

A chess master was walking through an art museum when he came upon a painting entitled, "Checkmate." It depicted a cowering man playing a game of chess against a looming figure who represented Satan. The master stopped and gazed for a long time at the painting, noting the terror on the man's face and the smug satisfaction of his opponent. And then his gaze moved down to the chessboard and he examined the artist's rendition of the pieces on the board. But suddenly, the master cried out, "Wait, there is one more move!"

So it is with us. Last week we started looking at how we are made for a mission. We saw that sin sullies our hopes and stops us from getting to where God wants us to go. It makes us feel trapped and unsure of what we are to do. But we also saw that Jesus was able to step in. When everything around us was shouting "checkmate", he died on the cross, he purchased us for a purpose and he wants us to walk in his way.

But how do we do that? What is the most important thing that God wants us to do in our lives? Well one day, Jesus was asked that very question. In Mark 12 a teacher of the law came up to Jesus and said "Jesus out of all the commands of God what is the most important?" In other words what does God say is our top priority in life?

Now what is Jesus going to say? What would you say? You don't have four choices to choose from? You can't choose a 50:50 or ask to phone a friend? What would you choose as the most important thing in life? What should your greatest priority be?

Raising a family? Getting a fulfilling job? Being good to others? Being happy? Safe and secure? Comfortable? No Jesus doesn't give any of those answers, he says in v.29 the thing that is of first importance is to recognise who is your Lord.

1. LORD, Bob Dylan, once said in a song, "You've gotta serve someone. It may be the devil, it maybe yourself, but everyone's gotta serve someone." He's right, isn't he? We all have a lord. We all have someone who directs our life. It may be a person, a spouse, a member of your family. It may be a feeling - pleasure, guilt, love. It may be a goal - to succeed, to be rich, to climb the corporate ladder. But we all gotta serve someone. We all have a Lord.

So when Jesus is asked what the most important thing that God has ever said, he says make sure you know who your LORD is. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Remember people that the Lord is your God. Reflect on what He has done for you. He made you. He gave you all the qualities you needed. He placed you here for a purpose. He is the rightful Lord of your life.*

Your life then is not about YOU. Its about Him. Its not about what you want to do. Its what your Lord has told you to do. He alone is the only one that deserves your honour, your devotion and your worship. But why? Why Him over all the others? Because we have a history, *O Israel, the Lord is our God.*

God didn't just make you, he continued to reach out to you. He choose a people, the Israelites and he committed himself to them. So that through them all the world may know who God is. He sent them prophets, priests, kings. He saved them when they were in trouble. He forgave them when they went wrong. And eventually he sent his son Jesus into the world to die on the cross, to be risen to life on the third day, so that the whole world may have a chance to be part of God's

special people. So that everyone would have a chance to allow God to be their Lord.

Why should God be your Lord? Because God always makes the first move. God doesn't ever ask you to make the first move. He creates us. He saves us. He forgives us. He blesses us. He protects us. And then because of all these things, he says Hear O Israel make sure the Lord is your God.

But there is another reason, *for the Lord is one*. There are not thousands of equally powerful Lords. There are not competing gods on the celestial stage. There is not a fine balance between good and evil and so we don't really know who is going to win out in the end. The Lord is one. There is only one real God. All other gods will let you down. All other Lords will disappoint, they will fail to satisfy. For God has made you, designed you, put you together so that life is lived to the full when he is your Lord.

Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonalds Restaurants was once asked what the most important things in his life were. And he said "my priorities are God first, family second and McDonald's hamburgers third." Which is a great answer if he had stopped there. But he then continued, "And when I go to work on Monday morning, that order reverses."

Friends this is the first question we have to ask ourselves when we come to the purpose of our lives. Who is our Lord? Whose the boss? Who comes first? And let me tell you, if it isn't the Lord, our God then we will never even get to the starting blocks in the race of life. The place to start is making God our Lord, not because there is something in it for me, but because of what he has done for me. But then Jesus continues, we need to

2. LOVE our LORD. Look with at verse 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.*"

The most important command that God gives involves LOVE. A group of 4 to 8 year-olds were once asked: "What does love mean?" They said this....

* Love is when you go out to eat and you give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.

* When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.

* Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Tom Cruise.

* Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.

Jesus says that we should LOVE God with ALL our HEART. Which means we need to love Him passionately. God doesn't want your duty. He wants your desire. God doesn't want you to say – "Oh, okay. I better do what God says." He doesn't want ritual and religion and rules and regulation. He wants a relationship. And He's passionate about it! And He says, "I want you to love Me as much as I love you, because I made you and I created you."

W.E. Sangster was a minister interviewing potential candidates for the ministry within the Methodist Church. And one specific pastoral candidate admitted that he was shy and quiet, and in the course of the interview, he stated that he would probably never set the Thames on fire, meaning he probably wouldn't turn a community upside down. Sangster's response was "I'm not interested to know if you can set the Thames on fire. What I want to know is this: If I picked you

up by the scruff of the neck and dropped you into the Thames, would it sizzle?"

God wants us to sizzle, to love him with all of our heart, *and* with all of our soul. All of our inner being, all we truly are needs to be given to God. Not just our actions, but our being. Nor just the outward appearance, but the inside. We need to love him with all our heart and all our soul *and* all our mind.

Jesus says, we must love God thoughtfully. In other words, He wants you to think things through, to not just do things without thinking. He wants you to worship Him thoughtfully, know and love Him thoughtfully. He doesn't just want you to come to Church and switch off. To sing hymns and put your mind into neutral. He doesn't want us to just believe what our parents told us, or our minister told us.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind *and* with all your strength. Our love has to be a practical love. It is not just good enough to say to God I love you, in the same way it is not just good enough to say to our spouse I love you. We need to back it up with actions, with sacrifices, with putting the other first.

What Jesus is saying is that God wants all of you. Not just a part of your life, but all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. God is not just interested in half hearted commitment, partial obedience, or the leftovers of your time and money. God desires your full devotion.

3. LIFE Which leads us to Jesus next point. Who is your Lord? Love your LORD, yes, but Love your Lord with all your LIFE. Because you show your love for God, not just in how you treat God Himself, but how you treat God's creation. How you deal with those he made in his own image. How you use the resources that he has put in your trust, in your possession. That's why Jesus goes on and says in verse 30, *'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* *There is no commandment greater than these."*

You see you show your love for God in the way that you love your neighbour. For as the apostle John says, *"For anyone who doesn't love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."*

Which just means that everything we do needs to be tinged with love. Not just your relationship with God, not just the spiritual things in your life, but everything. Everything you do whether it is worshipping in Church, or washing the dishes. Whether it is reading your Bible or putting out the garbage, needs to be done in a loving attitude. And needs to be done in a way that God's love for you is either returned back to God or allowed to flow through to those around you.

Our first purpose in life then is to love the Lord our God with everything we have. As Martin Luther once said "A dairy maid can milk cows for the glory of God." Or a housewife can sweep the floors as an act of worship to God. A businessman can run his business so well and in such a moral way that it becomes an offering to God. An athlete can train hard and do his best for God.

You see when we consciously use our gifts and abilities and give them over to God and then do our best, then that is an act of love to God. It is also a spiritual act of worship. He enjoys seeing his sons and daughters give everything over to Him. And in return we enjoy not only the challenge of doing something to the best of our ability, we find that God's strength and God's patience and God's perseverance and God's help is available to us, every second of every day. And that means we enjoy doing things in God's presence, we enjoy the daily tasks that God sets before us.

So in life it's less about what you do that matters; it is who you do it for. It's not what you do that matters; it's whether you give it all to God. Which means all of your work can be turned to worship. I don't care if you're a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker. You can do it for God. You say, "I'm going to do this as if I'm doing it for you, God."

Do you want to live a life of purpose? Then live a life of love for your lord. Wake up each day and say to God, "Help me Lord to show my love for you in the way that I treat my family. Help me Lord to show my devotion to you by today seeking first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness and then letting you look after the other things that you know that I need. Help me Lord, to love my neighbour the way that you have loved me so that your love will reach everyone that I come into contact with today.

So let me just end with one more thought. Jesus lived out what he commanded that day. He showed people God's love in word and in action. He committed himself daily to doing his Father's will not just his own will. He even died on the cross, he offered himself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Yes Jesus did that, but he did it all of his life, not just the last three years of life when he was involved in his public ministry. Have you ever thought about that? The first 30 years of his life he was a son in a family, a cousin down the road, an apprentice carpenter in his dad's shop, a tradesman in his own right. Even when he was doing these things, he was loving God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. And so when he left his carpenter's bench, the type of work he did changed, but the way he did it, didn't!

Friends the most important commandment is that we love our Lord with all our Life. That was how you and I were made. That's our first priority. That's our real purpose in life. So tell me when we leave this building will that be our aim or will you and I settle for second best?