

Identity #2 Matthew 22:34—40

March 17, 2019

If you could ask one question of Jesus—and be guaranteed to get an answer—what would you ask?

Only one, mind you.

You would have to choose carefully.

You would probably have to push past questions of curiosity like:

- Did Adam and Eve have belly buttons?
- What are the Nephilim?
- Where did the dinosaurs go?
- How did the ark hold all those animals?
- How big is the universe?
- What the heck is up with that creepy witch of Endor?
- Where is the ark of the covenant?

You would probably also have to choose not to ask questions of a personal nature like:

- Why didn't my parents love me?
- Why do my friends leave me?
- Why did I get cancer?
- Why do my feelings fluctuate so?

- How long until I'm with you for good?
- Why is this life so hard?

If it were me, I would ask this question:

What is the one thing I need to know?

Push all the questions out—Jesus what is the ONE THING, what is the ONE THING I need to know?

ONE THING.

Silence all the noise and give me ONE THING.

Stifle all the voices and give me ONE THING.

Focus my eyes and give me ONE THING.

Point me in the right direction and give me ONE THING.

Give that ONE THING.

Ah, but we don't have to wonder. Someone else has asked Jesus for the ONE THING and he tells us. It turns out the ONE THING is the SAME THING for all of us.

PROP: The One thing, is to love.

This one thing is the same thing for all of us.

From the mouth of the Lord Jesus the one thing, the same thing is for us to love the Lord with all that we are and others as we love ourselves.

The ONE thing? Love.

What is the one thing that Jesus would have us to know? What is the one thing? Love.

What is the ONE thing for our church?

Love God—love others.

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:34-40

PRAY

The Great Commandment

Like the Great Commandment

1. The Great Commandment—

The question that the lawyer put to Jesus here in Matthew 22 was not asked in good faith. The question was meant to make Jesus stumble in front of a watching crowd.

Sometimes good answers can come to questions asked with bad motives. That is the situation here—

Here's the question again:

Vs. 36,

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

They mean what is the greatest command in the entire OT. There are 613 commands in the OT and they ask—which one takes precedence?

Vs. 37,

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. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment."

That is Deuteronomy 6:5. Half of what is called the Shema (which means to hear). The Shema was recited twice daily by the faithful Jews of that time. Each morning and each evening they would say,

“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.” Deuteronomy 6:4–6

Now, you will notice that Jesus only quoted the second half of the Shema. All of his audience knew where it came from.

Each day Jews would confess that the Lord was ‘one.’ Not meaning that he was essentially unified but that he was/is/would be the ONLY God. It was a statement of exclusivity not unity.

That God.
The One God.

That one God you are to love.

How?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Before we move on past this let us stop for a moment to take stock. We are commanded to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength.

How much is that?

A lot.

This does not mean that people are divided into 4 different parts, but rather it means we are to love God with the entirety of our lives.

We are to love God

Supremely

Primarily

Foremost

Wholeheartedly

Principally

Let's be honest?

Has anyone really loved God like that?

How are we to love him?

In every moment
With every fiber of our being
Full past the brim
Without flagging or failing.

Has anyone really loved him like that?

It seems that Jesus is commanding the impossible. Set aside for the moment the very concept of commanding love—how in the world does Jesus expect us to obey this?

It gets harder.

Not only does Jesus call us to love God

In every moment
With every fiber of our being
Full past the brim
Without flagging or failing.

But also there is something else. There is a second command. Another like it. In fact, you are not going to understand how to love God if you don't grasp and understand the command that is like the great commandment.

2. Like the Great Commandment

Vs. 39,

“And a second is like it:....” LOOK UP!

We can speed by words in the Bible without considering much about what they are saying. But we can't do that here.

Remember what is going on.

Jesus is answering the question—what is the most important thing? The first answer makes sense—the most important thing is to love the Lord your God without any reserve.

And in verse 39 here comes a second one.

Jesus himself says whatever comes next is LIKE the love of God. If you had never read verse 39, what commands could possibly be LIKE the command to love God?

Nothing would come to my mind.

But the second command, is similar to the love that God commands us to give to him.

What is it?

³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

That is jarring.

Jesus does something no one else had ever done, he connects the command to love God with the command to love our neighbor. Neighbor means anyone you come in contact with in your life.

If it wasn't surprising enough to hear that there is a love like our love for God and it is a love for others—look again at how to measure how much we should love others.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

That is jarring too.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Make sure you understand this here. This is not a command to love ourselves as much as an assumption that we already love ourselves and we are commanded to love others that way.

How hard is that?

How do we love ourselves?

Think of all the things we want for ourselves—
we have a craving for things like:

Security

Hope

Happiness

Protection

Stability

Satisfaction

Understanding

Compassion

Love

Healing

For ourselves.

Jesus tells us—those things we want and work for in
our lives you must want and work for those things in
your neighbors lives.

- Do you want and work for security for yourself?
You must want and work for security for others.
- Do you want and work for hope for yourself? You
must want and work for hope for others.
- Do you want and work for happiness for yourself?
You must want and work for happiness for others.

- Do you want and work for protection for yourself? You must want and work for protection for others.
- Do you want and work for stability for yourself? You must want and work for stability for others.
- Do you want and work for satisfaction for yourself? You must want and work for satisfaction for others.
- Do you want and work for understanding for yourself? You must want and work for understanding for others.
- Do you want and work for compassion for yourself? You must want and work for compassion for others.
- Do you want and work for healing for yourself? You must want and work for healing for others.
- Do you want and work for love for yourself? You must want and work for love for others.

How hard is that?

Have any of us loved others like that? I haven't. When I think about the sheer number of times in a day/in an hour I think about myself it is staggering.

And no one ever had to train me to love myself.

And that is the state that we all find ourselves in—we all naturally love ourselves. You might say, what about

people who hate themselves? They need to learn to love themselves.

No. They love themselves enough to hate some things about themselves. Self-hatred is inverted self-love.

Let's get our bearings here—

Someone asks Jesus—what is the most important thing. What is the ONE thing?

And Jesus commands us two things that seem impossible—

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind....AND love your neighbor as yourself.

Those things seem impossible because they are. How in the world can Jesus possibly command us to obey the impossible.

Isn't that a little like saying in response to 'What is the most important thing for me to know?'

And someone says—You need to know how to fly to the moon by flapping your arms.

That isn't happening.

How are we to think about this? What is our way forward?

It is not enough for us to know who to love—but we must know HOW to love.

What are we to do?

Whatever the answer is—it is important. It is the ONE thing. It is our ONE thing.

Look at what Jesus says about the two commandments in verse 40,

⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

If on these two commandments depend all of the testimony of the scriptures it only stands to reason that our church—all of us—that these are our ONE thing.

How can our one thing be so impossible?

Who has always loved the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength? About whom can it be said—there is never a moment they don't love others as themselves?

No one.

These commands are such that no one can obey them well enough, but there is a shard of hope shining in verse 37,

³⁷ 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.

You shall love the Lord your God...It is so easy to skip over words in the Bible but, so much is in each word. Did you notice the two little words, "your God?"

You shall love the Lord your God...

How does the God become your God? By loving him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength? By loving our neighbors as ourselves?

No.

How does the God become your God?

We all know that he is not your God by right of ownership. We do not own him. Rather, he is our God by the gift of grace. We can call him our God because of his son.

Way back at the beginning of the book of Matthew an angel appeared to Joseph—the father of Jesus—in a dream. Speaking of Mary we read,

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:20–21

He will save his people. That is what the name of Jesus means. He will rescue.

Those that become his people have the right to call upon his God and father. Those that confess their sins will receive forgiveness. Those that trust Jesus trust that while we might not be able to love like we should—

We cannot love our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—but Jesus did.

We cannot love our neighbors as ourselves. But Jesus did. Actually he loved his neighbors better than he loved himself. There was never a moment when Jesus did not love his God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength.

And he ALWAYS loved his neighbors better than he loved himself. This matters because when we trust him, we receive from Jesus the right to call God 'our God'.

As we get to know Jesus we get to know his all-surpassing love. Jesus loved you better than he loved himself. Think about it this way—

- Jesus gave up his own security so that we might be secure eternally.
- Jesus faced the hopelessness of God's wrath so that we might be able to have hope that does not fail.
- Jesus thrust his happiness aside for our good and joy and enduring delight.
- Jesus made himself vulnerable so that we might be protected both now and forevermore.
- Jesus made his life unstable so that we might be able to have to stand on the rock that cannot be shaken.
- Jesus set aside his own satisfaction and loved us enough to give us eternal peace and satisfaction today.
- Jesus allowed himself to be misunderstood so that we might know his enduring love.
- Jesus was scorned and treated worse than an animal so that we might be able to enjoy compassion from God.

- Jesus was cursed so that we might be healed.
- Jesus was hated so that we might be loved.

None of us will love our God like that—but all of us are loved by God like that.

When we see how much we are loved by God in Christ, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbors as ourselves becomes less of a chore than an opportunity to share.

Jesus himself says that our love for God is like our love for others. Did you see that?

Vs. 37,

³⁷ 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. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

What makes these two loves alike?

First, Love for God and love for others is focused away from ourselves. When we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbors as ourselves we spend time and energy loving someone besides ourselves.

We naturally love and think of ourselves.

None of us need to be commanded to love ourselves, we've got that down. We all need to be reminded that we must focus our love on someone other than ourselves.

Love for God and love for others is outward focused—how else are they alike?

Second the very nature of love is self-giving. God's love toward us is the very epitome of self-giving. He loves us not because we are worth it, or because we will pay out or because we will do something for him he loves us because it is said of him, "God is love."

That means God is always giving of himself for the good of others. The reason that God can command us to love our Lord God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength is because it makes absolute sense.

His love is self-giving and so for that reason we don't just bask and enjoy and hoard his love—we must give it away. God loves us not so that we can be like hoarders but so that we might share that love with others.

So you see, the Love of God is always evidenced by a love for others.

God's love for you lays a claim upon your life. Because we are loved by God—we must love others.

Love for God and love for those in your life are so thoroughly connected that if you do not love others in your life well, it could be that you do not love God.

In other words, you can tell those who love God by the way in which they love others. Or stated the other way—those who love other best love God most.

And this is the principle on which this church will stand or fall. This our ONE thing. We must be that people who love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Wherever God is leading and guiding we must be marked by love. That is the baseline. That is the foundation. We must be preoccupied with loving God and others.

It is so easy to have the wrong preoccupations and end up going in the wrong direction. We can get taken with trying to be relevant and forget about love

and thus lose our way. Relevance is not the same thing as loving God and others as ourselves.

We can be preoccupied with being hip and end up going the wrong direction. Hipness is no substitute for loving God and others.

We can be preoccupied with doctrinal precision and lose our way. Doctrinal precision is a waste of time if we are not marked by love for God and others.

How does Paul put it?

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1–3

Said another way—if we do not have love for others we might not understand the love God has for us. God loves us—but if his love does not come out of us—can it be said we love God?

Look at the testimony of your life.

Do you love others the way God loves you?

It can be so easy to think that the acid test for a Christian is to have all the right theology. Right theology is important but if we have not love it means nothing.

If you can explain the hypostatic union but do not love others—be warned!

Maybe you can teach the Bible—but does your life radiate love toward others. If not—be warned! That is a warning for me.

Where are we going?
What is our ONE thing?

It must be that we love God and others.

As we think about where we are going—we must be a church and a people motivated by love. Love must be that thing ONE thing. Our defining characteristic.

The ONE you need to know from the mouth of Jesus—love God and others.

Love entrusts ourselves to God and not others.

When you love someone you immediately make yourself vulnerable. When you connect your life to someone you say, "I will trust you enough to give you my love." That is a dangerous thing to do.

It is dangerous—love others enough to:

- Look to their interests above yours
- Sacrifice your time and energy for their good
- Hope in the things you hope in
- Weep for the things you weep for
- Protect them

It is dangerous to love others—because I will guarantee you that you will get hurt.

But the reason it is safe to love others as we love ourselves is because we are loved by God better than we could love ourselves. And we must give that love away.

We owe others in our lives our love.

What kind of love do we owe one another?

- We owe A love to others that initiates, and is not offended when those people don't respond how we think they should.

- We owe A love to others even when they have sinned against us in the past.
- We owe others an active love. A love that is Always looking to bless, encourage, build up. It doesn't sit around judging people for what they do or don't do.
- We owe others that isn't loaded down with expectations.
- We owe others a love that picks them up when they fall.
- We owe a love to others that sends help before it is asked.
- We owe a love to others that ALWAYS welcomes new people in.
- We OWE a love to others that CHERISHES old friends.
- We OWE A love that shows itself to be friendly to others NOT only expecting them to be friendly to us.
- We OWE a love that considers others needs before our own.
- We OWE others a love that doesn't ask—do I fit? Are people like me? It asks how can I help others fit in?
- We OWE others a love that doesn't count the cost and expects to be taken advantage of.
- We OWE others a love that overlooks sin without a word.

- We OWE others A love that is always hopeful and not pessimistic.
- We OWE others a love that speaks the truth kindly.
- We OWE others a love that that welcomes in the strange, awkward, weak, weird and uncool.

We OWE others a love LIKE we've received.

That is our ONE thing. That MUST be our ONE thing.