

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2014.**

**Matthew 22:34-46**

Have you ever thought that God might be selfish, or self-centred?

This is the question we will attempt to answer this morning, based on our Gospel reading.

When God gave the Ten Commandments, the first one was, “You shall have no other gods before me.” And when Jesus was asked by an expert in the Law which the greatest commandment was, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Then he added a verse from Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

So, why would God command all the peoples of the earth to love and worship him alone?

The answer to these questions is based on a concept of value. Throughout our lives we are constantly making decisions based on a concept of value. Big decisions and small decisions.

An example of an everyday decision based on value would be if we were buying some fruit and one shop sells everything for 50p less than the shop down the road. Based on value for money we would buy our fruit at the shop that sells the same fruit for 50p less. That is simple logic.

Or if we are buying a new car and find exactly what we are looking for at a car showroom, but then hear that we can get exactly the same car for £2000 less from a dealer on the internet – based on a concept of value we will buy the one online.

On a more serious note, if you are driving through a town and suddenly a child and her dog run out into the road straight in front of you. You brake, but know you can't stop in time. If you swerve to the right you will knock down the child. If you swerve to the left you will knock down the dog. Based on a concept of value you will make your decision.

Think with me for a moment about what makes something valuable. If you think about jewels – they are valuable because they are rare, and difficult to obtain. All jewels are most valuable if they are flawless, and therefore perfect. So rarity and perfection in an object makes it valuable.

Beauty can make something valuable. Sentimental value can make something valuable to someone. Or if the workmanship on an antique is exquisite, it could be valuable.

Or if we think of paintings, or works of art. If you were given a couple of million pounds to buy a painting for an art gallery and you had to choose between a Rembrandt or a Monet or my grand-daughter's latest art offering, of course you would choose the priceless Rembrandt or Monet.

The value of an object in itself gives us an obligation to choose it.

So back to God. What makes God valuable?

- Firstly, God is the creator and sustainer of the whole universe and all that is. God is the source of all that is. Everything that exists – the planets, stars, the earth and everything in it owes its existence to God. If something could happen to God and God disappeared, the whole universe would disappear too. (Fortunately, that cannot happen.)
- Secondly, God is the only un-created being in all the universe. God is everlasting. God is the only being who never had a beginning and will never have an end. God has simply always existed, and always will. Everything else has had a beginning.
- Thirdly, God is perfect in his love for all things, especially in his love for people.

God is infinite in his value. Remember that we said earlier “the value of an object in itself creates an obligation for us to choose that object.” So if God is of infinite value, because of who God is in himself, then it is logical wisdom to value God more than anything else. God simply is more valuable.

All humans are equal in their value, but God is more valuable than humans. That is why we are commanded to put God first.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He re-iterates the old command to love God with our whole being, and he re-emphasises the old command to love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus explains to us how to move on from the logical wisdom of valuing God above all else to the importance of relationships. The commandment we read about this morning is to LOVE God. We cannot love someone we don't know. In teaching us how to pray, Jesus said to start by calling God, “Father.” God wants to be in a real relationship with us. God wants us to know and love him.

The more we get to know God, and the more we actually experience the love of God, the easier it is to love him, because he is such a wonderful Being.

Once we have experienced the unconditional, surprising love of God, we are able to grow in self-acceptance. We know that we are loved and accepted at a very deep level, despite our faults and failings. From that position of confidence we can learn to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. The profound truth here is that if we are unable to accept and love ourselves, we will be unable to love others.

So Jesus' simple answer to the expert in the Law is **absolutely profound**. The simple command that we should love God with all our being, and our neighbour as ourselves is the recipe for world peace.

It leaves us with the responsibility of getting to know God, of experiencing God's love and being changed by it forever. From that well-spring of love where God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, we are able to love ourselves and our neighbours.

A children's song that I appreciate has these words:

In the sound of a single word

All the laws of God can be heard,

In the light of a single command

Perfect peace for all has been planned:

It's LOVE, God's love. If the whole world knew God's love.

Our question at the beginning of this talk was, "Could God be selfish, or self-centred when he commands us to love him?"

No, God is not selfish, or self-centred in commanding us to love him. It is the apex of wisdom to put God first and our neighbours equal with ourselves. Christianity is not about being logical or right. It is about learning to love.

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