



# CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

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## **The Meaning of Life – Part 2**

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While we're getting ready to give our offerings here, I just wanted to take a minute just to remind us all one more time of the fact that next weekend is the greatest day of hope in Christianity. It's a great day because it's filled with energy and joy. It's a little bit more than the usual, and it should be. Easter is the one event in the history of the world that gives mankind its greatest hope, and so we get a little giddy around here at Easter.

Yet it's important for us to know it does require a little bit of cooperation here at Canyon Hills to make it work. There are going to be six services, as you've been hearing for the last several weeks: two on Saturday, and four on Sunday. In order for Easter to actually work, we have to convince many of you to come on Saturday night.

Make that your weekend service of choice, just because the greatest fear that your pastor and elders have is that you will all come to the same service at the same time. That would be nothing short of a disaster, so we just want to spare you a little bit of the stress on Easter. If you can at all make Saturday your choice, that would be so helpful.

Also, if you could park at the Park & Ride a couple hundred yards down the road, we are going to run some extra shuttles and we will get you here on time, stress-free (we hope). All of that helps. I know some of you are very willing and able to do that with us, so thank you for that.

Let's get our Bibles open now to Mark, chapter 12. Today is part 2 of what we started together last week. The context is a very short but profound conversation that Jesus had with a highly regarded and educated Jewish attorney. In a moment of vulnerability, this religious leader asked Jesus, "Jesus, what is the greatest commandment? Jesus, can you clarify once and for all what is most important to God?"

As I said last week, I can't prove it from the text, but I think the underlying tone of the question is actually sincere, because there were 613 religious laws and rules the exhausted Jewish people were trying to keep. At the time, the rabbis were relentless and ruthless at pointing out the shortcomings and failures of the people.

They had all but stripped away grace, mercy, and joy from their religion, and God was no longer someone to know. God was no longer someone to love, trust, and delight in. God was someone to avoid. God had become someone you just needed to keep off your back. Once again, I want to warn you, if you ever find yourself thinking or feeling that way about God, you have a theology problem; you don't have a God problem. That is not the God of the Bible. That's exactly what had happened in Jesus' day. God had just become someone to avoid.

Jesus mercifully answers him. I believe what comes from the mouth of Jesus are two of the greatest things that give our lives the most meaning, hope, and purpose for living every day. With that said and with that catch-up, let's stand for the reading of God's Word, as we always do, out of just sheer respect that this is God's Word and he is going to speak to us now through it. We're going to pick it up in verse 28, right where we left off last Sunday.

**"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the most important of all?'"**

**Jesus answered, 'The most important is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And 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.'**

**And the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 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, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions."**

Father in heaven, I thank you for the truthfulness of the words of Christ. I pray, God, now, that you will help us feel the weight of them. Help us, God, to understand what they mean. Give us courage to believe them. God, increase our faith to trust in these words of Christ. God, I pray that by the time this is all over we will be changed, we will know you better, and we will love and trust you more.

I pray, God, for those who are standing all around us right now whose hearts are heavy for all kinds of other reasons than being here today. I just pray that you will meet them in this place right now, that they will be overwhelmed with the knowledge of your presence, love, care, and comfort. God, help them to know, believe, and trust that you will walk with them every step going forward. I pray this in Christ's name, amen.

Last week, we spent our whole time on the first half of Jesus' response to this guy. We said last week that when you boil down being a Christian to one transcendent truth, it's *to faithfully and fearfully love God more than anyone and anything*. This was our first point last Sunday. That

was the point of Christ in the first half of his answer. The greatest and most important thing you can do is to love God first and most.

We talked a lot about what means and we gave several reasons for why there is nothing and no one else in all the world that can give us the meaning and give our lives the joy and purpose that only loving God can. We were actually created to live this way. There's no other reason for being alive that compares to this. When you think about this commandment to love God more than anyone and anything else in the world, it really is the one commandment alone that saves us from the self-destructive forces of making ourselves the central object of our own love.

This is the one thing that frees us from the destruction of thinking and attempting to love ourselves above everyone and everything else. It's a message our world constantly throws at us, and it is a message that doesn't work. Here, God gives it clear. Your greatest hope and meaning is not to love you; it's to love the one who loves you most, and that would be him.

I want to focus today on the second half of the answer. It's interesting. This guy asked Jesus, "What's the greatest commandment?" and Jesus gave him two. I love it here because at the end of verse 31, he says, "**There is no other commandment...**" (Singular.) "**...greater than these.**" (Plural.) These two commandments actually form one commandment, because it's impossible to separate the two.

The first answer, which we talked about last week, that we love God first and most, is actually the summation of the first four of the Ten Commandments. The second answer, to love our neighbor as ourselves, is the summation of the remaining six commandments. This is, again, part of the true meaning of life, which is simple.

1. *Love my neighbor as myself.* Once again, Jesus quotes right out of the Old Testament. He answers the man from his own Scriptures. It was there all along. The first answer was in Deuteronomy. This answer is out of Leviticus 19. It had been in their Scriptures. They had just buried the answer beneath an avalanche of all their own rules and definitions.

Jesus is pointing out here that loving people is the most natural outgrowth of loving God. We have no claim to love God or to believe in God and be consistently mean, selfish, harsh, abusive, dishonest, hypocritical, immoral, or sexually promiscuous toward our fellow human beings. The leadership of the Jewish religion of which this guy was a part were notorious for being most, if not all, of those things. So, Jesus clarifies for this guy that loving God and our neighbors is what matters most to God.

Now, if that's true, and we believe it to be, then I want to approach it the same way we did last Sunday. First, let's answer the question...*Why is loving our neighbors as ourselves the most important thing?* Secondly, let's answer the question...*Who are our neighbors?* Thirdly...*How are we supposed to love them?* Let's just deal with it in that line of reasoning.

A. *Why love my neighbor as myself?* I think Scripture gives us three very biblical motivations for this. There are some good reasons why the whole law of God and all the commandments of God

can be summarized to include this. Let's start with the most obvious. Why love my neighbor as myself?

First, *because God loves our neighbors*. It's so obvious, it's almost embarrassing to include it as a point in the message, but we are talking about motivation. Every human being is created in the image of God. Out of all of God's wonderful, amazing creation, humanity is the only part of his creation that he has crowned with his likeness and his image. You are the only part of creation that God determined to stamp his image and his likeness into.

This is exactly what gives your life worth. It's what gives your life value. It's not what you wear. It's not where you live. It's not where you work. It's not what you do that adds value to your life. It's not how much money you make, what you drive, or whatever else the world continues to throw at us relentlessly. None of that gives value to your life.

What gives intrinsic worth to your life is that the Creator of the universe has made you with his nature, image, and likeness in you. So, there are no illegitimate children in God's family. As children of God and followers of Jesus, we're to love what God loves and who God loves, so to be hateful or harmful toward our neighbors is to be hateful or harmful toward those God loves. We can't claim to love God and not be loving toward each other.

Secondly, *Jesus died for our neighbors*. In Matthew 9, verse 13, Jesus said himself, "**...I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.**" In Romans 5:6, we read, "**...at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**" In John 3:16, the ultimate motivation, "**For God so loved the world...**" There's the first motivation. "**...that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**" There's our second motivation. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to save us from our sin.

You see, the cross of Jesus Christ casts a long redemptive shadow over the souls of all our neighbors. Why love our neighbors as ourselves? Because the very Son of God came to die for them.

Thirdly, *God loves me*. If the most holy, glorious, powerful, creator God of the universe can love me, the greatest of all sinners, as the apostle Paul once confessed, then there is hope for everyone. God shows his love for us in while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So, if you're lacking motivation to love your neighbors as we move along here in this message, please be reminded one of the greatest motivations you need is a mirror. If God can love you, you can love your neighbor. It's true for all of us, isn't it? We must love others because God loves us.

Let's move on to some of the more difficult challenges.

B. *Who is my neighbor?* This guy in Mark 12 doesn't ask Jesus who qualifies as being his neighbor, but in Luke, chapter 10, another one of this guy's buddies, another scribe, a Jewish religious lawyer, asked Jesus one day, "What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?" He was pretty sure. It was kind of more of a question he really didn't want an answer to because he

already believed he had eternal life, but he asked Jesus anyway, and Jesus gave him the same two answers.

The guy thought, "Well, I love God enough. I'm pretty good at that, so if I have to love my neighbor too..." He asked Jesus, in Luke, chapter 10, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers him by telling the story of the good Samaritan, and that story rocked his world. We're not going to go back and look at that, because it's one of the most famous parables in the Bible. You're most likely familiar with it.

The reason it rocked that Jewish man's world is because Jesus showed that only the hated Samaritan in the story proved to be a neighbor to the one who had been robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. The Jewish people hated the Samaritans. Certainly, the Samaritans couldn't be included in the whole neighbor list! Yet there Jesus gave the story, and the point Jesus was making was that anyone and everyone is our neighbor.

The neighbor is the one who shows compassion and mercy. The Good Samaritan didn't know that person who was lying beaten, robbed, and bloody on the side of the road, but he stopped to help. So, let's just make a quick list of who would be included as our neighbors.

First, *family and friends*. You see, our neighbors are, first and foremost, our parents, children, siblings, and our spouse, if you're married. Loving our neighbor starts at home. It must start at home. It's hypocritical to apply the Golden Rule to everyone else and then to treat our closest family and friends unlovingly. That is a high calling, and for some, it may be extra difficult, depending on the family you find yourself in. Nonetheless, it always begins there. We are to love our neighbors who are closest to us, God's greatest blessings to us.

Secondly, *our fellow believers*. Scripture is very specific about the church being a place where unconditional love must germinate and permeate our lives. In 1 John, chapter 3, it says, "**And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.**"

In the next chapter, John writes, "**If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen...whoever loves God must also love his brother.**" This big, giant mess we call the church... This giant living organism of imperfect and slow sanctification... This giant melting pot of culture, language, and skin color... We are actually to be united by our love for each other.

The way we love each other within the walls of the body of Christ is meant to shine a gigantic light into the culture of what God's love looks like. So, obviously, if we're going to love our neighbor as ourselves, we have to start at home and quickly move to our church family and home. Don't underestimate the necessity, power, need, and meaning of us loving each other as ourselves.

Thirdly, *our enemies*. I tried to ignore this one as long as I could, and the Holy Spirit wouldn't let me. It's tough enough that Proverbs 24, verse 17, warns us not to rejoice when our enemy falls. That's hard enough, but Jesus takes this to a whole new level of love when he commands us, in Matthew 5:44, to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Paul takes it even farther. He says if your enemy is hungry, go feed him, and if he's thirsty, go give him something to drink.

Jesus doesn't merely just say these words. He never does. He always models them. What we have in the life of Christ may be the most heroic act of love in all of history when, while on the cross, brutally and unjustly suffering at the hands of very hateful, evil people, he prays to his Father to forgive them.

You don't know how hard that is for Italian people to understand. It's virtually impossible. We Italian people love to hate our enemies. It's just a passion of ours. We enjoy it immensely. We egg that on in each other. Then, you come to Christ and you watch Jesus and listen to his words, and you're grateful for his grace and mercy that breaks the ugliness of the natural self.

Our enemies include all those who have personally brought harm and hurt into our lives. Our enemies include the enemies of our God and our faith. We are to love them as we love ourselves, and anyone who dares claim that following Jesus is for wimps is ignorant. Christianity is not for cowards. It is much more cowardly to kill everyone who is not agreeable to your god and to your faith. It is much harder to love them, and certainly much more like the God of the Bible.

So, in this time and place where we find ourselves living in the world and living out our faith, we're given a privilege every day to love our Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, atheist, and whoever else neighbors, one person at a time. Is there any better picture of the gospel than that? So, we love our family and friends as ourselves. We love our fellow believers as ourselves. We even love our enemies as ourselves, and then there's one more category.

Fourthly, *complete strangers*. The parable of the good Samaritan actually proves that. Complete strangers in our lives might be the widow, the orphan, the homeless, the prisoner, the hungry, or the hurting. Jesus taught that all acts of love and kindness toward these neighbors, the strangers in our lives, are actually acts of kindness and love toward him. Strangers on our neighbors list might include the people at work, our employer or coworkers. It could include all those who serve us in the stores or restaurants we go to, of all colors, all languages, and all faiths.

I think the final and toughest question is, if this is why we do it and this is who we're to love, then *how do we love them?* How do we break through the worldly barriers of hate, revenge, racism, favoritism, anger, selfishness, isolation, and violence?

*C. How do I love my neighbor as myself?* This has to be more than just a warm feeling, right? It has to be more than just positive thoughts. See, what we've talked about so far, loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, is invisible. That's the inner passion of our souls. You can't really see that.

Loving our neighbor as ourselves is the visible manifestation, the visible expression of our love for God in the world. I suppose there's an endless list of ways we can love one another as ourselves, but let me just give you a few that I think are necessary for the world we live in right now.

First, *honor and respect*. The Bible says, in Romans 13:7, to give respect to whom it is owed. It doesn't say to whom it is deserved. Teachers, policemen, firemen, military, government leaders, even as the Bible describes pastors and elders, to be honored and respected. At the top of that list would be parents.

Many times, this isn't easy, but that's why loving God first and most matters. It's impossible to love each other as we love ourselves if we're not first loving God, because the most natural part of us is to not love each other as we love ourselves. I want you to love me as I love myself, but I don't want to have to love you as I love myself. It's not natural to us.

One of the miraculous ways our love for God becomes visible is when we show honor and respect to whom it is owed. Whenever we feel this is impossible, we just need to remember how much God loves us. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and yet his love never ceases. It never fails.

Secondly, *no revenge*. This is kind of weird, but I think it's important. Revenge has to be scratched off our list of emotions and actions. In Romans 12, God says, "**Vengeance is mine, I will repay...**" In other words, God is better at justice than we are. He promises that no sin and no evil will be ignored. God is better at justice than we are. He says, "You let me take care of justice. As far as it depends on you, you live at peace with everyone." We cannot be a vengeful, grudge-holding people and still love God and our neighbor.

Thirdly, *moral purity*. This must be an expression of our love. The seventh commandment says, "Do not commit adultery." It's right there in the grouping of the Ten Commandments that are all describing how we're to love each other. Sexual immorality is first and foremost a sin against God.

We understand that, but it's also a sin against those we participate with. Adultery, fornication, and the like are the opposite of love. Lust is selfish and harmful and has no regard for the purity or the good of the other person. One of the greatest ways we express our love for God and each other is through moral purity.

Fourthly, *sharing in their suffering*. Loving our neighbors includes our willingness to walk alongside them on their roads of pain and loss. In Romans 12:15, the Scripture calls us to "**...weep with those who weep.**" Sometimes our neighbors are suffering because it's just the natural consequences of living in a fallen, sin-broken world. In other times, we find the neighbors on our list of neighbors suffering because they've made very poor choices.

Either way, this kind of love doesn't abandon them in their need. We walk alongside in the hurt and the pain, no matter how it comes by, because that's what God does, and that's what God does

with us. The Good Samaritan, the woman caught in adultery, the Prodigal Son...all wonderful examples of this kind of love.

Fifthly, *celebrating in their blessing*. Loving our neighbor means rejoicing with those who rejoice. Things like jealousy and envy are sinful affronts to loving our neighbors as ourselves. One of the commandments is, "Thou shalt not covet." It speaks to this. Coveting is that desire that says, "I want what you have because I deserve it more than you." That's what coveting is. "You have something, but I deserve it more than you, so I want that."

Jealousy is that inner seething anger over the fact that, "You have something I don't." Being blessed when people are blessed is a great way to live. Wishing and hoping the best for others is an amazing expression of the kind of love Jesus is saying is most important to God. It's certainly something our world desperately needs.

Sixthly, *sacrifice in the face of inconvenience*. This struck me this week as I thought about the tangible expressions of love that have come my way in my life over the years, the ones that always seemed to touch the deepest and the ones that are the most meaningful expressions of love are the ones that required inconvenience or sacrifice on the part of the person.

Something as simple as that ride to the airport at 4:30 in the morning, which is what one of our neighbors just did for Tammi and me last week... He found out we were heading out of town for a few days and found out we were flying, and he absolutely insisted on taking us to the airport. Bless his heart. I wouldn't even take my own kids to the airport at 4:30. Can I just be real? Apparently, you wouldn't either.

This is the kind of love that is expressed over and over in Scripture. I think of Acts, chapter 4, at the beginning of the church, when Pentecost happened and the church just exploded onto the scene. When you came to Christ and you got baptized this early in the life of the church, it meant instant persecution.

It meant losing your job. It meant your family turning their backs. It meant losing your home. It meant losing everything. You had nowhere to live. You had nothing to eat. You had no job. You were on your own. All you had was Jesus and these other people who had Jesus.

At the end of Acts, chapter 4, it says they pulled together, and immediately this kind of selfless love starts surfacing in the life of this young church. It says they just brought whatever they had and no one considered anything their own anymore. They just brought whatever they had, whether it was money, or...

If they had land, they sold it. If they had a house, they sold it. They just did whatever it took to take care of each other. That's the ultimate expression and movement of the kind of love Jesus says we are to have for each other. It's a kind of love that desires to bring them comfort and happiness and to lighten their sorrows. It truly means to do unto others what we would want them to do unto us.



Seventhly, *share Jesus with them*. Is this not the greatest expression of love, telling people about Jesus when the opportunity comes, intentionally building friendships and relationships with the hope of someday leading them to Jesus, or inviting them to church with the hope that maybe God uses that to open the door to their hearts?

You know, God has a great sense of timing that this passage would fall this close to Easter. You've seen this in your bulletins for the last few weeks. It's amazing how interested people are in spiritual things when there's a good excuse. Easter is one of those great excuses for people who typically maybe don't give a lot of thought to church, God, Jesus, or anything anymore, but because it's Easter, somehow and some way, there's a little bit of an openness there.

What if this week, God was just encouraging us to have our antennas up, looking for those who might be ready for the next step in their spiritual journey? It could be that coming to church on Easter weekend, for whoever that neighbor is who walks across our path this week, is just the next step in God drawing them to himself, where they hear about it again and they find out that God really does love them and there's undeniable evidence at the cross and somehow, some way, you were used to love your neighbor and I was used to love my neighbor, whoever those neighbors are on our list, to take that next step.

I want to encourage you. Do you need a practical application of this? Don't leave these in your bulletin. Put them in your purse. Take them with you to work. Put them in your car and just say, "God, open my eyes and ears this week. Show me who it is. Show me what neighbor you want me to love."

It could be as simple as, "You know what? I don't know if Easter matters to you, if you ever go to church on Easter Days, or if you've ever been to church on Easter, but if you don't, I'd love for you to come with us," or, "I'd love for you to visit my church." Just give them one of these and see what happens. Wouldn't it be amazing if next weekend, the spiritual journey of hundreds and hundreds of people changed?

Well, there you have it: two inseparable ingredients that are the grand secret of the most meaningful, fulfilling way to live our lives. At the end of this conversation, Jesus looks at the guy and says, in verse 34, "You know what? You're not far from the kingdom of God." That's kind of a weird statement. I've been thinking about that for two weeks.

I think what Jesus was saying here is that the kingdom of God is where these two loves will be in an eternal state of perfection forever. It is our greatest hope that the day is coming that we will be in heaven with God, where our love for God and our love for each other will be completely unpolluted by sin. We have no idea what that's going to look and feel like, but it's going to be pretty amazing.

I think the second thing he was telling this guy is, "Listen. Just because you know now the answer to your question, don't fool yourself into thinking you're going to go out there and just start doing it." Don't think anybody can just go, "Oh, is that all this religion is all about: just love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love my neighbor as myself?"

Let me just tell you something. That is a sheer impossibility. These two commandments show me that I'm not a good person. The cross is my only hope of ever becoming one. They're impossible unless you're born again, your heart has been cleansed and forgiven of sin, and you've been given a new heart with spiritual eyes and spiritual ears to hear and see what God is like.

Jesus is looking at this guy and is saying, "You're close, but until you're born again, until you trust me and what I do for you on the cross, don't fool yourself. You can't live like this unless you've been changed." Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I do pray in the name of Jesus Christ for those whom you may have drawn to this room right now, for whom your full intention is to open their eyes and ears to your goodness and your grace in Christ. I pray, God, that today would be the day they would believe. I pray you would give them courage, faith, and understanding that Jesus Christ is the one in whom they can put all their trust and hope.

God, I pray for the rest of us who already have, that this would be an amazing week of practically loving our neighbors. I pray, God, that hundreds of people will be here next weekend who might hear for the first time in a long time that you really do love them. God, have your way. We love you. More than ever, we want to love our neighbors. In the name of Jesus, amen.

If you want to talk to someone about what it means to surrender your heart to Christ, there are people here who would love to help you take that step and explain that to you. If there's anything we can pray with you about before you go home, please come forward. We'd love to pray with you about that as well. We'll see you next weekend.