

## **What is the Greatest Commandment – Midweek sermon 12-11-20**

**What is the bible story in 2 words?**

Law and prophets. Both are about obedience to God. Jesus when asked and tested about the greatest commandment was being challenged by people who believed that obedience to the law as it had developed over many centuries was the way to God. He would be pleased with those who observed the law and its variations. And the law makers had made those variations. Jesus sees the test as an opportunity to ground his hearers in the fundamental purpose of the law, of obedience and of God. And that is love.

Now we need to be careful when talking about love. The reason is that the English word “love” is a blunt instrument used to describe many different emotions. Both in Hebrew and Greek there are many words for love that mean different types of love and different subjects of that love. I love butter but do not love margarine. This is a completely different context and meaning to “I love my wife” or even “I love Jesus”.

“Love is not love” does not make sense in English. But in Greek it might be “Agape is not eros”.

And mostly today we will be looking at agape. This is the self-sacrificial love that we see most acutely when we look at Jesus on the cross. But we also see it in Jesus’ teaching, healing, resurrection and even in the judgement to come. It is a love that calls us to holiness and purity. It is a love that cannot live with evil but will wipe away every tear and bring an end to sorrow, pain and even death.

**Agape.**

Jesus is tested on the 10 commandments and the associated laws that we find in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

The 10 commandments are about love – love God and love your neighbour. That is why Jesus responds in the way that he does.

**1-4 God (worship God, no idols, sabbath, name in vain)**

**5-10 Loving other people (adultery, stealing, killing coveting etc)**

**Matthew 22:34-40 The Greatest Commandment**

<sup>34</sup> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

<sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The English word “love” appears 686 times in the bible. 425 in the OT and 261 in the new. We are told in John’s letters that “God is love”. In fact, John’s first letter mentions love 12 times. We are

now going to look at this idea of love by looking at the OT reference Jesus is making and then at John's exposition of the love relationship in his first letter.

There are 4 loves that I want to explore today – love God, love your neighbour, love yourself and love your enemy.

## Love God

### Deut 10:12-13: Fear the Lord

<sup>12</sup> And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to **fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him**, to love him, to **serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul**, <sup>13</sup> and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

The context of loving God is a call to the Israelites to fear God, that is know that he is awesome, hold him in awe. In response to be obedient, that is NOT to be rebellious and to serve, not half heartedly but wholesomely, with all heart and soul. For God's instructions are for good. Not to be a killjoy but to protect and help us flourish. God is into the human flourishing business.

By doing all this we love God. The word is agape. A self-sacrificial love shown to us and reciprocated.

Part of our demonstration of agape is obedience. Matthew 28:19 Jesus says to the apostles "go, make disciples, baptise them and teach them all I have commanded" – to be a follower of Jesus means obedience.

This appears many times in John's letter. Firstly, that God loved us first us and secondly, we obey as an act of love but also because it is for our good.

☐ [1 John 4:9](#) This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

☐ [1 John 4:10](#) This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

☐ [1 John 5:2](#) This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

☐ [1 John 5:3](#) In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

☐ [1 John 5:1](#) Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

☐ [1 John 4:16](#) And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

☐ [1 John 2:5](#) But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

God loved us first. We obey him in love. That makes us complete.

## Love neighbour

Jesus commanded the apostles with a new commandment, <sup>34</sup> *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* <sup>35</sup> *By this everyone will know that*

*you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” This is a mark of discipleship and a signal of the Kingdom of God. It is part of making passionate disciples.

The OT context is from Lev 19: 17-18: Fear the Lord

<sup>17</sup> “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

<sup>18</sup> “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.

Its interesting to note that part of this love is to rebuke, to point out others faults and rebellion, in love. Because this is a sign of veering away from the first commandment – to love God.

John explores this too in his letter.

☐ [1 John 4:20](#) Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

☐ [1 John 4:12](#) No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

☐ [1 John 4:8](#) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

☐ [1 John 3:10](#) Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

Jesus took off his robe, wrapped it around him, knelt down in servile position and washed their feet. He told them to do the same. He then gave a new commandment – to love one another. By this he meant other believers, brothers and sisters. He also, here in Matthew, by the parable of the Samaritan, says you are a neighbour, just as Steve was sharing on Sunday. Love your neighbour. The word here is again agape. Put others above yourself.

Love yourself

However, the third love is easy to miss. Jesus says “love your neighbour as yourself”. The implication being – love yourself. Not in a selfish, proud, puffed up sort of way. There is plenty in the bible to warn against this sort of self-aggrandisement. But there is something about being self-content.

God made you. He loves you. He knows you better than yourself. He forgives you. Love yourself. Forgive yourself. Receive God’s forgiveness.

From that place of self-loving we can then put ourselves in the place of others and love them, because that’s what we would like to receive. It is not selfish to receive. Its ok to pray for yourself. Its ok to receive from others. Some are givers but find it hard to receive. Where appropriate, we can allow ourselves to receive as much as to give.

The fourth love is a very Hard saying – love your enemy (Matt 5:43-47)

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour<sup>[a]</sup> and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are

*not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

Its easy to love someone wo loves you – but love your enemy, bless and do not curse. It is not a transactional relationship, this agape love. We do not give to receive. We give because it's the right thing to do. We hold the olive branch and hold it out. We pray for our persecutor. We turn the others cheek. According to Solomon *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.*

*<sup>22</sup> In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."* (Proverbs 25:21-22)

This is probably the hardest. But also, possibly the most beneficial – for us and for society and building the kingdom. True agape in action. Jesus died for his friends and his enemies. And there is no greater love than that.

A final thought. What was Peter's test before his commission on the beach at the end of John's gospel? Jesus asked him "Do you love me?" Peter answers yes three times – to agape and to the less stringent phileo, as a brother. Each time Jesus commissions him to be a loving shepherd.

We are made to love. To obey God's commands and to live holy, pure lives dedicated to the other.

And Jesus asks us that same question – "Do you love me?" If we answer yes, the next is a command – "Love one another so that others will see that you are my disciples" and "Love your enemies...and the Lord will reward you".

Love is love – but only when it is obedience, holiness and kingdom building.

Lets pray.