

The Greatest Command

The Gospel According to Mark Part 23

Mark 12:28-34

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Do something great.

- Abraham Lincoln, as you all know, was president during the Civil War. Like today, a president could not just go somewhere public without getting bombarded with people everywhere. So whenever he wanted to and was able to go to church, a preacher named Dr. Gurley would let Lincoln sneak into the side door of his church building and sit in his study, which was located next to the worship room where he would preach, so that Lincoln could listen to the sermon discretely and not draw attention to himself. After one particular service as they were walking back to the White House, a friend who accompanied Lincoln asked, “What did you think of the sermon?” Lincoln answered, “Well, it was brilliantly conceived, biblical, relevant, and well presented.” And he asked again, “So, it was a great sermon?” “No,” Lincoln replied. “It failed. It failed because Dr. Gurley did not ask us to do something great.”²
- Today we will see that Jesus calls us to something great.
- We all want to do great things. We want lives full of purpose. We want lives of significance. We want to do meaningful things. We want to do great things!
- Greatness in the Kingdom of God is different from greatness in the world.
 - A short preface before we get into the text we’re looking at today
 - The definition of greatness in the kingdom of God and definition of greatness in the world are different.
 - Jesus already addressed this in the Gospel According to Mark.
 - *Mark 9:35* - “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”³ (Jesus’ words)
 - *Mark 10:43-44* - “[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” (Jesus’ words)
 - When you become a follower of Jesus, greatness looks different.
- Choose to do something great. Jesus has great plans for you.

¹ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the people of Hilltoppers for Christ were unable to gather in person. Therefore, the weekly teachings were recorded and posted online.

² Nelson Searcy, “What Makes A Great Sermon Great? Abraham Lincoln’s Opinion,” *Church Leader Insights*, accessed on February 7, 2018. <https://churchleaderinsights.com/what-makes-a-great-sermon-great-abraham-lincolns-opinion/>

³ All biblical references in this document are taken from the New International Version (NIV). *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI:Zondervan, 2011.

Mark 12:28-34

- This scene starts out with a teacher of the Law asking Jesus a question.
- **Mark 12:28** - 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?”
 - Of the 613 laws in the Torah, the teacher of the law asks Jesus which is the most important one.
 - This implies that some commands are more important or greater than others.
 - This was Jesus' response.
- **Mark 12:29-31 - 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.
 - Jesus answers the teacher of the law by quoting from *Deuteronomy 6:4-5*, the *Shema*.
 - *Shema* - is “hear” in Hebrew. These verses were repeated twice a day by first century Jews.⁴
 - *Mark 12:29-30* - Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
 - He also quoted *Leviticus 19:18*.
 - *Mark 12:31* - The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
- According to Jesus, the two most important things you can do is love God and love people. The most significant thing you can do is to love the Lord, the God of the Universe, your Creator, and to love the ones created in His Image. The greatest task of humanity is loving God and people well.
- **Mark 12:32-34 - 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.
 - Jesus says the Kingdom of God is close. In the Kingdom of God, the most important things you can do is to love God and people.
- The Kingdom of God is closely connected to this greatest command. (12:34)

⁴ Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others*, (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004), 298.

Do Something Great

- If there was one thing I wish for you personally, me personally, and for our church and campus ministry as a whole is this: that we would love God and love people more.
- I'm not sure how this applies to you personally. I'm going to offer several suggestions to love God and love people better: choose one of each
- Love God
 - Give God the first part of your day.
 - Read scripture
 - Research shows that the greatest indicator of spiritual growth and maturity is daily Bible reading
 - Bible reading plan (Project 51)
 - Spend time in prayer
 - Guided prayer
 - Prayers of scripture (prayers of Paul, the Psalms)
 - Journal your prayers
 - Make being a part of a Christian community a priority.
 - It is difficult to be a Christian by yourself.
 - God created us for community (maybe that's why we are to love people)
 - Make decisions with God in mind.
 - Ask yourself, "What is most honoring to God?"
- Love people
 - Change the way you look at people.
 - View your neighbors, family, coworkers, friends, and strangers, as people who are made in the Image of God.
 - They are so loved by and precious to God that He sent Jesus to die for them.
 - When was the last time you prayed for your roommates, friends, or family?
 - Spend quality time with people.
 - Serve people.
 - Share the Gospel with people.
- Even love yourself
 - You cannot "Love your neighbor as yourself" if you're not loving yourself.
 - Take care of yourself.
 - Know that you are beloved by God.
 - Remind yourself that you are forgiven.

- Do something great. We all want to live lives of significance. We want to do great things. You will do nothing greater in 2019 than loving God and loving his people.
 - Parents, the greatest thing your kids will do this year has nothing to do with grades or sports

God did something great.

- Not only does God call us to do something great. God did something great.
- God doesn't just command something arbitrarily. The greatest command is to love Him because God loves you.
- **1 John 4:7-12 - 7** Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
- Karl Barth - "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."