**Matthew 22:34-40**

Introduction

I. Connecting this series on Matthew 22 with our last series on Romans 8

A. Overflow: We must fill our lives with God’s love and faithfulness (Romans 8), so that the overflow of that will be our love for others (Matthew 22)

B. Galatians 5:6: “What counts is faith (Romans 8) expressing itself through love” (Matthew 22)

II. This is a very foundational and basic series where we are simply being reminded of what we already know

The Passage

I. The Pharisees’ Question (v. 34-36)

A. They are clearly trying to trap him

B. Their question is this: of all the 613 commands in the OT, which is most important?

II. Jesus’ answer

A. The answer

1. Love the Lord your God (Dt 6:5)

2. Love your neighbor (Lev 19:18)

3. Notice this is really just one command (love) with two expressions. In Jesus’ mind, you can’t really separate these two commands (see 1 John 4:20)

B. Jesus drives home the point that love is the most important thing

1. He actually answers the Pharisees’ question directly. It is so rare for him to do that, so he must want everyone to be absolutely clear on the answer.

2. He calls love both the “greatest” and the “first” commandment (v. 38)

a. The greatest = love is the most important; love takes priority over all other commands

b. The first = love is the source and foundation for all the other commands

3. He gives a word picture

a. The law and the prophets “hang” on these two commands (v. 40)

b. Imagine 2 closet hangers with a shawl draped through both of them

c. The law and the prophets = the entire story of the Old Testament = God’s plan of redemption from Genesis to Malachi

d. So Jesus is saying that when God created the world and set this story in motion what he had in mind = to create people who Love him and love each other. And when God has finished this story (new heaven and new earth) what will he have= people who love him and love each other

4. So, in various ways Jesus is saying: the whole point of life is LOVE

III. Other passages confirm the priority of love

A. Romans 13:9-10

Love “fulfills” all the other commands. So if you had never heard any of the other commands but simply obeyed the command “love your neighbor as yourself” you would end up obeying all the other commands in the process.

B. John 13:9-10

Love is THE distinguishing marker of Jesus followers (not their doctrine, politics, religious activity, etc.)

B. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

You can do a lot of amazing things but if missing love, you’re missing the whole point

IV. Prioritizing love in our lives

A. What is the goal of your life? What drives you?

-Self-actualization, adventure and fun, approval, comfort & safety & pleasure, ambition (to make something of yourself in this world)

B. God’s goal for our lives is that we learn to love well

1. God’s goal for your life as whole is to turn you into a loving person.

a. The fruit of the Spirit’s work in our lives is first and foremost love

b. The goal of spiritual maturity is becoming a more loving person (that’s more important than knowledge, leadership experience, skills acquisition, etc.)

c. “When I first see a client in my office the yardstick I use to determine their level of maturity is the yardstick of love. How free are they to love others?” –Bob Hughes

d. How do you measure your own spiritual maturity?

e. How can you pursue your religious activity and your spiritual disciplines with the goal of becoming a more loving person (e.g. Bible study, church attendance, etc.)

Important implications for how we pursue our spiritual life with God

f. This explains why God appears to sometimes work slowly in certain areas. He may allow certain issues to remain in our lives because removing them immediately wouldn’t help shape us into more loving people

2. God’s goal for you in any particular situation is that you love well

a. No matter what specific situation you are facing, loving well will always be the most important priority in that moment. Loving well will always trump whatever personal agenda or outcome you might desire.

b. This week take time to simply notice what is driving you in any given circumstance: what is your goal? What is your agenda? And where does simply loving well in that moment fit within that goal/agenda?

**Discussion Questions**

1. The topic of love is obviously a very familiar one for most of us. What struck you from Sunday’s message that was either a new perspective or that was a good reminder of an old perspective?

2. In our passage Jesus says that all the law and prophets “hang” on the two love commands. Discuss what you think he means by that. Likewise in Romans 13:9-10, Paul says that love of neighbor both “sums up” and “fulfills” all the laws. Discuss what you think he means by that.

3. On Sunday the question was asked: “What is the goal of your life? What motivates you and drives you each day?” Several possible answers were given (See IV. A. above). How would you answer that question for yourself?

4. On Sunday it was argued that God’s primary goal for your life is to turn you into a loving person. Accordingly, the Christian counselor Bob Hughes says, “When I first see a client in my office the yardstick I use to determine their level of maturity is the yardstick of love. How free are they to love others?” In your experience, what keeps people from loving well? That is, what is it they need to be freed from?

5. In every specific circumstance of your life, God’s main priority for you is that you love well. As you consider walking through the specific circumstances of any given day, how does God’s priority sit with you and what issues does it raise in you?