



# THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:  
*Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace* God's Word  
On  
Your Discipleship Path

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Sermon Series: "I Believe." The Nicene Creed  
(Pentecost, 2025)  
"Christlikeness." Various Texts.

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**☐ Day #1—Monday, September 15<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 22.34-36. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

Our Gospel text from yesterday was the "Great Commandment" as recorded in Mark's Gospel (*Mark 12.28-34*). This week, we will examine the "Great Commandment from the Gospel of Matthew.

Our text picks up from Jesus' silencing of the Sadducees after trying to "trick" Jesus into answering the question about who would a woman be married to in Heaven if she had seven husbands. Now, the Pharisees enter the picture with their questions. One of them Mathew tells us was a *nomikos*, a "lawyer." Not in our contemporary sense of an attorney, but an expert in the religious Law of Judaism. Craig Blomberg notes that the lawyer's question...

...seems innocent enough but reflects an intra-Jewish debate on how to rank and/or summarize all of the scriptural commandments and on whether such ranking is in fact possible at all...Moreover, given Jesus' radical views on the law, an open-ended question such as this would surely elicit some remark by which Jesus would indict himself.<sup>1</sup>

Don Hagner concurs:

Again the question in Matthew is not a sincere one but is asked with the motive of *πειράζων* [*perizō*], "testing" ... Jesus' opponents address him as *διδάσκαλε* [*didaskalos*], "teacher." There is evidence that the question concerning the most important commandment (*μεγάλη* [*megale*], "great," is a Semitism for "greatest") was of considerable interest in rabbinic discussions... Nevertheless, the wrong answer—i.e., other than that given by Jesus, which could be construed as including within it all the other commandments—could have proved useful to the Pharisees in their attempt to get rid of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** By Jesus' definition, what kind of "lover" are you? In what way do you want to grow in love right now: toward God? Toward those in your family? Toward the needy? Toward yourself? Pray about this this week.

**☐ Day #2—Tuesday, September 16<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 22.37-40. —Examine: The Text and its Context.**

Jesus' response is derived from the *Shema* of Israel, and is recorded in *Deuteronomy 6.5*. "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.*" The Hebrew word, *Shema*, is translated, "hear," and is the first word in the verse. Jesus affirms that to love God is to love with the whole person: Heart, soul, and mind. Love of God is the first and foremost love-relationship, and the foundation for all other loves.

The first and great commandment is to love God with all one's being: with heart, soul, mind, and whatever else one might care to add. This commandment from Deut 6:5 can easily be recognized as a kind of elaboration on the first commandment of the Decalogue: "I am the Lord your God ... you shall have no other gods besides me."<sup>3</sup>

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1 C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

2 D.A. Hagner. *Word Biblical Commentary*: (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993).

3 Ibid.

Jesus then adds a second commandment to His response, indicating that these commandments are very similar: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” Hagner notes that this command “agrees verbatim with the LXX (Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) of Leviticus 19:18.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus’ dual answer is referred to as “The Great Commandment.” Moreover, what must be noted here is the inclusion of one’s own person in the command to love. A healthy understanding of one’s being loved by God as His child, can lead to a proper understanding of self-regard or self-love. This is very different from a secular belief that the human self is sovereign, the center, above all else. As J. Nolland helpfully articulates:

Where intensity and comprehensiveness mark a true love of God, parity is offered as the mark of true love of one’s fellow human beings. Scholars have shown a great desire to find here an other-centeredness that is self-disregarding: love of neighbor in place of love of self. But the wording hardly supports this. The text assumes positive self-regard and the care for oneself that goes with this, and therefore that behaving towards others as though one were oneself on the receiving end will produce kindly and considerate behavior towards them. Self-disregard may be said to characterize love of God, but not love of neighbor. And since the two commandments are coupled together, even love for God—that God who commands love of neighbor as oneself—should not be seen, despite all the rigors of discipleship, as extinguishing the significance of our own well-being (cf. Mt. 7:12; Eph. 5:29).<sup>5</sup>

When Jesus said that all the Law and Prophets “hang” on these commands, He was saying that the “Great Commandment” is essentially *the message of Scriptures*—these commands “sum up” why God created us and what God asks of us! In these two commands of love:

The first summarizes the first table of the Law, and the second summarizes the second table. Jesus said, All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments, that is, all the Old Testament develops and amplifies these two points: love for God and love for others, who are made in God’s image.<sup>6</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** “Significantly, Jesus’ answer is thoroughly traditional. Luther: ‘But you may say: Oh, it is utterly impossible for a person to keep these two commandments. Yes, it is impossible for you to keep or perform them. You cannot do it; God must do it in you, for him it is possible.’”<sup>7</sup>

**□ Day #3—Wednesday, August 17<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 6:6-15; Romans 12:1-2. –Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Do you remember the first time you fell in love? You probably could not get that person off your mind. You thought about them when you woke up in the morning and you thought about them before you went to sleep. You thought about them all day long. God, the Bible tells us, has a love for us that is eternal. God is always focused on us and He wants to teach us to focus our heart and our attention on Him. To say the least, that is difficult sometimes.

In truth, we are constantly deciding what to focus on throughout the day. We also decide sometimes to not focus on something or someone—a boss, a difficult relationship, and even God. How do we keep our focus on God? It begins by confessing to God and ourselves that we are very easily distractible. In fact, there are two rather huge issues that distract us from focusing our attention on God. First, we are self-centered by nature. Second, we live in a self-centered culture where we are bombarded with messages that the individual is the measure of all reality.

Consequently, we need to establish a regular time to focus on God. We can do this by establishing a *daily time with God*. It can be as little as a few minutes during the day or as much as an hour in the morning, mid-day, or evening. When we do, it does not matter as much as doing it!

What we can do is to stop, quiet ourselves, talk to God, and read His word. Jesus encourages us to pray and even provides us with a prayer: *The Lord’s Prayer*. In the Old Testament, there was only one place where you could worship God—the Temple. You had to make a journey there to worship God and focus on God. This is no longer the situation. You can worship God anywhere at any time.

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4 Ibid.

5 J. Nolland. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

6 J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

7 *Luther’s Works, American Edition* 51:104. Quoted in, *Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

However, what is required is nothing less than a total transformation in world-view. No longer are we to look at life in terms of *this world*, the realm of sin and death from which we have been transferred by God's power (see also *Romans 5:12–21*), but in terms of the new realm to which we belong, the realm ruled by righteousness, life and the Spirit. Living in the world, we are nevertheless no longer “of the world” (*John 17:15–16*). The essence of faithful, Christian discipleship is the *renewing* of our minds so that we might be able to *approve what God's will is*—that is, to recognize and put into practice God's will for every situation we face—which is a way we love God! God has given us His Spirit, who is working to change our hearts and minds from within (regeneration), so that our obedience to God might be natural and spontaneous.

**Consider/Reflect:** Do you have a time during the day where you can *focus on God*? If not, begin today!

□ **Day #4--Thursday, August 18<sup>th</sup>. Read: Deuteronomy 10:12-13. — Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Worship is one of the ways we demonstrate our love for God. The word “Worship” derives from the Anglo-Saxon word, “*weorþscipe*” or “*worþship*,” which implies the recognition of the intrinsic value or worth of a person or thing. Of course, in Christian worship, the church recognizes the worth and glory of the Triune God. Worship is at the core of what we do as a church. Worship is at the core of how we live as Christians. A definition of worship that I have thought of through the years is that worship is the...

*“Surrendering to, and the loving, celebrating, honoring, and glorifying of, the Triune God and gratitude for His creating, redeeming, and sanctifying work.”*

*Deuteronomy 10:12-13* is an introductory summary to the general exhortation found in *verses 14-22*. Having shown the impossibility of self-dependence (*Deuteronomy 8*) and the impossibility of spiritual pride in light of her rebellious history (*Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11*), Moses called Israel to exercise her only option for survival: Total commitment to the LORD (Yahweh). This is seen in the several infinitives used: To *fear, walk . . . love . . . serve, and observe*. Such commitment leads to a *deepening* of faith and love—love for God and others, rather than a self-centered, manipulative spirituality and lifestyle. Worship is a “reality check” against the other objects of worship—false gods, idols, and self-justification.

The same is true for us: Our commitment to God, expressed through our weekly worship, is a “check” against all the idols, false gods, and competing allegiances that surround us, asking for our commitment to them! Through worship, God invites us to “come home,” to confess that our commitment to Him weakens and we need to be strengthened to follow yet another day—because He alone is worthy to be worshipped. God asks for our *whole self*—to hold nothing back from Him. Notice Moses’ rhetorical question: “*What does the Lord your God ask of you...*?”

This question is related to a question that King David asked in *Psalms 116:12*: “*How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?*” When we recognize that ALL we have and all we are comes from the hand of God, our response should be to ask ourselves, “How can I respond (live) in ways that reflect my gratitude to God?” How does God ask us to respond to Him and His goodness? God desires love, fear (respect, awe), and that we follow (trust) Him; this leads to a “*worship-full*” lifestyle.

**Consider/Reflect:** Of the five responses that God wants from His people (*vs.12-13*), how would you define each? What kind of relationship with God would these responses produce?

□ **Day #5— Friday, August 19<sup>th</sup>. Read: Psalm 135:1-4. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

*Psalm 135* calls upon God's people to praise Him for His majestic power that He has displayed in His deeds on behalf of Israel. This Psalm has been used in worship throughout the centuries to renew the faith and gratitude of God's people. Praise in Scripture is most frequently a community activity. What God has done for you and me individually, He has done for all His people. We need to join with others and praise God together as the psalmist exhorts us.

Following the introductory “Praise the LORD” (“*hal'êlû-yāh: hallel [praise] yah [God or Lord]*” See also *vs.3, 21*), the psalmist particularly called on the priests, the servants of the LORD in the temple, to praise Him (*Psalm 134:1*). Praise is the result of knowing that God is good and to praise God is pleasant. The references to these Temple servants, and the adjectives *good . . . pleasant*, are here applied to the Lord and link with *133:1; 134:2*.

God's almighty power is evident in His creation and in His acts of redemption. The true God is contrasted with the man-made deities of false religions. When we know God only through His creation—the lightning and the storm—

He can be terrifying. And in His dealings with human beings, He punishes sin, as He did with Pharaoh, the Canaanite kings, and worshipers of false gods. Yet God has compassion on His people, those whom He has chosen and claims as His own. The true God was incarnate in Jesus Christ as true man, one with us. In Baptism, He makes us His possession.<sup>8</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** What reason do you have for praising the Lord? Pause now and praise God for those reasons. Can worship be “pleasant” if you are not in the mood for it? Why/why not?

□ **Day #6-Saturday, August 20<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 22:34-40; Revelation 4:9-11.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

Today, we end the week where we began: With a deeper understanding of what it means to love God. In the next few weeks, we will explore *The Nicene Creed* and how this creed confesses our Christian beliefs that transforms our hearts and minds to be people of love—love for God, others, and self! Today, let us consider some final thoughts about how we are to demonstrate our love for God.

First, God wants us to love Him *thoughtfully* (Mind). The Bible tells us to love God with our minds, our intellect. In other words, He wants us to think about Him and remember all that He has done for us. God wants us to worship Him thoughtfully and to know and love Him thoughtfully. Second, God wants us to love Him *passionately* (Heart/Soul). Jesus says that we should love God with all our heart and with all our soul. Our culture has almost ruined the word *passion*, equating passion with sexuality alone. Biblical passion is the decision of the lover to enter into another’s life in order to share the other’s life, particularly *the suffering* of and for the other. God wants us to love Him passionately because He passionately loves us!

Third, God desires that we love Him *practically* (Strength). Loving God with all of our “strength” means that we love God with our abilities. The truth is that even though God created the universe and He created you, there are three things God does not “have” unless you give them to Him. God does not have your *attention* unless you give it to Him; this is loving God with your *mind*. God does not have your *affection* unless you give it to Him; this is loving God with your *heart* and your *soul*. God does not have your *abilities* unless you give them to Him; this is loving God with your *strength*. Whenever you take the things God has given you and give them back to God that is the heart of worship—and love!

Jesus avoids another trap set by His opponents, correctly identifying love for God and for neighbor as the two main concerns of the divine Commandments. Among our many sins, none is more grievous than our failure to love God above all else. Thankfully, God does not respond to our selfishness by reciprocating. Instead, He gives us the greatest gift: His only-begotten Son.<sup>9</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** Is there one area (mind, heart, soul, strength) that is more natural for you when it comes to loving and worshiping God? How can you develop the areas where you are weaker?

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<sup>8</sup> *Lutheran Study Bible.*  
<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*