

## Sermon Notes – June 13, 2021

(Matthew 22:34-40)

Let me give you a little background on the scripture passage before I go into my sermon. The Sadducees had come to Jesus asking him a question. Moses said in the Jewish law that if a man had been married, had no children, and he died that his wife is to be married to his brother, so that they could have children. Well, a man had six other brothers and the wife had married all seven and they didn't have any children. They all died and then the wife died. The Sadducees asked Jesus, "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" Jesus said, "In heaven, there is no marriage. We are all like angels and children in heaven. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I am the God of the living, not the dead." You see, the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, but the Pharisees did. So, the Pharisees were happy that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, but it didn't stop them. They came back and asked, "Jesus, what is the greatest of the commandments?" (*Now, keep in mind, they had the Ten Commandments and they also had 613 laws.*) Can you imagine? They had 365 negative laws and 248 that were positive. But, out of those laws, they considered some of them the least important and the most important. "Jesus, which one is the most important?" And Jesus said, "They can all be summarized in these two sentences: Love God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind and love your neighbor as yourself."

I heard an interesting story about an 85-year-old man who was married to a 40-year-old woman; this was his second marriage and he loved his wife dearly. He asked her one day, "Honey, if the stock market crashes and I lose all my millions, will you still love me?" She said, "Big guy, I'll still love you, but I'm going to miss you around here a lot." Our love is sometimes conditional, isn't it? Ours is finite. We often love "if you do this for me" or "because you do that for me." God's love is, "I love you (period). I love you just as you are. I love you (period)." He doesn't put the conditions on it, like we do.

***Love is at the center of our faith.*** The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13 said, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but have not love, I

am just a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal.” God created us because he loved us and wanted to be in relationship with us. In 1 John, John the Apostle says, “We love because God loved us first.” We love because he loved us first. He wanted a relationship with us. Love is at the center of our faith, and Jesus calls people to love him with all their being. In the Old Testament (in Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 18), the people had been taught to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. *Love is at the center of our faith.*

***But, love is also essential to our physical and emotional well-being***, isn't it? There was a study done in South America many years ago of some little children that had been abandoned. They were 3-months old to 3 years of age. They were taken in by an orphanage; they fed those kids; they clothed them; and they gave them all the necessary medical help they needed. But, what they noticed was that they didn't have enough people to hold, cuddle, play with, and love those kids. Guess what happened? ... In two years, they began to see the children's appetites decrease; they also began to see the kids be stymied in their physical and emotional growth. As time went on, some of those little kids died - all because they didn't have love. They didn't have somebody to hold them, cuddle them, talk with them, or play with them.

John Ortberg, who is a Presbyterian Minister in Menlo Park, California, once told a story about some Harvard sociologists and psychologists who studied a group of people in Alameda County, California. They studied these people for 8-10 years. They were people who were poorer than most of the population, but they studied them to see how they dealt with life, love, and relationships. What they found out was that the people who were the most socially isolated (disconnected from friends and family), were three times more likely to die sooner than those who had healthy relational connections. They also found that those same people who had poor health habits (obesity, drug use, alcohol abuse, etc.), but had some strong relational connections, lived longer than those who ate healthy, lived alone, and had few friends. John Ortberg made a funny comment about that. He said, “Well, I guess it's better to eat Twinkies with a few good friends than to eat healthy broccoli alone.” Well, what it

says is that love is essential to our physical and emotional well-being. We all need to be loved by people and to have connections.

***I also want to say that love is our primary calling as followers of Jesus Christ.*** In John 13, Jesus said, “By this will all people know that you are my disciples – if you have love one for another.” There’s a story that I read about several years ago about a woman who lived in Birmingham, Alabama. She went shopping one Saturday. She was in one of the main department stores in downtown Birmingham. It was a cold, winter day and she saw this little boy who was out trying to sell newspapers on the street corner. It was cold and he was not clothed for the cold weather. He had no shoes or socks on. Moved by compassion, the woman went up to the little boy and asked, “Son, where are your shoes and socks?” He said, “I don’t have any.” She said, “Come with me.” The little boy took his money bag, but left his papers, and followed her into the store. She took him in and bought him several pair of thick socks and a brand new pair of shoes. As he went out the door, he says, “Thank you, ma’am.” All of a sudden, he turned, before he closed the door, and he said, “Ma’am, are you God?” She said, “No, but I am one of his children.” He said, “I knew you must be kin to him because he’s supposed to be kind, compassionate, and generous.” You are one of his children. May we remember that love is our primary calling as followers of Jesus.

I want to share, not only that love is the center of our faith, love is essential to our physical and emotional well-being, love is our primary calling as disciples of Christ, but I would also like to share with you from a book called, “The Love Languages of God” by Dr. Gary Chapman. I hope, if you ever get a chance, that you will go back and read that book. Dr. Gary Chapman is a Christian Educator, Minister, and Marriage Counselor. Many years ago, he wrote a book called, “The Five Love Languages of Couples.” He went on to write one called, “The Love Languages of Children and Teenagers.” And then, a few years later, he wrote one called, “The Love Languages of God.” In what he says in each of those books is that each of us has a primary love language – how we feel loved, and he describes the five love languages: *quality time, acts of service, words of affirmation, gifts, and physical touch.* He says that one

of those languages speaks directly to us and we feel most loved by people. We also use that gift to speak it to other people, and to reflect our love to God.

The problem comes, sometimes, when we are a little different as couples or friends. For example, he gives an illustration of a couple named Reuben and Patsy. Reuben's love language was words of affirmation. He was always writing love notes to his wife, poems, sticking notes in her coffee mug, or the car or whatever. But, her love language was acts of service. She was the one who was quiet and introverted. She didn't share much, but when she did speak, it was kind of critical and negative. So, you can imagine that didn't speak too much to Reuben's love language when she was critical. Her love language was acts of service, and she just wanted him to take out the trash occasionally, or take the car to the shop to be serviced, or empty the dishes out of the dishwasher some time. She said, "That would've shown me his love, not all these words! Words just don't get me."

I want you to know that each of us has a primary love language that we use to show God how we love him. Have you ever thought about gifts? God is a supreme gift-giver. He gave us his Son, Jesus Christ... "For God so loved ... he gave ..." He gave us rain, sunshine, the beautiful creation we have, talents and skills, life and breath. He's the supreme gift-giver. Have you ever been to somebody's home where you can't leave without them giving you something? They're giving you tomatoes from the garden, a book, a slice of cake, a piece of bread, a picture, or something to give you. Those whose love languages are gifts, probably give back to God -- gifts -- whether it be the gift of their time, their money, or whatever.

Those whose primary love language is "words of affirmation" may be those who sing, read, etc. I heard a cute story about a man who was from a small country church that was informal in its setting. He went to visit a friend of his who lived in a large city and went to a big downtown church that was formal in worship. He said that he sat down and was amazed at the preacher's message on salvation. All of a sudden, he shouted,

“Amen!” Two ushers at the back of the church said, “Who does he think he is?” The preacher said something else, and the man said, “Hallelujah!” and raised his hands. One of the ushers went and sat beside him. He said, “Sir, you’ve got to be quiet or leave this church.” He said, “Sir, I can’t. I just can’t. I’ve experienced religion. I just can’t help it.” The usher said, “Well, you didn’t get it here.” Well, I hope that’s not true of you – I hope you got it here! Sometimes, words speak to us in a song, in scripture, in a sermon, a play, etc.

I heard another story about a young man (about twenty-years of age) who was having trouble with his parents. He was alienated and separated from them. He was trying to find himself and went off into another town. He was in a small motel, was lonely, and was reflecting on his relationship with his parents. He said, “I reached into the night stand, where I found a Gideon’s Bible and started reading it.” In Jeremiah 31, it said, “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you to me with loving kindness.” That was exactly what the young man needed to hear at that time. He kept reading the scriptures, and, as he read, he said he began to want a relationship with Jesus Christ. He asked Jesus to come into his heart and life. Words reached him.

Have you ever noticed that some people, when you are singing or saying certain things or whatever, they say they feel the presence or the touch of God physically? They may have tears in their eyes, joy in their hearts, or big smiles on their faces. They’ve experienced the presence of God through words and music. Some of us show our love for God physically; some through words of affirmation; some through gifts; some through acts of service.

Have you ever met people who just have to be doing something all the time? They’re going to be doing something for you or other people. I heard about a lady who was complaining about her husband being retired. She said, “Peggy, he’s always got to be doing something. He’s carrying food to ECCCM, helping at Habitat for Humanity, working in the garden or the yard, etc. He’s always got to be doing something for somebody else!” Acts of service. Think of a good example in the Bible:

Mary and Martha. Do you remember Jesus came to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? Martha is in the kitchen slaving away and Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Martha says, "Jesus, make her come in here and help me." Jesus said, "What Mary is doing is okay. It's good. She's sitting here, listening to me." *What Mary was doing was spending quality time with Jesus - listening, learning. Martha was doing acts of service - in the kitchen cooking, and that was her way of showing her love for God and others. Mary wanted to spend quality time with Jesus.* Often those who say their love language is quality time are those who want to spend time reading the Bible, praying, studying, meditating, and worshipping. But, it's also true in relationships, isn't it? Some of us want quality time with our spouse, a friend, etc.

Dr. Gary Chapman said he had a couple who came to see him one day and she said, "Dr. Chapman, I want a divorce from my husband." He said, "Well, come in and sit down. Let's talk about it." She sat down and talked about it. He said, "Why do you want a divorce?" She said, "All he does is work all the time. He never has time to talk to me and ask me how I'm doing." He said, "Bring your husband next week and you tell him what you told me." So, she did and they came in. She said, "Honey, I want a divorce." He said, "What do you mean? Don't I work every day? Don't I give you money? Don't I mow the grass and take care of the cars?" She said, "Yeah, but you never have time to just sit down and talk with me." Dr. Chapman said, "I want you guys to do an experiment. For the next three weeks, I want you to spend 10-15 minutes a day just talking with each other - what you've done during the day, how you are doing, etc." About six weeks later, he still hadn't seen the lady come back, so he thought they had gotten a divorce. He finally saw them at church and he asked the wife how things were going - if they had gotten a divorce? She said, "No, we did not get a divorce. I am the happiest that I've ever been in my life!" The husband said, "I wish I had learned sooner that a few minutes of talking each day would've made all the difference in my marriage."

I want you to read that book sometime, if you get a chance, because it shows us how to love God. I used to be critical of people that don't do

things the way I do. Aren't we all a little bit that way? We think they should do it this way or do it that way. ***We all love and show our love to God in a different way.*** Jesus said, "Love me with all your heart, your mind, your soul" however you show that love - whether in quality time, acts of service, words of affirmation, "I love you" - "I appreciate you" - "Thank you, God" - gifts to God, or physically with touching or hugging people. God wants us to show our love to him. But, it's a two-sided coin - if you love God, you are going to love your neighbor. In 1 John, he says, "If you say you love God and hate your brother, you are a liar" - because God is love. If we love God, we are going to learn to love our brother - and if we love our brother, we are loving God. Jesus says, "Love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself."

And, I close with this part: The Pharisees thought when Jesus said, "Love your neighbor," that it meant another Pharisee. But, he was talking about your enemy, those at your workplace, school, or in your family who you have a hard time with - he's talking about ALL people, no matter what their race, nationality, or anything else. ***And, I have to say, with all that's going on in our world right now, I think we all have to grow in loving one another, because Jesus Christ challenges our assumptions and pushes our boundaries and calls us out of our comfort zone.*** Today, he asks us to, "Love him," and as we grow in loving him, we grow in loving one another - and vice-versa. May we grow in loving him and one another. Amen.