

Matthew: Love the Lord, Love Your Neighbor

By Bob Young

I have two goals for this sermon: (1) to say something significant about Matthew, and (2) to say something significant about love as a dynamic that helps establish the identity of God's people. The preparation of this sermon has not been an easy assignment, not because it is impossible or even terribly difficult, but because it is somewhat unexplored ground and we have not customarily thought in this way.

Introduction

The love we are talking about is very specific. We are talking about *agape* love.

You will not be surprised if I tell you that Matthew is not the gospel that talks the most about this kind of love. Counting the verbs, the gospel with the most references would be John (31 times). Matthew has 7, Mark 5, and Luke 10.

A look at agape love in the gospels reveals an interesting fact: it appears 53 times in the verb form and only 8 times as a noun.

Step 1, understand that in the NT, especially in the gospels, love is a verb, something you do, as much as something you feel. The noun form is less common, almost rare. Love is not best understood in the abstract.

Tracing the idea of love in the gospel of Matthew: love your enemies (5), love your master (6), and love God and neighbor (22).

Some of this I have said before. I want to say it again, hopefully in a way that is fresh.

For Matthew, the supreme evidence of love is putting "First Things First" FTF

And the first thing is love for God.

When we pursue God with reckless abandon, we will win the world, we will succeed.

We have a great opportunity. Having opportunities does not make us uncommon—it is what we do with the opportunity that makes us uncommon, that sets us apart.

Catch the vision, because it is from God.

Opportunity to surrender—issues, preferences, desires, engulf all in relationship with God, let him be supreme. What will we do?

This is cornerstone teaching of Jesus, Mt 22:34-40. Questions are important. Knowledge = having right answers, wisdom = right questions. Right questions will lead to right answers, and vice versa. Here is a question. Which is the first and greatest command?

He could have said seek and save the lost. Get first things first. But he did not so respond.

He could have said help others, but he didn't.

He could have said love one another, but he didn't.

Most important = love God, fully! Not haphazardly--fully.

The second (#2) is similar, love neighbor as yourself. No greater commands. No section of Scripture is more important. These two love commandments define discipleship for the authentic, serious follower of Jesus.

We tend to make #2 as #1, and #1 as #2. Most churches focus first on #2. Most churches around us want to love people. That is how many churches do mission work. This approach gets things in reverse. How do we get #1 as #1?

We will not have a clear Christian identity until we get #1 as #1.

How let God take care of consequences, focus on #1 first? Not know how to do #2 without #1. Primary objective of life = #1. Understand #1 to do #2. God has #1 as #1 on purpose. Start from beginning. It is hard to have an effective ministry if we are not doing #1 first. First, we should hold one another accountable for #1, not #2. Pursue, model, teach #1. Who is leader? A leader is someone who does #1 supremely. Love God, love people, and make disciples. We overcomplicate it. It is simple. Love God, and we will do what he wishes, accomplish his purpose.

Let me tell you what God is going to ask at the judgment. Did you follow me or did you do your own thing? Without Christ, life leads only to mediocrity. We can't settle for that—life is too short. We are not going to live forever. We are not invincible, number our days to gain heart of wisdom. Door of opportunity—watch it go by or sit and wait. Pay attention to commandment #1.

How do you connect with God? That is my love question. What do you do, remembering that love is a verb?

Our answer is determined by something I said 3 years ago. It is determined by whether I see myself on rescue mission or treasure hunt.

#2 is a rescue mission, out to save world. That is not the primary motive in life. It is a primary purpose in my life, but it is not a sufficient motivation. When we talk about love, we are talking about our motivation.

We are on a treasure hunt, #1, treasure in field, buy the field. Jesus was on rescue mission, we are on treasure hunt so that we can participate in his rescue mission (not ours).

Contrast helps us see, contrast these two: rescue mission vs. treasure hunt.

Here is the love that defines us. Not John 13, whether we love one another and neighbors. Get to #1 first: passionately pursue God, primary aim is to connect with God, activity I will pursue is activity with God one on one.

We can do spiritual activities corporately, but we are missing something one on one with God. Doing things for God not same as loving God. Doing ministry not the same as loving God, loving people not the same as loving God. Spend time with God. If love, then obey. John 15 = incredible, last minute cram session: bear fruit, fruit that lasts.

When teach how to pursue God, that will last. Teach to pursue people, will not last. Connect with God. That is primary. Love God with all my heart, maximize my connection with God. To search minimizes need for God and time with God. Build spiritual roots, God's way or our way? Don't have to defend Jesus.