

Sunday Sermon
The Greatest Thing You Can Do!
Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-30

Remember when you were asked, “Is that the best you can do?” Indeed, what is the best you can do? What is the highest priority on your “to do” list? Further, what is the greatest thing in life that you can do? What is more important than anything else? What is your ultimate duty? Taylor Swift says that “the most important thing in life is to dance to the beat of your own drum and to look like you’re having more fun than the people who look cool, like they fit in.” Audrey Hepburn said that the most important thing is to be happy – that is all that matters! Well Jesus, quoting the Old Testament Law, answers that highly important question. The answer is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Mark 12:29-30. “*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... 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.’*

As we come to our passage, Jesus is engaged in a friendly debate with a teachable scribe, a theological scholar of that day. The scribe has asked which commandment of God is of fundamental importance and central to everything else in the living out of our lives. In other words, “What is the greatest commandment?” Now this was no easy question. The Jews counted 613 commandments in the Old Testament and had divided them into 248 to be put on our “to do” list and 365 on our “not to do” list. But instead of going to one of the Ten Commandments, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-5, known as the *Shema* (which is the Hebrew word for ‘Hear’ the beginning word in these verses) , *which* had become the summary statement for the entire Old Testament law. It was much like John 3:16 today. It was a Hebrew child’s first memory verse and most Israelites repeated it twice a day, once in the morning and once at night. The idea is that if you ever needed to stop and listen, it is now! Hear O Christian! The most important thing you can do in life is to be

consumed by your love for God – to love him with your whole being! God is to be loved completely and totally because he, and he alone, is God and because he has made a covenant of love with his people – with you! In this covenant, God gave himself totally in unconditional, undivided love to his people and therefore he expects his people to be totally in love with him. Now what exactly does that look like? Listen then, as *Jesus gives four descriptions of a person who is totally and deeply in love with God:*

I. They love him with all their heart.

We were made to love God and the failure to love him is the ultimate sin. Yet we cannot miss the glorious fact that the ultimate joy is to love him with all our heart. To love him with all our heart is to love him from the very center or core of our being. Your control center daily decides or wills to love God on all occasions and in all ways. If someone were to describe your personality they would see you as someone who is clearly in love with God. It is your personality, to whenever there is an occasion to display your love for God, to do so.

*****If you've ever been to Camp Fairhaven, you've probably met Dunkin. Dunkin is not a person, he's a dog. He belongs to Dave, who is currently one of the directors at the camp. I've never seen a dog quite like Dunkin. I've never seen a dog so *devoted* to his master. If Dave is in the camp office, Dunkin will stand just outside the office door and stare at him. Doesn't matter if Dave is in there for three hours; Dunkin is content to stare for three hours. Dunkin follows Dave everywhere. Once, when Dave ended up on the opposite side of the lake from Dunkin, Dunkin didn't wait for Dave to come get him - he swam all the way across the lake to get back to Dave. If I opened the door of my car and Dave opened the door of his truck, I have no doubt which vehicle Dunkin would get in. If I stood there and *called* him by name, I *still* have no doubt which vehicle he would get in. And, if I stood there and called him by name while holding a doggie treat for him, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that he would still get in Dave's truck instead of my car. This is devotion, pure and simple. And in Deuteronomy 6:5, we are told that we should be wholeheartedly devoted to God. We should have the same love and**

devotion that Dunkin has toward Dave. For us, there should be *no one else* who steals our attention and devotion from God. But how often does Satan hold out a "doggie treat" (temptation) to me and say "Here, Doug!" and I have no qualms about getting on board with him? I want to be so devoted to God that when Satan tries to get my attention, I don't even stop to consider the possibility of betraying God. This is what it means to love God!

II. They love him with all their soul.

I would call it the "Alka-Seltzer principle." That is, you are saturated and consumed by a passionate, not a passive, love for God. You have a desire for him that mirrors a dating couple. You are obsessed with spending time with him. You love what he loves and hate what he hates. To describe the difference between loving God with all your heart and all your soul, I would liken it to a gas tank filled with gas. The soul is the tank filled with fuel and the heart is the ignition switch. In other words, your soul is filled to the brim with a desire to please and be intimate with God and your heart readily responds by turning on the ignition – by deciding to think and act in a loving way.

III. They love him with all their mind.

Motivated by your desires and directed by your will, your intellect becomes fully involved. Loving God is at the root of your thinking. It enters into your all your thoughts, your plans, establishes your agendas and goals, and becomes the priority in your education. Gene Veith puts it well. *Everything the mind is capable of doing is to be devoted to loving God. It would seem then that if your mind can spin out complex mathematical calculations, you are to love God in mathematics. If your mind can plan a business, design a building, analyze a novel, understand a philosophical problem, or imagine a story, you are to love God in your planning, designing, analyzing, understanding, or even imagining.* We are to educate our minds by studying the Scriptures, by studying theology, by studying God's creation, by reading the biographies of great Christians. The list goes on and on! Dr. David Jeremiah writes, *God doesn't like laziness, and he doesn't like a lazy mind. I thank God for the men and women who encouraged me with their intellectual strength and giftedness, my mentors and professors and*

those from whom I'm still learning. I thank God for those who write books that make me think and who give talks that make me listen. I thank him for the teachers he has raised up in my church and in every God-fearing congregation. I thank him for the gifted minds of our young people, and I pray they'll learn to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind. We can thank him because we can think of him.

IV. They love him with all their strength.

Finally, we can demonstrate our love by our actions, by using all our bodily powers to make him known, serve him, and shower acts of love upon others. Just like every athlete expends every last ounce of energy into a game or an event, we do the same with loving God. And we demonstrate that love primarily through obedience. We read our Bibles, say our prayers, witness to others, work hard on our relationships, and above all serve God and others. We are the first to volunteer when there is a need at our church or in the community.

Linda Didion was a cook in a Life Care Center. She was industrious and always eager to brighten the plates and hearts of the residents. She knew they loved turkey pot pie and she and her fellow cook would painstakingly make from scratch an old recipe provided by one of the residents. But one afternoon when they were serving the pies suddenly there was a loud crash and the tray containing about half the turkey pies tumbled onto the floor. They lamented that they would have to substitute an alternative meal for the pies they lost. Linda would drive home hot and tired from a long day's work but in the middle of the night she would get up and at 3 o'clock in the morning she would finish baking the new pies so that the next morning there would be enough pies for everyone. Now that is loving God with all your strength!

Conclusion

What then is your highest priority? What captures your attention, what fills your being? What is the focus of all your plans? If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, make loving God the first thing you think of when you get out of bed, and the last thing you ponder before you go to sleep. It will make all the difference. As we come now to the Eucharist. As we come to the Lord's Table, it is the perfect reminder of God's love for you and the catalyst for loving him in return. As I wrote on our

church blog recently, “I am overwhelmed by the thought today that Jesus has given everything he possibly could for us in the past (He died for you!); he is giving everything he possibly can for us in the present (He daily intercedes for you!); and he will give everything he possibly can in the future for you (He will create the new heaven and the new earth). His love is the gift that keeps on giving! How could we possibly not want to give back!