

The Most Important Text?

Mark 12.28-34

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Sometimes people will ask you what your favorite book of the Bible is or your favorite verse, and for me, that's always been a tough question. As a preacher, I often find that my favorite book is whatever book I'm studying.

Now if I were to ask you all not what your favorite passage is, but what you believe the greatest or most important passage in Scripture is, that would be a tough question as well. Maybe it wouldn't be a completely fair question.

All of God's Word is important and foundational, but even Jesus talked about "weightier matters of the law" and Paul also talked about things of "first importance." Hebrews talks about foundational truths for believers.

But think for a moment how you would answer. What's most important or greatest of all the passages in the Bible for us to know and do? We might have different ideas or give different answers. But I want to first ask a different question: *What is the most quoted Bible passage in all of history?*

- ➔ I'd suggest **it's not Jn 3:16**, Ps 23, Rm 8:28, Lord's Prayer, 1 Cor 13
- ➔ Some suggest today the most quoted verse in America is Matthew 7:1 "judge not, lest you be judged" – even unbelievers sometimes will quote that verse, but in history another text is way more quoted
- ➔ I would argue for another passage as the most quoted in all history, because for thousands of years it has been recited by believers in the morning and evening, and was a standard part of worship services
- ➔ Historically, as God's people were scattered all over, one writer said the greatest single bond that held them all together was the truth and belief professed in this text. Young boys were taught this passage as soon as they could talk. It's called a believer's confession of faith
- ➔ The faithful through the centuries were told to repeat the passage in their devotions and it was to ever be on one's lips, living or dying
- ➔ This most-quoted-passage-ever I'd argue is also the greatest and most important. It is not the most famous or most familiar text, but we need to become familiar with this passage, which is Deut. 6:4-9

So turn in your Bibles to **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

This text has been considered **the most important of all the OT commands**.

It was **like Israel's pledge of allegiance** to God, like kids recite to our flag.

For thousands of years it's been quoted in daily Jewish prayers and in their synagogues to this day: **Shema** *Isra-el, Adonai, elohenu, Adonai echad*.

Deuteronomy 6:4 *"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.

PRAY

“**Shema**” is the Hebrew word for “**hear**” in v. 4, and in fact the Jews called this passage **the Shema**, and religious Jews to this day call v. 4-9 the Shema.

This is what God’s people need to hear in the sense of heed, listen, or obey. It’s possible to listen with ears but not really hear (our kids, me sometimes).

It’s like the Lord says in Rev 2-3: *he who has ears to hear, let him hear*. Or like James says, ‘*be quick to hear...be doers of the Word, not hearers only*’.

In context, Moses is repeating God’s law to Israel as they prepare to enter the promised land. Look back at chapter 5 and you’ll notice familiar words.

Look at 5:16: “*Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*” ¹⁷ “*You shall not murder.*” ¹⁸ “*And you shall not commit adultery.*” ¹⁹ “*And you shall not steal.*” ²⁰ “*And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*” ²¹ “*And you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.*” ²² “*These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.*”

The 10 commandments start with who God is in v. 7-14. The first 4 are to God: no idols, no images, honor His name, honor His day. But what’s the most important commandment toward God? Dt 6, v. 5 sums up those 4 in 1 and sets up the rest of the commands toward our neighbor. “Love the Lord your God” isn’t the 11th commandment. It’s what goes over all of them with all our heart, all our soul, all our might, love to God, then love to neighbor.

Vertical love → horizontal love (family, community, nations)

The 10 commandments are mostly ‘you shall *not*,’ Dt 6:5 is the ‘you *shall*.’

Look at ch 11. It’s not just all our heart, all the time we must love our God.

11:1 “*You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments **always**...* All of them all the time.

Look back at 10:12: “*And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God **require of you**, but to **fear** the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to **love him**, to **serve** the LORD*”

your God with **all your heart and with all your soul** [love links to fear/obey/serve]...¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.¹⁹ **Love the sojourner**, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

If we love God, we must love all those made in God's image

Sojourners were non-Israelites among the Israelites, neighboring people among them. God loves all people groups, and those who love God must love all neighbors. This is a practical love to strangers and sufferers, giving them what they need. This is parallel to Lev 19: "*When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 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 ... you shall **love your neighbor as yourself** ...*" (v. 33-34, 18).

That includes treating equally all ethnicities, even loving your enemies

Turn to Mk 12. This is timely for us with sojourners among us like evacuees, Sacramento may see more Afghanistan refugees; but really any stranger, or any neighbor we need to love like we love ourselves. In Dt 6, it starts with a wholehearted love for God from our whole soul that takes our whole might. The Law extends that love to others starting in families out to communities.

Dt 6 has been recited more by Jews for 3,500 years, at least 2x a day, every Sabbath day. Maybe most quoted. But most important? The greatest, really?

Mark 12:28 *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.*

What's most important of all the things God told His people to do? Or your Bible may say what is the first or foremost command? Jesus said the most important is: hear O Israel, there is one God, the Lord, and you must love Him with exclusive love that encompasses all that is within you. Jesus starts with Israel's great confession (oneness of God) then He moves to the great commandment of love for God. The unity of the one true God calls us to united hearts and minds in love for Him alone. That's first and

foremost and the second that comes out of it is ‘*love your neighbor as you love yourself.*’ In the end of v. 31 Jesus adds ‘*there is no greater commandment than these*’

I can't think of a greater study to do next than love; there is no greater

In Mt 22 Jesus said loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind is the “**greatest commandment.** *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” (v. 38-40 NIV). There are like two hinges that the whole door rests on. You need both to open God’s truth. You must have both together, you can’t have one without the other or it doesn’t work. Jesus said ‘*the second is like it,*’ it isn’t unrelated, and it can’t be separated. The whole scripture turns on these 2 greatest of all commandments to love God and neighbor. Not just the law, but the prophets, and the gospel. Not just the OT, the NT hinges on this love

James calls ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ the royal law (2:9). Paul says the whole law is fulfilled in that one verse “love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14). Rom 13:8: *the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* ⁹ *For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁰ *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

TALK ABOUT JESUS QUOTING FROM DT 6 MULTIPLE TIMES.

Wilderness temptation – 3x “it is written” (Dt 6 & 8, Israel in wilderness).

Dt 6 is important to Jesus, in His words, “most important” and “greatest.”

In Paul’s words there’s faith, hope and love, but *the greatest of these is love.*

I can’t think of a greater theme to study, the love of God lived out by us.

TALK ABOUT **NEW SERIES ON LOVE** IN WEEKS AHEAD – WILL LOOK AT LOVE FOR OTHERS IN 1 COR 13, TODAY LOVE TO GOD

TALK ABOUT WHY I CHOSE THIS STUDY FOR D.MIN PROJECT. I NEED TO GROW IN MY LIFE, WE NEED TO. HELP I NEED FROM YOU THIS NEXT WEEK – EMAIL SURVEY FOR RESEARCH PART

The **context of Mk 12** is a **controversy** with Jesus **over the Israel’s law** men, the Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes of the law, lawyers in the sense of OT law who are trying to cross-examine Jesus. In v. 28 this one hears that Jesus has answered them well, so he asks what the ancient rabbis debated often: **what’s the weightiest or greatest or most important part** of the Law? The disciples argued this same week about which disciple was the greatest, but the rabbis argued about which duty was the greatest. They had counted 365 commands that were negative (“you shall *not*”), one for every day of the year. What’s the most important? **You shall love God and your neighbor.**

All the positive and negative commands fall under and should flow out of love. Lk 11:42 “*woe to you Pharisees! ... You neglect ... the love of God.*”

Look at Mk 12:34, the end of the verse says no one dared ask Him any more questions. This is where **Jesus ends the debates**. The context before this, Mk 11, is when Jesus shut down the temple money-changers corruption, turning their tables over. Now He shuts down and shuts up false religious leaders. He’s doing the talking now, and He turns the tables on this last question to what the whole OT turns on, love for God and neighbor. He’s in the temple where sacrifices were done, but love is more important than all sacrifices.

Soon sacrifices and the temple itself will go down, next chapter

In Mk 12:32 after Jesus quotes the **first and second greatest commandments**:

³² *And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher [or ‘you are good,’ or some translate it ‘well said, Rabbi’]. 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.”*

Micah 6: ‘*Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings... Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams... He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To **love** mercy...*’ (v. 6-8 NKJV). Or Hosea 6:6, God says ‘*I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings*’ (NLT). This scribe got it, **love is much more than all the sacrifices and their system**.

Mk 12 is the week where Jesus in His love would fulfill the Jewish scripture and sacrificial symbolism by giving Himself on the cross to die for sin. And as He did, the veil in that temple was torn from top to bottom to show God opened access from heaven to earth. His sacrifice of love brings us into the kingdom by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. His resurrection gives new life from a new heart that repents and now loves God and man.

This Jewish scribe wasn’t far from the kingdom, maybe God later brought him the rest of the way. Maybe one of those Christians hearing Hebrews 10:

‘...when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired...in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure...according to the law...But Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins... Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin... And let us consider how to stir up one another to love’

The Bible says love fulfills the Law, but **our love falls short, so Christ came** and fulfilled the Law for us, and the sacrifices in it, and in love died for us.

And He rose for us to bring us into His kingdom of love where we love Him and He calls us to love one another and stir one another to love as we meet. Jesus said this is what's most important, starting with love for the Lord God.

And that love should go out to one another as the church gathers

You may have noticed Jesus adds the phrase in v. 30 "with all your mind" but Dt 6 uses the word "might." Which is it? **Mind or might?** Yes! Jesus in v. 30 adds soul and strength, but in the Hebrew language mind and heart go together. And notice in v. 33 how he sums it in his own words: *And to love him with all the heart and with all the **understanding** and with all the strength...* They're both paraphrasing a bit, for mental, spiritual, relational love. Not just love of the will, not just choice or decision without feelings.

Strength and soul, head and heart, volition and affections and emotions. Love God in your decisions and choices, what you think and what you feel.

'all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.' Throw in understanding and together the point is every part of your inner person, your whole self, all your capacity and life is to love God above all

How do we apply that? Back to Dt 6. If this is the greatest most important command of all, how do we grow in our love for God? What does that look like? How do I pursue loving God with more of heart, soul, mind, strength?

1. HEARING His Word (Dt 6:4-5)

Are you a hearer in the biblical sense of the Word? Do you listen to apply? Do you lovingly obey? You can't grow in love for the Lord if you aren't regularly hearing what He says (His Word preached, read by you daily)

Ps 119:97 – pray v. 18, 25, etc.

2. HEARTS on His Word (v. 6 *these words ... shall be on your heart*)

Ps 1:2 delight is in the Word and so he meditates on it day and night

Ps 119:10-11 with my whole I have sought you, let me not wander from your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart ...

v. 36 incline my heart to your Word

3. HOMES filled with His Word (v. 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.

Illustration: what our kids pick up (2 year old daughter spanking her doll).

What do mom and dad love? Our kids will know if we love church or not, or if other things are more important (them, sports, activities). Is God #1?

Whose job is it to teach kids? Not SS, Th night, Christian school, or videos

What does teach mean – sharpen, chisel, shape, impress truth upon them

When and how? Talk about different phrases and ways you might apply

4. **WHOLE lives marked by His Word** (v. 9)

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.*

Hand – actions (remind you in what you do, like string around finger)

Between your eyes – thinking and seeing

Write them – verses around house, mirror, car dashboard, cubicle, monitor

Doorposts – whether you're going in or out, think of God's Word

Gates – where business took place in OT, business decisions, social matters.

Or the idea that the Bible must be applied not only when you are around your family and friends but also when you are out of town. *Everywhere* and in *all circumstances* the Scriptures are to be applied to life! (Priolo, 16-17)

Application to talking about sermons in home – small groups, family

“Talk when you sit at home ... keep them before your eyes ...”

GCBC Sermon Application & Discussion Guide

(for individuals, families, small groups, etc.)

For further Application, Meditation and Conversation on today's text:

#1. **How did the Scripture challenge or encourage you** or speak to you today about God?

#2 Is there a **particular takeaway, conviction, or application** you can share with a fellow believer?

#6. How might understanding the greatest commandment impact **how we view how great our sin is**? How should this passage impact how you confess sin (whether at communion today or during the week)?

#7. What **practical ways can you pursue loving God** more with all that you are? How can you help others to?

#8. What can you do to **love your neighbor as yourself** more (Leviticus 19:18)?
Does v. 16-17 help? v. 32-34?

#9. Is there anyone you're **convicted you haven't been loving** to? What can you do this week to show love?

CLOSE OF MESSAGE

COMMUNION – into communion by reading text on self-examination
Remind elements only for repentant believers in right relationship with God
If not sure ...

How to examine yourself and confess?

Think of two greatest commandments, confess where you fail, ask for grace

TIME OF SILENT CONFESSION & COMMUNION THEN I'LL PRAY

Sing stanzas (COMMUNION HYMN)