

“Reflecting the Heart of God”

The ministry today is particularly important. One aspect of my topic can be summed up in one word, love! Once we allow the Lord to seed love into our hearts it must become the standard by which we measure our spiritual life. Love will cause us to lay aside the need to be recognized and the hunger for self-gratification. It will cause us to shed attitudes that feed the cult of self, control, over sensitivity and all other types of natural minded expressions, as well as any and all demonic influences.

Matthew 22:36-40 says (NIV):

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

A significant loss of relevance occurs in personal and corporate ministry when we misrepresent the character of God by claiming that His single interest is in saving man from his sinful state. The truth is the Lord is just as interested in addressing our need as He is in addressing our sinful condition. As early as the Garden of Eden, God made provision for Adam’s need when He created Eve for him (Genesis 2). If we are to be spiritually relevant during this season we are going to have to enfold the two elements of touching the need of people as well as sharing with them the salvation message. To do this we must allow the compassion of the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) to speak to our hearts, filling us with compassion that can only come from our Heavenly Father. We must allow the Lord to give us a burden for the lost in Austin and a desire to assist Christians to become strong mature believers. The reality is that when we operate as Jesus did, allowing love to be central, we will easily become a citywide ministry.

Perhaps one of the most vivid illustrations of Jesus’ Great Compassion for mankind is found in his encounter with Zacchaeus, a tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). As an agent of the Roman government, Zacchaeus, a Jew, reached deep into his Jewish brother’s purses to satisfy Roman taxes. Whatever else he could extort from the people, he likely kept for himself. The Jews typically regarded tax collectors with contempt and as deceitful traitors and thieves. As a result Zacchaeus probably felt rejected, guilty, fearful, alone and lost.

When Jesus looked up into the sycamore-fig tree, he knew all about the sinful behavior of the little man peering down at him. It’s notable, however, that Christ did not say to him, “Zacchaeus, you lying, cheating thief, get down here right now and stop your sinful behavior.” Rather, he said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately! I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5). Jesus offered to enter the man’s home and, as was the custom, eat out of the same dish he ate out of. He could hardly do anything more accepting! Indeed, the Pharisees’ big complaint was that Jesus actually ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Zacchaeus's immediate response demonstrated the impact of Jesus' offer by coming down out of the tree and welcoming the Lord to come home with him with open arms. Jesus first ministered to Zacchaeus's deep need and left the rest up to Zacchaeus. We talk a lot about relationship in this house, so making a transition to incorporate the kind of interaction we need to embrace the lost or being patient with the saved will be but a small transition. As we make the transition into a love driven ministry we will hear people say to us what Zacchaeus said to Jesus in Luke 19:8-9, "Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'" Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.'" During this season of evangelistic thrust we need to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). We must ask the Lord for high levels of discernment as we approach the lost of Austin and touch their need through relationship and as we do, I believe just as Zacchaeus did, they will open their heart to receive the message of Christ.

The biblical truth to be gained in Jesus' exchange with Zacchaeus is that man is not just a collection of chemical elements, nor is he just part of a brute creation. Man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). It is for that reason that he is lovable. Dispel the love of God from leading us and all we have is an angry un-teachable person. Act outside of God's love and all that is left is pessimism about man's improvement. Become prideful about our abilities disregarding God's love and all that is left is a callous people that become vessels who are influenced by Satan. What the Lord is saying in the statement of the Great Commandment is that we need to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind and we need to love man, who is the image of God, with the same fervor. When we do this everything changes!

A large part of reaching the lost and discipling them, as well as maturing the saints depends upon how much we love them. We must realize that merely telling someone that they are lost can shut them down. However, pepper those statements with love and watch the most callous person dissolve into a pool of tears.

Like Zacchaeus, everyone needs attention, acceptance, and respect even as people seek to satisfy their sinful needs. Once Zacchaeus experienced the love of Jesus through the Lord's acceptance of him, he was ready to receive the truth about how to turn around his life. The message of the Lord addressed both Zacchaeus's need and his sin and that's the essence of what Jesus spoke in Matthew 22:36-40 and believe me, that is relevant ministry.

There are so many other instances where Jesus demonstrated love and acceptance rather than addressing the sinfulness of man. We find that Jesus demonstrated love and acceptance for the Samaritan woman before He challenged her to change her behavior. He was relational with the twelve disciple's way before He addressed their spiritual shortcomings. Also, Jesus said to the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, "Do you want to get well?" before he confronted him at the temple in

John 6:14 when he said to the man 'See you are well again! Stop sinning.'

Since the Lord is positioning us to be a citywide Church we must stay in step with this transition. To merely tell people they're lost or tell the saved they have a problem without love and relationship may result in a negative outcome. It's alright to go into the darkness to bring people light, let's just do it in a way that will cause them to receive the Gospel, rather than shut them down because another religious person just told them they were lost. I hear them say, "Okay I'm lost does anyone care?" "Does anyone really see me for who I am, rather than what they want me to be?" To achieve the call of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), which is to go, we must go in the right way or our going will be non-productive. In other words, we can't go in order to fill some agenda nor do we go because we are part of the evangelism team. We must go because we have a love for those we are reaching and maturing.

Basically, the Lord saved us so we could become a useable vessel to save others. The way we have reached the lost in the past must be reevaluated. We must choose to lose the idea that it's my "mission," or "my ministry," or "if I don't do this who will?" We have to fall in love with those the Lord has placed in our path and be driven by it. Love will cause us to inconvenience ourselves to pickup people who are too poor to have a vehicle. Love will cause us to pray in the early morning hours for those the Lord has entrusted into our care. Love will cause us to be attentive to those we have brought into the Kingdom. It will cause those who are unlovable to receive love once again.

Conclusion

We must become a people who love because our Heavenly Father loves all of mankind. Let's face it, since the Lord made man in His image He holds us in pretty high esteem, leaving us with one thing, if we love God we must also love the greatest creation that God made, man! That means with all of man's carnal issues, we are commanded to love because by doing so we fulfill the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40), first love the Lord and second love our neighbor as ourselves.

Declare and Decree:

- Lord I decree from this day forth that your people will be baptized with a spirit of love.
- I decree that we will lose selfish ambitions and personal agendas.
- I decree that our hearts will receive this impartation and emanate your love.
- I decree that I will be burdened for the lost in my city.
- I decree that the heart of the Lord, His agape love, saturate every person in my Church, in Jesus Name, amen!

Pray:

Lord open our hearts to receive the fullness of this love. The areas where the enemy has darkened our hearts and caused this revelation not to be received are being removed even as I speak. I ask that the definition of love be fully redefined in our hearts and that you would disconnect it from any sexual innuendo. That the type of love the Lord is giving us today is tenderness toward one another and to the lost of this city. It requires patience and concern as well as action to turn passivity into passion and compassion for those in need. Lord thank you for this deep abiding work today and thank you for answering our prayers in Jesus name, amen!

- Some of this information was taken from David Ferguson's book, "The Great Commandment Principle," and William Barclays, "The Gospel of Matthew," volume two-revised edition. Of the Daily Study Bible series.

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