

The CORE TEACHINGS of JESUS

The Most Important Thing

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Hello, men. I'm Pat Morley. Welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible study. Today we're going to be talking about the most important thing. We're in the series, the Core Teachings of Jesus. The title of the talk, as I say, is The Most Important Thing. So I had a man send me an email and he asked the question, "Pat, what's the most important thing that I can do in my relationship with God?" Now this man is in ministry. And so I wrote him back. I said, "Who wants to know and why?" And he wrote back and he said, "Well, it's for me." And the rest of the story is that he has been so invested in helping other people involved in the church, in ministry and married and has a family and a job, and he just feels like he's being pulled in so many directions by so many different teachings. Obey here. Serve there. Worship this. Do that. Perform here. Make God happy. And so he's just asking, "What is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God?"

Well, it's interesting because we come to a text today. Let me ask you to go ahead and turn there; it's Matthew chapter 22, verse 36. We come to a text today where a very similar question, a synonymous question is being asked. And the reason that the question is being asked is really, for the same reason. It's a religious leader, a Pharisee, asking Jesus a question, and it's because the religious people of the day, they were being pulled in so many different directions. There were approximately 600 rabbinical precepts that if you were a believer in God, that you had to figure out how to obey this. And so they had them categorized, big ones, little ones, and so forth, and it would be it's okay if you don't fully do this one, because you really, really need to make sure you're doing this one.

It was a legalistic structure and men today often feel like they're caught up in some sort of a legalistic performance based Christian structure. And it would make sense that we would want to know, out of all of this stuff, I'm tired. I'm pulled in so many directions. What is it that I'm supposed to do? What is it that I'm supposed to do?

LOVING GOD THE WAY HE WANTS

And so the first thing that we want to talk today about is loving God the way He wants. So we actually are going to learn something in this text today that we would otherwise not know. We're going to learn, what is the most important thing that you can do as a man in your relationship with God? Let's take a look at the text, Matthew chapter 22.

So in verses 34 and 35, this expert in the law comes to Jesus. And it says here in this text that he tests Jesus with a question. Now I'm going to read out of a harmony of the gospels. A harmony of the gospels takes the four gospels and where there are more than one recitation of that teaching or that story, they put them side by side. Well, in this particular case, this text is also in Mark chapter 12. We're going to look at 22 and I'll make a reference, or Matthew 22, and I'll make a reference one or more to Mark as we go. Verse 36, "Teacher,"

What is the title of the series? The title of the series is the Core Teachings of Jesus. "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the law? What is the megas?" That's where we get the word mega. Buy this lottery ticket and win mega millions of dollars. What is the greatest? What is the megas? It's interesting

because in the Mark version, the question is of all the commandments, which is the most important? What is the most important thing you can do? And the word there is protos from which we get proto prototype. So what's the prototype commandment? What's the biggest, largest mega commandment? These are synonyms.

A lot of times you don't want to be caught parsing words or concepts too carefully. It's the idea that's important here. What's the biggest thing that you can do? The most important thing that you can do? And so Jesus is getting ready to answer this question. Now let's freeze frame here. Jesus knows that whatever he says is going to be written down and read and repeated millions and millions of times over the next few thousand years. Jesus knows that whatever he defines as the most important thing is going to become the rule of life for the billions of people who will later call him Lord. So these are extremely important when we're looking at the core teachings of Jesus. This is like core of the core. This is like the elemental force. This is like the guiding principle, the guiding principle for all of human life that He's getting ready to give here. This is extremely important. Jesus replied, "Serve the Lord, your God."

Is anybody looking at your Bible? It doesn't say, "Serve the Lord, your God." Is Jesus interested in having people serve the Lord? Well of course He is. He did not say, "Obey the Lord." Is Jesus interested in our obedience? Of course He is. Jesus doesn't say, "Worship the Lord." Is he interested in our worship? Absolutely. But He hasn't been asked the question, "What are the most important things?" He's been asked the question, "What is the greatest thing? What is the megas? What is the protos? What is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God?" And Jesus replied, "Love the Lord, your God." Agape. Love the Lord, your God. With most of your heart and most of your soul. And most of your mind. We're laughing, right? Because Jesus is telling us to love him with the totality of our being, with every ounce of our energy, with the sum of our strength, to love him unconditionally, all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and all of our strength, if you put the Mark and Matthew passages together.

Attempts have been made to sort of parse these out and talk about the difference between the heart and the soul and the mind and they're there. But I think the more complete meaning of this text is, is to see that Jesus is trying to enfold everything about you. He's trying to roll up everything about you and say, "Love God like that. That's the way you love God." He goes on and says, "This is the first and greatest commandment." And then he goes on to say, "and the second is love your neighbor as yourself." We'll do that a different week. And then he says, "All," not many, not many of the law and the prophets, "All the law and the prophets hang or depend on these two commandments."

This is the fountain head. You know, in some places, Jesus is kind of cryptic. You must be born again. I can understand why Nicodemus didn't understand that. If you had been the first person who Jesus ever said, "You must be born again," you would have been more confused than Nicodemus. Don't read that passage in John chapter three, where Jesus has having a conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who comes by night to ask Jesus, about spiritual things and picture that Nicodemus is somehow stupid. He's a lot smarter than you will ever be. He was one of the top religious leaders. So take the top 70 pastors, if you will, and theologians in the world today. And are you going to be in that group? Probably not. I know I'm not going to be in that group.

And so bottom line is, is that Jesus is sometimes cryptic Jesus. And he's usually, when he's not cryptic, he's usually figurative Jesus. He's speaking in parables and metaphors and figurative language. He says it himself. But in this particular case, Jesus is a stone cold killer. He's given it to us straight, love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The totality of your being, every ounce of your energy, the sum of your strength, love him without conditions. All of you. No reserves anywhere.

Wow. Wow. Why does it matter? Why does it matter? It matters because of the question that my friend was asking me and not just the question, but why he was asking the question. What is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God? The wise, because of being pulled in so

many directions and not being sure, how do I be a man of God? How do I do this thing? And the answer is to love God unconditionally. That's the starting point. That's the most important thing. Augustine famously said, "Love and do what you will." Because Augustine knew that if in fact we love God and we love other people, if we do these things, then in so many words, everything else is going to turn out okay. It will work itself out. And you think about all the problems that we have in the world and that's certainly the case. Now, it's hard to think about how to bring that kind of intensity to the loving of God. How do you do that?

How do you love? I mean, there's not a man in this room or who will ever hear this message or ever read this passage that wouldn't long to be able to love God like that. And the answer is our Big Idea for the day, and the **Big Idea** for the day: **The key to loving God unconditionally, is to believe he loves you unconditionally.** In any relationship when you feel like the other person is holding back, what do you do? You hold back. It's human nature. In any relationship where you don't fully trust the other person, you don't trust them, the natural reaction is to hold back. But what happens? What happens when you have a relationship with somebody?

I have a relationship with a guy up in Alabama right now. He actually does not have an unloving bone in his body. I doubt that this person has ever had an unloving thought. I don't care what you do to him. You can call him a big, stupid, oof from Alabama. And he'd say, "Well, Pat, I don't know why you feel that way. But if you feel that way, that's just fine with me." That's exactly how he would respond. And so I can't help but love him. I love him because he loves me.

IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?

Well, let's take this in two parts, loving God unconditionally. Do you think it's possible? I mean, the next thing I want us to talk about, is that even possible to love God like that? Well, of course it is. Of course it is.

There are so many examples of this in the Bible of men who love God unconditionally, start with Abraham. Abraham loved God so much he was willing to leave everything and move to a new land. Take Moses. Moses loved God so much, so unconditionally, he was willing to be mistreated rather than enjoy the pleasures of being part of the household of Pharaoh. Or take Joseph, who was sold into slavery and loved God so much that he was able to say to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Or Daniel, who was told that he must bow down to an idol and worship Nebuchadnezzar. And instead love God so much that he would not worship an idol. Or pick Job whose properties were nationalized, who terrorists overran his some of his interests, real estate interests. His family was killed. And his wife said, "Why don't you just curse God and die," as he was scraping his body with pottery, with his sores all over him.

And he said, "Though, he slay me. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Wouldn't you like to have that kind of love for God? Paul in Galatians 2:20 said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God who loved me unconditionally and gave himself for me." Wouldn't you like to love God like that? Oh, oh, we know that loving God with the totality of our being unconditional is possible because we have so many examples of it in scripture.

That's the Big Idea today. It is possible. The Big Idea today, the key to it, to loving God unconditionally is to believe that he loves you unconditionally. And so the third thing we want to talk about is how this is possible, not just for Moses and Abraham and Joseph and all the others to love God unconditionally, but how is it possible for you to love God unconditionally?

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US

And the answer is we love him because he first loved us. I have only personally found one example in the Bible of God's unconditional love. And that is in the parable, in the story of the prodigal son.

And in that parable, for those of you who, well for all of us, just as a reminder, the boy, the younger son wants to split the inheritance. Father does it. He goes off, spends all of his money on wild living. Comes to his senses, wants to come back home. His father sees his son in the distance, coming over the brow of the hill. And watch this, before the son ever said a single word, the father without conditions then, the father runs to the son, throws his arms around him, and lavishes him with love. He has compassion on him, slobbers on his neck.

And then the boy said, "Father, I've sinned against you," and so forth. And so there was a great reunion. Now the boy could've said, "Hey, father, I've come back to see if I can get some more money from you." And then the father's actions would've had to been different. He would have had to go to the right instead of the left, but notice that the father's initial response to the boy returning is not dependent on what the boy says. It's unconditional love. That's how God loves you. That's how God loves me. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus said, "As the father has loved me, so have I loved you." Just imagine the way the father must love Jesus. They are one. They are the Trinity. It's one relationship. We don't understand the Trinity, but the father loves Jesus. As the father loves me, so have I loved you. That's a lot of love. That's unconditional love. John 17:23, "As the father has loved me," Jesus said, "so the father loves you." So imagine, we talk about how much Jesus loves you. Imagine how much the father loves Jesus. The father loves you in the same way that he loves Jesus. That's a lot of love. That's unconditional love. That's unconditional love.

All right. Some of you been here long enough; you probably have seen me do this before. I have in my possession here a crisp \$100 bill. All right. Everybody see it? Who would like to receive this \$100 bill as a gift right now? Raise your hand. Okay. And if you don't want to receive this gift, let me see your hand too, because I just want to get to know you. All right. Okay. All right, now, how many of you guys want the \$100 bill? Raise your hands. I mean, that's almost everybody, right?

All right. Now who wants the \$100 bill? Everybody still wants it. Why do you still want the \$100 bill?

All right. Because it's still a \$100; because it's tattered, right? But the condition of the bill does not alter its value. And that's you. You may be a little tattered. You may be pulled in too many directions, but it doesn't matter what condition you're in. You still have the exact same value to God. And that is unconditional love. And that is what releases us to do that most important thing, the Big Idea. The key to loving God unconditionally, the most important thing, is to believe he loves you unconditionally.

Let's pray. Our dearest father, we thank you for your Word, for the truth of your Word. Lord, there's not a man among us who doesn't want to love you unconditionally with the totality of our being, in a complete and full way. And yet Lord, we know that in order for us to love you, we need to be fully convinced. We need to believe in our hearts that you love us unconditionally. So we just ask God that you would empower us with your Holy Spirit to do this most important thing, to love you with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and all of our strength. And we ask you in Jesus name, amen.

Okay. All right, then. I'm going to keep the \$100.