

# Our Great Oblitunity

## Matthew 22:34ff.

March 5, 2017  
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Sixteen years ago I gave a message while preaching through Mark about loving God entitled, *Our Great Oblitunity*. "Oblitunity." Some of you know what that word means, some of you don't because you weren't here back then or even born back then. All these years later I still hear from time to time someone refer to something as an oblitunity. I love it.

Warren Wiersbe once said, "If a sermon is worth preaching once, it's worth preaching a hundred times."<sup>1</sup> How about once every 16 years or so? I hope this will be a new and improved version. It is worthy of a second go at it because it is sourced in what Jesus called the greatest and most important command of all. It is a command that destroys religious hypocrisy and creates difficult questions which a word like "oblitunity" will answer.

Chapter 22 is the anthology of the religious leaders trying to take Jesus down. Two groups of religious leaders known as Sadducees and Pharisees try gotcha questions like, *Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?* and *Is there a resurrection?* Jesus' answers brilliantly shut them up. *"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him."* (Matthew 22:34-35 ESV)

So here's the setting. First century Judaism. It was different from most American-style religions today but with many of the same problems. God gave Israel the law at Mt. Sinai. This included The Ten Commandments, but many, many more laws. I've been reading through these in my personal Bible reading. The number of laws and detail is astonishing. I often think, how could they remember all of these?

One way the rabbis did is they identified specific commands in the Law. There are 613 specific commands. We struggle with the famous 10, but what about the other 603? So to help, the scribes and lawyers tried to identify which ones were more important and which ones were less important. Easy, right?

Wrong. As with anything, arguments ensued. Remember this is in a different cultural context from ours so we have to put ourselves back in the time when people cared as much about a question like this as we may care about abortion or immigration. This is why it was selected by the Pharisees. What better way to catch Jesus than to give him a Rubik's Cube theological question?

*"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:36-40)

Jesus not only answers the question, he doubles down and adds the second most important, quoting Leviticus 19:18, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* On these two hang all

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching in Black and White: What We Can Learn from Each Other*, p. 62.

the Law and Prophets. Like two giant pegs, the 611 other commandments hang on these two.

We will look at loving our neighbor in two weeks. Our focus today is the greatest commandment: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" (Matthew 22:37)

These were very familiar words as they are taken from Deuteronomy 6 and what is known as the Shema. Every good Jew would quote the Shema twice a day. You maybe have heard the first part of it, "*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.*" (Deuteronomy 6:4) That is a sacred text in Judaism to this day and its emphasis on the oneness of God is what makes Judaism theistic but keeps it from being Trinitarian. Ironically, it is the second member of the Trinity quoting it here.

Love is the repeated requirement in both commands. Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor. In both commands what follows is a description of Love. For God we are to love him with all our heart, soul, and mind. For our neighbor we are to have the same love and concern for them that we naturally have for ourselves.

This raises a really important question. How can you command love—especially in our culture where the word "love" is misapplied to describe everything from how you feel about your cat to your allegiance to your country? We love our dishware and we love our children. The same word is used. Love is often viewed as a feeling or an emotional wave that comes over us. So we describe love as something that can happen at first sight. Love is applied to sexual relations between a man and a woman. Then we come to a text like this and we could think it's a command to feel about God like I feel about my cat or my wife. The argument goes that if love is a feeling then it can't be commanded; it must flow mysteriously and organically from within us. How can God command a feeling?

## **Oblitunity**

I'd like deconstruct that entire approach and do so with one word. "Oblitunity." If you are not familiar with this word it's because I made it up. *Pastor Steve, you can't make up words.* Every word was made up by somebody, so this is my contribution to the English language: "oblitunity."

What does it mean? It is a mashup of two words. "*Obligation*" and "*opportunity*." Loving God is your greatest obligation because this is the greatest commandment. You miss this one and you've missed all of them. Loving God is also the greatest opportunity in your whole life. There is no greater love to receive than the love of God and there is no greater privilege than to love God.

## **Loving God is our greatest obligation**

Do we have to love God? Yes. Is not loving God a sin? Yes. It is a command. Lest we think there is any wiggle room here, notice the extent that we are to love. *All my heart. All my soul. All my mind.* Notice the repetition. All. All. All.

- *All my heart* - Heart here is not that organ pumping blood to your body. It is the essence of the man, the center of his being. It's what we might call the real you.
- *All my soul* - the place of affections and desires and values.
- *All my mind* - Where we think and evaluate and process. The intellectual me.

Don't make too fine a distinction here. Don't say, *I love God with my mind but not with my heart*. The emphasis is that man should love God with all his being. Love Him supremely with all that I have, everything in me, as much as I can.

*"The love of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer any thing for his sake, or at his pleasure."<sup>2</sup>*

Remember what Jesus asked Peter three times at the end of John's gospel, *"Do you love me?"* (John 21:15ff.) It really is the bottom line. In a sense that is the ultimate question for each of us. Who do we love? By love we mean treasure, value, desire, and worship. Who or what within us is truly our highest and greatest love? I think of the old Whitney Houston song that summarizes man's answer for love ever since the Fall. *"The greatest love of all is easy to achieve. Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all."*<sup>3</sup> Self-love leads to self-destruction, as it tragically did in Whitney's case.

Without God, self-love is our natural default. We are born self-lovers and we live hoping nobody discovers how much we really do. We love ourselves with all our hearts, souls, and minds.

This is why this command is the greatest because no other command shows how far we fall short of the glory, holiness, and love of God. We are morally obligated to love God to an extent that none of us naturally can. Our obligation to love God damns us no matter how morally superior we may think we are. In some way, every sin every day is a failure to love God most. Yet we must. It is a command. It is an obligation. Does that seem fair? How can God command what is impossible for me to do? I might as well high jump the Sears Tower as love God perfectly my whole life.

Something within me has to change for me to love God this way. What could possibly be so radically inwardly changing that I could love God in this way? Listen to Old Testament prophecies:

- *"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."* (Deuteronomy 30:6)
- *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* (Jeremiah 31:33)
- *"And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."* (Ezekiel 11:19)
- *"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."* (Ezekiel 36:27)

Then Jesus comes proclaiming that anyone who believes in him will experience a spiritual change so radical that it's like being born again. He told Nicodemus that he must be born again. (John 3:3). Why? The apostles explain it this way. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,*

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Written by Linda Creed, Michael Masser • Copyright © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group

*he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

What’s new? In a sense everything is new but it starts with a new heart, fulfilling Jeremiah 31 which prophesied a spiritual heart transplant. I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. A stone heart. Stone toward what? Stone cold toward God. Our natural hearts cannot and will not love God. Can’t.

This past year one of our members got a physical heart transplant. She waited and waited. Finally the call came. She went to Northwestern hospital. They took her old heart and they put a new one in. Amazing.

That is a picture of what God does spiritually. He takes the stone heart out, the broken heart out. A spiritual stone heart can’t pump spiritual blood. It can’t love God. It can only love itself. New birth in Jesus is a spiritual heart transplant. The old heart is taken out and a new one is put in. God creates a new heart, a new spiritual heart. It can pump spiritual blood. It can do something that the stone heart can’t do. What? It can love God. **Not only can it, it wants to.**

A new Christian discovers a whole new set of spiritual desires they never had before. A desire for moral obedience. A desire for spiritual truth and teaching. But most of all, a desire for God himself. A desire to know him. A desire to please Him. A desire to love him more and more. This is the opportunity part of oblitunity. Before we are saved, this command is ALL obligation. It’s all condemnation. It’s all frustration. I can’t do it! But after experiencing new birth, sometimes small starting out, there is a motivation and a capacity to love the God of my salvation.

### **Loving God is our greatest opportunity**

Regeneration is what frees all of God’s commands from being simply duty. They remain duty but there is a huge difference between doing something because you have to and doing something because you want to. The want-to is the joy. The want-to is the delight. The want-to is the sincerity and authenticity.

Christ has freed us from approaching God and serving God and loving God as merely duty and has gloriously freed us to want to do what God requires us to do. And that is **oblitunity**. When what you have to do is also what you want to do. God is not honored by duty love alone. He didn’t send Jesus to create robots; he sent Jesus to create spiritual children. Disciples. People who love him genuinely from the heart.

Loving is a duty and is no less than a duty. It is a command. But by faith in Christ it becomes a delight to us so great that if we allow it, it can encompass the entirety of our lives; one massive everything-all-for-him expression of love. This is the joy of real Christianity. Religions try to create outward conformity. Christianity changes your life by changing your heart.

Four and a half years ago was my wedding day. We got to the moment in the ceremony where I was told, *you may kiss your bride*. Did I have to kiss her? Yeah. I guess. It’s socially expected. It would be very frowned upon if I chose not to. It might have even been a scandal. I kind of had to do it. Ok! If I have to! But love creates another kind of have-to. I had to do it but everything in me wanted to do it. I laid a good one on her.

Then we left on our honeymoon. Did we have to do a honeymoon? Well, it's somewhat an expectation these days. Did I have to? Yes. Did I want to? Totally.

This should be the aim of our lives. Christian, you have this heart. It is a gift from God. It's like marriage is a gift but what you do with potential desire is up to you. You are responsible. If your spiritual heart is cold and you don't find desires for God there, that's not God's fault. You have allowed another love or idol or self to chill love for God within you. If your Christianity is stuck on the duty side, look out. Something's wrong.

The real thing is oblitunity. The real thing is duty and delight. That is who we want to be here. Please don't come to our church to merely fulfill a spiritual duty. Don't be a part of our church thinking simply being a part of our church is all we're about. That's not Christianity. Christianity is a matter of the heart and all our emphasis and teachings and ministries must move past the have-tos and take us to the want-tos.

If you aren't there today, that is sin and it needs to be repented of. Don't just nod and think, *I'll work on that*. Not loving God first and foremost is sin and you need to confess it and repent of it. Ask God to stir affections in you for him. Begin to take seriously the need to love God first and foremost.

It's like marriage where the duty to love is there but the delight can come and go. It takes effort to stir delighting love and a marriage that remains on duty love for long is in serious trouble.

Our love for God is like that. A thriving Christian is one who works at their love for God. They intentionally engage in spiritual activities that stir the delight like corporate worship and teaching. Prayer. Serving others. Disciplines that at first feel like duty, but over time become delightful. Don't forget you have the Holy Spirit in you. He is jealous for your love (James 4:5) to be passionate for God.

Can you say today, "*I love the Lord*"? Jesus asks us every day, *do you love me?* Susan, do you love me? John, do you love me? Not that he needs our love but it is his love to want our greatest joy and happiness, which for a human being is loving God and enjoying him forever.

The Christianity we are promoting here is not just the "obli" but also the "tunity!" Not just the duty but the delight, the love, the passion, the joy and gladness in God our Savior. So that when the Bible says, "*God loves a cheerful giver,*" (2 Corinthians 9:7) we get that our giving is duty and delight. When the Bible says, "*Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart,*" (Psalm 37:4) we get it because we see how God is changing our desires so we want what he wants.

When the Bible says, "*rejoice in the Lord*" (Philippians 4:4) or "*serve the Lord with gladness*" (Psalm 100:2) we get it because we are doing life with delight in God—not perfectly—but it's real and we want more of it.

Listen, I can speak with tongue of men and angels but if I don't have love for God, I gain nothing. I can prophesy and have all knowledge but if I don't have love, I gain nothing. I can have faith enough to move mountains but if my whole approach to all my religion is void of a true and genuine love for God, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

But with love for God, all my days and all my service and all my duties and the entirety of my life is not only pleasing to God but is the great privilege and joy of my whole life. Better

than love for parents or love for spouse or love for friend or love for child. To know God and to love him is the greatest obligation of all.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016)*.  
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