood or silver. This case is commonly known as a **mezuzah** (Heb.: doorpost), because it is placed upon the doorposts of the house. Again in the small container is placed a small portion of the torah as a reminder of God's presence and God's 'mitzvot' or commands in response to this passage of the Shema.

Sadly these like so many religious practices even in our churches today, these can become distracting from our primary command to simply Know and love God, to live a life seeking him and living according to His character and His Kingdom will. We start doing things to try to earn a place of acceptance rather than abide in His love.

Our mission statement here at 4Cs is drawn from this passage as well as the great commission of Matthew 26;

Love God, Love others and advance the Kingdom together

Not only are we to love God we are to love others as ourselves. It is overwhelming because it seems to demand that I tear the skin off my body and wrap it around another person so that I feel that I am that other person; and all the longings that I have for my own safety and health and success and happiness I now feel for that other person as though he or she were me. This kind of love represents an absolutely staggering commandment. If this is what it means, then something unbelievably powerful and earthshaking and reconstructing and overturning and upending will have to happen in our souls. Something supernatural. Something well beyond what self-preserving, self-enhancing, self-exalting, self-esteeming, self-advancing human beings like Dave Scherrer can do on their own.

So what is our hope? Our hope is like the hope that Jesus gave the scribe. You are not far from the Kingdom of God.

The Hope: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God"

Jesus said, "You are very close." This may have been a bit of a play on words. Christ was standing very close, an arm's length away. He was saying "You are so close to the Kingdom of God that you can touch it. I am that King and you simply need to yield to my authority. You are so close!" Jesus knew he was close because he was able to see that it was not the burnt offerings and the sacrifices that God wants, but our hearts and our allegiance.

This . . . 'Is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

But is close close enough? Is it possible to stand this close to the Kingdom, to the salvation and peace with God that we all seek and to miss it? I think so. That is why Jesus said I am going to have to show you what love looks like.

I am going to have to show you what love looks like!

1 John 4:10-11

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Closing Prayer

Small Group Discussion questions:

Dave has been talking about the passions of Christ. Based on what you know about Jesus and the scriptures, what do you think are the passions of Christ?

Re-Read Mark 12, especially paying attention to vs. 28-44 and the conversation of the great commandment:

What is it to love God heart, soul, mind and strength? How do those characteristics differ from one another?

How do we love someone as ourselves? At what cost are we to love one another?

Jesus has a special love for the scripture it seems to me. How do we nurture a love for the scriptures in our own lives?

Jesus said to the scribe, "You are very close to the Kingdom of God."

What does the 'Kingdom of God' mean to you?

Dave asked the question, "Is close close enough?" Is it possible to be very close to God and still miss him. Have you met people like that? Are we sometimes like that too?

Masada notes

Adjacent to the ancient synagogue on top of Masada, is a small room that was the site of the geniza for the Jewish community before the Roman destruction. In accordance with the reverence we hold for sacred works, a geniza is a room for storing worn out texts before they are given a proper burial in a Jewish cemetery. Two scrolls were found buried in this room, one containing the final two chapters of Deuteronomy, the second with excerpts from Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones. Both, as opposed to many of the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran, are virtually identical to the Masoretic Texts that are the authoritative versions for our Bible today.

The geniza room was reconstructed in 2008. Today, in this air conditioned, humidified room, behind a glass wall, two scribes writing Torah scrolls sit on a rotating basis. In the past 7 years there have been six scrolls of the torah hand scribed, whispering each letter before it is written.