

## What Matters Most To Jesus Matthew 22:34-40

I want to start this morning with a little game, a game of association. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear these names? In a word or a phrase. Call them out.

Edmund Hillary

Mother Teresa

Helen Clark

Jack Lovelock

Bill Gates

Kate Sheppard

Donald Trump

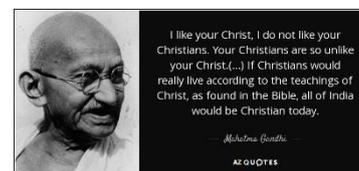
My point is that when you think of certain people, you think of certain passions or roles, right? In fact, some people are so tied to their passion you can't separate the two. Their passion drives them, motivates them, gets them out of bed in the morning and keeps them up late at night. And sometimes, if they're not careful, their passion can consume them and destroy the relationships around them. Their passion can become an idol and even a tyrant. And that's not good.

At Otumoetai Baptist we want a passion that is good. A passion that enhances our relationships, not destroys them. We want a passion that drives us every single day of our lives. We want a passion that's worthy of our worship and will make us better people. We want our passion to be JESUS.

Wouldn't it be great if when people think of OBC, when people think what matters most to Otumoetai Baptist Church, they think of Jesus.

I will never Gandhi's quote;

"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ... If Christians would really live according to the teaching of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today"



I want Otumoetai Baptist church to be all about Jesus. And there's nothing new about that. We've strived to be all about Jesus since we started, planted by Tauranga Central as a Sunday school back in 1953, 65 years ago. The church started 5 years later, it will be our 60<sup>th</sup> later this year.

We as a church want Jesus to be our main thing because he IS the main thing. Not only at Otumoetai Baptist Church, but Jesus is the main thing in the entire cosmos, whether people know it or not. But one day they will. Jesus is number one.

This passage from the Apostle Paul put it into perspective in Colossians 1:15-18,

<sup>15</sup>Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

<sup>16</sup>for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup>He existed before anything else,

and he holds all creation together.

<sup>18</sup>Christ is also the head of the church,

which is his body.

He is the beginning,

supreme over all who rise from the dead.

So he is first in everything.

With this passage it's hard to argue that Jesus shouldn't be the main thing.

But what is Jesus about? That's the question I want to answer today. What gets Jesus excited? What Matters Most to Jesus?

And to help us answer that question we need to turn to Matthew's gospel, Matthew 22:34-40,

<sup>34</sup>But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. <sup>35</sup>One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this

question: <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”

<sup>37</sup>Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

The Jewish Law found in the first five books of the Bible, called the Torah, contained 613 commandments, ten of which we call the Ten Commandments, but there were 603 others. And with all the competing interpretations of the rabbis in Jesus' day the law had become almost as complicated as our tax laws.

So one day Jesus was cornered and pressured to tell a legal expert what was the most important command of the 613 listed in the Law of Moses. And without hesitation, Jesus shot back, "Love God and love others. End of story. Next question."

“What matters most, Jesus?” That was the question behind the question the lawyer asked. Is it sacrifices? Is it Temple worship? Is it tithing? Is it prayer and fasting? Is it observing the feasts? Is it keeping the Sabbath? What's most important?

What matters most, Jesus said, is to love God and to love people, who are all made in the image of God. And so we read in verse 46,

<sup>46</sup>No one could answer him. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

They got it. And I wonder if the silence was because they knew they weren't doing it.

What matters most to Jesus? Love God and love others. That's what matters most.

This is what we had in mind when we developed the four words/phrases around our walls – Live – love – learn – lead....

Live like Jesus – not wandering around in a caftan and sandals, but like Jesus in character, attitudes, priorities

Loving without measure (loving God and others like Jesus told us to do) –

Learning our faith (getting to know Jesus and his teaching and how we live it out on a day to day basis)

Leading to make a difference (it not just about us, it's about working with Jesus to make the world a better place.)

If Otumoetai Baptist is all about Jesus, and Jesus says loving God and loving others is what's most important to him, then this needs to be what's most important to us. This is the greatest commandment.

Now, loving God was not new truth that Jesus is giving them. Jesus knew his faith. That command goes all the way back to Deuteronomy 6:4-5,

<sup>4</sup>“Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup>And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

And if I can have a little aside here – Jan quotes this passage all the time but she reads further as she encourages us to disciple our children.

<sup>6</sup>And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. <sup>7</sup>Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.<sup>8</sup>Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders.<sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Jesus knew his faith and knew his bible – he wasn't saying ignore God's commands but all the other commands lead us to Loving God.

Loving God was nothing new. And loving your neighbour wasn't new either. And again Jesus knew his faith. Loving your neighbour has its roots in Leviticus 19:18,

<sup>18</sup>“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.

But Israel had gotten off track. Just like OBC or any other church. If we are not careful we can so easily get off track and forget what's most important. We can get so busy with life and all its demands and responsibilities we forget the main thing. If the main thing is Jesus, then what matters most to Jesus should matter most to us and that is loving God and loving others.

The prayer I find myself praying the most for myself, as well as for Otumoetai Baptist is “How can I/we serve you best?” And that is actually all about loving God and loving others.

Surely that needs to be the cry of each of our hearts. Lord how can we serve you best? How can I love God and Love others best? And yet we all know we fall way short of loving God and others, which is why we have a large cross in the corner of our building, which is why we plaster these words on the walls, which is why we regularly gather around the communion table where we

remind ourselves that Jesus died on the cross for all the ways we fail to love him and others as we should. Thank God for the cross and for grace and for forgiveness.

So how do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? Is it by keeping all kinds of rules? By going to church, by serving and volunteering, by reading the Bible, by praying, by giving, by sharing our faith? Those are all good things, wonderful things. And I encourage you to do them all and keep doing them for a lifetime. They're called spiritual disciplines and Jesus practiced them all.

It's great to worship God on Sundays as a community, to serve anyway we can, to read God's word for us and to pray, to connect with others during the week in Small Groups of some sort where we can rub shoulders with others to help them or be encouraged ourselves, to give of our resources, our money, and our time to kingdom work, to tell others about Jesus.

But please keep in mind these disciplines are not ends in themselves. They're not meant to become a check list of performance that feeds our pride. That was the problem with the Pharisees. They were doing all the right things, but not loving people. The spiritual disciplines are not ends in themselves. Instead, they're meant to destroy the "idol of self", and fuel our love for others.

Loving God and loving others are really not two separate commands. At least not according to the Apostle John. He welds them together in 1 John 4:19-21,

<sup>19</sup> We love each other because he loved us first.

<sup>20</sup> If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

The great commandment is really not two commandments. It's not love God and love others. It's really one commandment, **love God by loving others**. Loving others is how we show our love for God according to John.

We can do all kinds of "Christian" things, but still harbour anger and bitterness and resentment and judgment towards one another. And John says when we do that we're not loving God at all.

And again, that's why we need the cross, the communion table, God's word as a constant reminder of the forgiveness that God has given us and that we need to extend to one another.

I think I have mentioned before, one of the challenges I set myself a number of years ago was to read a book on marriage once a year. To have some author remind me what I am doing wrong and remind myself of what I am meant to be doing. Just to give my wife a break!!! (I think I might need to read a book on inappropriate jokes about your wife)

A book I read quite some time ago was called *The 5 Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. I am sure a number of you have read it or at least heard of it. I would recommend the book to every couple and maybe even read it together.

The premise of the book is that there are primarily five ways that we communicate love to one another: Quality Time, Words of Affirmation, Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch. I have all five, but then I am a very needy person – a bit of sympathy for Gay!!!

One of the issues the book brings out is that the love language that might speak volumes to you may be meaningless to your partner. And so the challenge is to discover the language that connects with the ones you love and makes them feel loved.

It can be argued that Jesus shares one of his love languages with us in Matthew 25. It's one of the ways he feels our love. And it's all about the way we love others, especially "the least of these." Matthew 25:34-36, 40,

<sup>34</sup>"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. <sup>36</sup>I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' ...

<sup>40</sup>"And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

We love Jesus when we love others.

Otumoetai Baptist Church strives to be all about Jesus - and what matters most to Jesus? Loving God by loving others. And the hostile culture we live in needs that now more than ever.

A while ago I read some blog about a book called *Good Faith: Being A Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme*. It's a recent book by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, the two guys who wrote *UnChristian* a few years ago. A fascinating book looking at Christianity and our culture.

And after doing tons of research and conducting endless interviews, their take is that Christians in America, (but we are much the same, maybe even more so) are living in exile very much like the Jews who lived in Babylon after the

destruction of Jerusalem. They were strangers in Babylon and we are strangers here in our culture. By in large our culture sees us as irrelevant and extreme or at least a bit weird. So what do we do? How do we act in a culture that's becoming more and more hostile to those who follow Jesus?

Their conclusion, and I think I agree with them, is that above all else we love others well. We don't hide our faith. We don't go underground. Can I risk upsetting a few of my Christian brothers and sisters and say 'we don't comment or protest at every command they break and call them sinners'. Instead, we express our faith, but we do it respectfully, demonstrating our love for people and for the God who created them.

They conclude the book this way, "We have a lot of work to do. At times, we may feel irrelevant and be labelled extreme. But we are in good company. Through the ages, the Christian community has faced pressure -' even persecution -' and endured. We are called not to determine the outcome, but to be faithful. Led by love, grounded in biblical belief, and ready to live as a counterculture for the common good, we trust that our good faith will be used by God to renew the world."

### **Conclusion**

What matters most to Jesus? Loving God by loving others. And to do that well we need to be reminded often how much God loves us, which is why we need to come to church or small group, read the bible, pray, listen to music, read books, feed the hungry, care for the vulnerable, take communion and practice some of the many spiritual discipline that Christian throughout the centuries have done

This is the application of the teaching today. What discipline, what habit, what regular action are you going to do to ensure you are regularly loving God by loving others?

Song Matthew West – do something