

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

LOVING GOD AND LOVING PEOPLE IN THE NEW YEAR

(for television audience only)

Mark 12:28-34

December 27, 2020

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INTRODUCTION: Good morning. I hope all of you are having a good holiday season. We decided to have a service just for our television, YouTube, and Facebook audience, or by whatever means you are watching or listening.

I want all of you to know how much I think about who is watching. I prepare my messages with the television audience in mind. You may be at home, in a rest home, in a hospital, in a lobby somewhere. We have viewers who are in jail. We have quite a diverse television audience around middle Tennessee and southern Kentucky. Social media allows these messages to reach even further.

I never gave any thought or desire whatsoever to being a TV preacher. It never crossed my mind, but when I became pastor here, the tv program had been going a long time. We were on a Comcast channel and had an opportunity to go on a regular over-the-air channel which expanded our audience.

Some of you have told me that you've learned a lot from my Bible teaching. I'll do my best to reveal God's word accurately to you. I don't have any gimmicks to sell you. I don't have any rusty spikes or dirt from Jesus' tomb. I am not going to send you any prayers cloths or anything like that. No, I am just going to speak every Sunday.

You've heard me say that this telecast is made possible by the good people of THBC and that is true, but some of you have decided to partner with us and we are grateful to you. I need to include the television audience the next time I say who sponsors the program.

Well, 2020 is almost over! What a year! And we survived it!

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28-34

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ *“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’³⁰ 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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’-There is no commandment greater than these.”*

³² *“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

³⁴ *When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

EXPLANATION: Getting Jesus to stumble was exactly what the religious people of Jesus’ day wanted. If they could just get him to say something contrary to the Law of Moses or the prophets, then they would have rejoiced in their evil schemes. But each time, Jesus foiled their plans. They simply could not catch him in a bind. You’ve heard the saying that a person can be “so heavenly minded, that they are not earthly good.” Well, that describes most of the religious leaders of Jesus’ days.

When they thought they had him, he always responded in a way they did not expect. In this case, a man asked which commandment was the greatest. A fair enough question, I guess.

Let’s look at the Ten Commandments.

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 20:3-17

“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ “You shall not murder.

¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ “You shall not steal.

¹⁶ “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

EXPLANATION: This man who came to Jesus was a teacher of the law. This means he knew the law and did his best to keep the law. In fact, it’s possible that he had kept all the commandments. But something was on his mind – was he trying to trick Jesus or was he sincere in asking his question? It stands to reason that if there

are ten commandments, there would be one that would be more important than the others.

When I gave my kids chores to do around the house, they knew the ones that were must-dos. They knew the most important ones.

Since Jesus knew the heart of the man, Jesus knew his need. It's possible this man was so busy keeping the law that he missed the point of the law which Jesus identified: Love God, love people.

Look what the man says in our main text, Mark 12:33: *To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.*"

Loving God and loving people is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. Perhaps this man had been so caught up in burnt offerings and sacrifices that he forgot to love God and love people. Or perhaps as a teacher of the law, he saw people around him who did the same. It's easy to get caught in the cycle of rituals to the point that they lose their meaning.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine told me yesterday about how in the early 70s, he and his sister were traveling together. His sister's husband was a very legalistic man and told his wife that if she traveled during the week, she had to find a church to attend on Wednesday night. He required his wife to bring home a bulletin to prove she had attended church. My friend said his sister drove around feverishly trying to find a Church of Christ, which is what his brother-in-law required. He was very controlling, and eventually his wife lost her mind over his control. Attending church had become a ritualistic requirement to him. He missed the message of the Gospel altogether.

When Jesus said to love God and love people, what he gave was a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments have to do with people's relationship with God and the following six commandments have to do with people's relationship with people. It would be possible to keep all the Commandments and neither love God, nor love people!

As we love God and love people, let's surrender to His Will. – Let's surrender our will to His will. Last year at this time, a lot of pastors latched onto the year 2020 to go along with 20/20 vision. There were all kinds of slogans out there to go along with capturing God's 20/20 vision. Well, look what happened in 2020. I wonder how many of those projections into the year 2020 actually happened.

In 2020, we learned that all man has worked for is very unstable. When the virus hit, no one was prepared. Let's look at God's command of loving God and loving people. Do you realize that command can be accomplished any time? In the middle of the pandemic, you can indeed love God and love people.

I've met so many new people (from a distance) during the pandemic. Most of them have become important people in my life. Because of the pandemic, I've been able to share the Gospel with some of them. People I would have otherwise never met.

As we love God and love people, let's be better students of His word. - Let's ponder its meaning and wrestle with its application in our lives. We'll discuss it, we'll revere it, we will live it out. We believe in the closed canon of Scripture, meaning there will be no more Scripture added to the Bible. And that's good because there's plenty here. I don't want any more. A friend of mine who is a Bible teacher told me years ago the more he reads the Bible, the more he wonders, "What is it?" I didn't understand what he meant then, but I am beginning to understand it more. If we love God, then we'll love his word.

The Bible is all-powerful.

If we love God, we MUST love people. During the New Year, we'll love God's people and we'll love others who are not His people. Folks, we have to love God's people. God did not call us to love only His people who are just like us, did he? No. If you have not read the book of Acts, you must do it. It reads like a novel of how the early church functioned. The book of Acts is about what happened when Jesus ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit was sent. People came together and were unified. If there was a conflict, they worked through it. They followed their leaders, they loved each other, they shared all things, and they spread the Gospel to others!

And with those who are not God's people, we'll love them, too. I'm convinced the reason many churches don't grow is because church people don't know people

outside the church. I ask you, do you have any friends outside the church, or is 100% of your socializing happening in the church? I challenge you in the new year to develop new friends outside the church. If we are to be salt and light yet we never leave the salt shaker and we hide the light, how will we ever be God's people on this earth?

APPLICATION: What's the application here? The teacher of the law replied that loving God and people were more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. A modern day interpretation of this is that having love in your heart is more important than the money you give, your church attendance, all the songs you may sing, or the prayers your voice may speak.

- You know it's possible for us to do all the things we think a Christian should do and miss the point completely.
- It's possible for us to study about God and not be in a loving relationship with God. It's possible for us to sing about God and not sing to God.
- It's possible for us to read the Bible, study it, and talk about it, yet not do what it says.

As you look back on the previous year, how's your report card? Did you love God? If you answered yes, then that means you loved what God loves. What grade do you give yourself?

The teacher of the law asked what is the greatest commandment? He asked for one, but he got two. Why? Because it's not possible to love God and not love people.

How about in the new year, we let go of those crippling grudges and sore feelings against that person who comes to mind?

In the coming year, let's focus on loving God and loving people. If you're already good at it, there's always room to grow. If you've not been very good at it, you can start today. Begin to see your life as if you were someone else watching you. Where is the love of God in your life? Where is the love of people in your life?

Are we truly available to God? Are we surrendered to Him? Let's take this scripture literally and make the changes that need to be made.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:13

For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

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Find me at www.thbc.com. Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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