

April 17, 2005

Planned For God's Pleasure – Worship Mark 12:28-34

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One day Jesus was dealing with men from at least three different special interest groups all trying to trap or trick him into saying something they could use against him. While Jesus was brilliantly answering their questions, a man nearby was struck by the wisdom of Jesus answers so he decided to ask Jesus a sincere question that was vitally important to him, “What’s the most important command in the entire Bible?” Listen to Mark 12:28-34:

“One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘**Which commandment is the first of all?**’

Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;

You shall 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 second is this, ‘**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**’

There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ – this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that answered wisely, he said to him,

“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

After that no one dared to ask him any question.”

Last week we talked about how God created us to love us. This week we’re looking at the first purpose of life, **which is God wants us to love the Lord in return. My first purpose in life is to worship God. Worship is knowing God and loving God back.** The word “worship” is often misunderstood, people associate worship with a church building or with singing a certain kind of music, or with a ritual or communion or a style of prayer with which they are comfortable. **Worship is my response to God’s love.** Jesus says we are to love the Lord our God in 3 ways:

First, we are to love God **thoughtfully**. We love God with our mind. We worship God thoughtfully. Second, we are to love God **passionately**. We love God with all our heart and soul. Third we are to love God **practically** with all our strength, with all our abilities. Even though God created the entire world and the universe and you, there are three things God can't have unless we give them: our attention, affection, and abilities.

Whenever we take what God has given us and give it back to God that is worship.

Worship is focusing my attention on God. It's focusing my mind, my thoughts, my attention on God. To focus our mind on someone or something takes energy. God wants our focus because God loves us and is focused on us. People however are easily distracted, we can get out of focus in a hurry. We get distracted from focusing on God because we are self-centered and we live in a self-centered culture. We have to choose to focus on God. We can do this in several ways; one is to have a set time each day when we choose to give God our undivided attention. For some folks this is best in the morning, for others the middle of the day or evening, it doesn't really matter when. A second thing we can do is to live life in a constant conversation with God. Focusing on God is beneficial because focusing on our selves often results in thoughts of worry, insecurity, anxiety, guilt, fear, or discouragement. Focusing on God we begin to sense hope, peace, love, gratitude, and confidence.

Worship is not only focusing my attention on God, it's also **expressing our affection** to God, loving God with our heart and soul. For some people this is more difficult than others, if you grew up in a family that wasn't very affectionate, didn't say, "I love you" a lot. We need to learn to say, "I love you God." Do you remember the first time you ever said, "*I love you*" to somebody who wasn't a member of your family? Probably scared you to death. Your palms were sweaty, your stomach was in a knot. You were all nervous...is she going to accept it or is he going to reject it, are they going to say it back to me. It's risky to say, "*I love you,*" because you don't exactly know how the other person feels about you. The reassuring thing about God is that the Lord's taken away the risk. **God says, "I love you," to us first.** We don't have to guess or wonder or worry about how God feels about us. **The most important thing you can know in life**

is that God loves you and the most important thing you can do in life is to love God in return. That's why it's called the first or greatest commandment.

When you get up in the morning, before you even get completely out of bed, you can say a little prayer like, *“God if I don't get anything else done today, at the end of this day, I want to know you a little bit better and I want to love you a little bit more.”* If you do that, at the end of your day, no matter how bad the day has gone, if at the end of the day, you know God a little bit better and you love God a little bit more, that day was a success.

If, however, you accomplish 24 things on your to do list and reach high achievements and goals, but at the end of the day, you don't know God a little bit better and you don't love God a little bit more, then that day was not used as God desires. God has deep passionate feelings for us and God longs for a relationship with us. Husbands and wives are to love each other passionately, not out of a sense of duty or obligation. In the same way, God doesn't want duty from us God wants desire.

God doesn't want, “Time to go to worship. O How I love you, God.” (Said in a flat, monotone). God doesn't want ritual and rules and regulation God wants a relationship. God says, *“I want you to love Me as much as I love you.”* **Our problem is not that we don't love God enough. Our problem is we don't realize how much God loves us.** If you knew how much God loves you, you would say, *“How could I not love a God like that?”*

And the greatest way we express our love to God is to give our selves to God. When a husband and wife stand in front of each other and say vows they commit themselves to giving themselves completely to each other. The essence of love is giving. **We can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving.** What holds us back from giving our life completely to God? The answer in one word is **“fear.”** We're chicken, we're afraid, “If I give my life completely to God, will God turn me into some kind of religious nut case?” Well let me tell you that **God wants spiritual fruit and not religious nuts.**

So worship is focusing my attention on God with my mind. It is expressing my affection to God with my heart and soul. And worship is **using my abilities** for God. **This is loving God with all our strength.** In a healthy marriage, husbands and wives

understand it takes more than just words or hugs or kisses to express affection. There are also more practical expressions of love – like taking out the garbage, making a meal, cleaning the kitchen, doing a load of laundry, filling the car with gas (this is becoming not only a practical expression of love, but depending on your vehicle it is also the equivalent of a nice evening out). When we love someone we show it in practical ways – helping, serving, sharing, fixing, those kinds of things. And we look to do them all the time. That’s also part of our worship.

Colossians 3:23 says, “*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.*” If you get that verse, it will revolutionize your life. “*Whatever you do,*” – that means anything - *work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.*” To love God doesn’t mean you need five hours of prayer everyday; you don’t have to go live in a monastery, or spend all week here at the church building. **You just change whom you’re working for, from now on you’re working for God.** When our family was traveling in February, we went via the airport in Houston. We went to get something to eat at a food court and as we were deciding what we wanted, I couldn’t help but notice a young man at the pizza place, he was probably a teenager or at most in his very early 20’s. He was animated, engaged, alive, calling out to people throwing slices of pizza in the air and catching them on a paper plate before he slid it over the counter to a customer. I said to Nathan and Greg, “That guy is going to be successful in life because he understands he doesn’t just work for a pizza company for an hourly wage, he is giving his very best. I mean if a pizza guy was working it for God, this young man was. The very next food option had three employees all of whom had their backs to potential customers. It was so uninviting and not surprisingly they had no business at all while the line for the pizza place went around the corner.

In life it is not so much what you do that matters, it’s whom you do it for. You can be a teacher, a chef, a plumber, a painter, a landscaper, a business person, a carpet cleaner, an attorney, an insurance agent, a real estate agent, manage a property, a stay at home mom or dad. **It’s not so much what you do. It’s who you do it for.** I know some of you are hoping God will give you clear guidance about your career, should I do this or that. I think we have a lot more freedom to do many different sorts of things

with the gifts and abilities God has given us, the more important thing is are you doing it for God. If you're good at repairing things, repair things like you were doing it for God. If you're good at cooking, cook like you're making the meal for Jesus.

If you decided today, "God, tomorrow morning, I'm going to get up and I'm going back to my tasks or my work and it's the same old work I've been doing for years, but tomorrow I'm going back to work with a new boss. I'm going to do it for you." That will turn mundane, trivial things into worship. **Real worship is a lifestyle.**

The truth is we become like what we worship. Everybody worships something. You can go to any culture in the world and find people worshipping. If we don't worship God, we will worship something else. The TV show "American Idol" is very popular, but there are thousands of idols that Americans worship all the time. Whatever we are giving our primary attention to, whatever you're giving your primary affection to, and whatever your giving your abilities to – that's what you worship. Some folks worship their career, some worship making money, some worship pleasure, or a person. Our calendar and our checkbook are theological documents that reveal what we love because the way we spend our time and the way we spend our money shows what we love the most.

The Bible says the greatest temptation is to worship something other than God. Whenever we love something more than God, we're going to have stress and problems, chaos and conflict in our life. When we love comfort more than doing the right thing, we get into trouble. When I love protecting my ego more than God and humility, I'm going down the wrong path. When I love my reputation, when I love money, when I love pleasure, when I love anything more than God, it creates havoc in my life.

We know worshipping something other than God is the greatest temptation because it is the one Satan pulled on Jesus. He said, "*Why don't you worship something else?*" The biggest temptation in life is to worship something other than God, to give our attention, affection, and abilities to something other than the Creator who made us and loves us. If we focus our attention and we express our affection and use our abilities for the one who made us, we give God pleasure.

The Academy Award winning film *Chariots of Fire* tells the story of Eric Liddell, the son of missionaries who was also an excellent athlete. He wrestles with God's purpose for his life in light of the gifts God has given him. Should he return to the mission field in China or should he run in God's name in the hope of perhaps making the Olympics. Eric Liddell wanted to give God pleasure. In the film, his sister is portrayed as not being very supportive of his running, which was not the case at all in real life; Eric's whole family took great delight in his running, as did the Lord.

(Showed clip, 70 seconds, of Eric saying, "I believe God made me for a purpose, for China. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.")

Eric Liddell had an unorthodox running style and when he really got into his fastest gear he felt God's joy and pleasure and he put his head way back in exhilaration as he ran. Eric did qualify for the Olympics in Paris, but chose not to run in the 100 meters because the initial heat was on a Sunday. He did however, run in the 400.

(Showed clip of Liddell winning the 400 in the Olympics).

Eric Liddell went on to be a missionary and he died in occupied China at the end of World War II. All of Scotland mourned. On his deathbed, his last words were heard by the nurse attending to him and they were, "**It is complete surrender.**"

That is true worship and what brings God pleasure, when we surrender our lives completely and make it our goal to love God with all of our mind, all our heart and soul and all our strength.

Let's pray: Loving God all of us here today are at different stages in our spiritual journey. Help us each to take the next step we need to take. Help us to remember we wouldn't exist if it weren't for you. Forgive us for all the times we think and act like You don't matter. May we never forget that you made us so you could love us and the first purpose of my life is to know and love you back. Forgive us for not worshiping You more passionately or completely. I want to learn to focus my attention, affection, and abilities on you. I want to love you the way you deserve to be loved thoughtfully with my mind, passionately with my heart and soul and practically with my strength. I want you to be my boss and to turn my work into worship. When I do my work on Monday, I'm going to be doing it for you as if you were my boss.

If you've never opened your life to Jesus, you can also pray, "Jesus, thank you for giving your life for me. As much as I know how, I want to give my life back to You. In Your name, I pray. Amen."