

### Graphics, Audio and Video - Media Notes are highlighted in this background

- Please record sermon at both worship services.
- At the end of worship, I will preview the next series with a promo video after the final song and before the benediction.

### Key Questions

1. What is this sermon about?
  - a. This sermon is about belief in God, loving God and loving our neighbor
2. Why is this sermon important?
  - a. This sermon is important because, according to Jesus, this is the most important commandment of all.
3. What are the next action steps?
  - a. Choose one of the practices from the sermon series to take the next step on this week.
    - i. Treat people in the same way that we want people to treat us.
    - ii. Do justice, embrace love and walk humbly with God.
    - iii. Ask for and offer forgiveness
    - iv. Live generously toward others
    - v. There is one God, love God and love your neighbor.
4. What is the good news (bottom line)?
  - a. The good news is that there is one God who invites us to love God and love our neighbor. This is the most important commandment of all.

### Context

This is the final sermon in the series, Restoring Joy: 5 Habits for Living Well. In this series we explore five important lessons the Bible teaches us about living well and experiencing real joy.

This sermon has been prepared with the help of Finding Joy in Real Life: 5 Habits for Living Well sermon series at The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection which was April 14 to May 19, 2013. More information about this series can be found online at <http://j.mp/1mRQf4f>.

### Metadata

- Topic(s)
  - Faith, Joy
- Books of the Bible
  - Mark, Deuteronomy
- Series

Sixth Sunday of Easter / Memorial Day  
Restoring Joy: The Most Important Commandment of All  
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado  
Text online at <http://j.mp/1ia95AH>

May 25, 2014  
Mark 12:28-31  
Target Word Count: 2,325  
Video online at [Insert Link Here]

- Restoring Joy: 5 Habits for Living Well
- Tags
  - faith, God, shema, love God, love neighbor

## Mark 12:28-31, CEB

28 One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

29 Jesus replied, “The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, 30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. 31 The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

## Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

## Sermon Starter Video

- Play sermon starter video, if available.
- 

## Introduction

This is the final sermon in the series, Restoring Joy, about some of the most important lessons of the Bible. During this series we have been focusing on those simple habits and practices that can restore joy in our life and help us experience life that really is life.

## Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. Today, I hope that you will hear:

- Something new or find new questions
- Perspective on your life or something in your life that gives additional meaning to the message today.
- Guidance about how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

I want to remind you of where we have been in the series so far and invite you to write some of these things down as well.

- **Treat people in the same way that we want people to treat us.**
  - In the first week of this series we took a closer look at the golden rule - Jesus' command to treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you. The good news is that God makes it possible through God's grace to actually do this, we *can* treat people in the same way that we want people to treat us.
- **Do justice, embrace love and walk humbly with God.**
  - The next week in the series we considered God's requirements for our life to do

justice, embrace love and humbly walk with God every day. These are more important than our religious practices.

- **Ask for and offer forgiveness**
  - Two weeks ago, the focus was on asking for, offering and receiving forgiveness from others and God. The good news is that Jesus came to save us from our sins and makes it possible for us to receive forgiveness
- **Live generously**
  - Last week we considered the secret of true wealth, which is found in living generously through both our finances and time.
- **There is one God, love God and love your neighbor.** - This week we look at loving God and loving neighbor - what Jesus says is the most important commandment of all.

Sometimes we can overlook these practices as they are simple and clear, yet they are essential to our life of faith. Today we focus on generosity and how this practice can bring perspective in our life, help us make a difference in the lives of others and restore joy.

I invite you to write down some of the things that you hear in the sermon today and take your bulletin home as a tool to grow in your faith outside of worship. You can reflect on what you heard today, pray for people of our congregation and read scripture to prepare for worship next week.

## Opening Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

## Opening Story - The most important rule

“Because I don’t do much baking, I haven’t invested in many utensils and often have to improvise. For instance, when following directions that call for “a large mixing bowl,” I can compare only among the dishes I own myself. Surely this bowl is large enough, I reason. Look how much bigger it is than my others. Unfortunately, this sometimes results in overflowing batter when, in fact, my largest bowl is too small.”<sup>1</sup>

## Transition

The scripture passage for today tells us of another story of figuring out which rule or commandment is the most important.

## Context of the Conversation

---

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Stackpole, “Righteousness,” *The Upper Room Daily Devotional Guide*, <http://devotional.upperroom.org/devotionals/2014-05-24> (accessed May 24, 2014).

Jesus finds himself in an argument with some of the religious authorities of his day. One of the scribes hears the argument going on there in the temple and sees that Jesus is holding his own against the verbal jousting of a self-appointed competition committee.<sup>2</sup>

“Up to this point, all the bickering has been about some subtle interpretations of the rules -- rules such as paying taxes (Mark 12:13-17) and about who would be married to whom after the resurrection (vv. 18-27). The religious leaders want Jesus to give them an answer that matches with their particular interpretation of the law, but it becomes clear to them that he's playing by a different set of rules.

So this scribe, perceiving that Jesus is an authority, asks Jesus to name the number-one rule: “Which commandment is the first of all?”<sup>3</sup>

### What is a Scribe?

Let me remind you that a scribe was “a member of the trained class of professionals ... an elite scholar who specialized in the teaching and interpretation of religious texts, particularly Torah.”<sup>4</sup> The Torah “is a Hebrew word meaning “instruction,” “teaching,” and “law.” It is the Old Testament’s general term for God’s commandments to Israel. It came to typify the literary corpus that contains those commandments (i.e., the first five books of the Old Testament - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—otherwise known as the pentateuch), as well as the divine will for Israel in general.”<sup>5</sup>

Within these five books of the Bible there are 613 commandments - 365 positive commandments, which are to do something and 248 negative commandments, to not do something.<sup>6</sup> This guy knew the commandments. He was an expert.

### Local Expert Example

The scribe’s question of “What is the most important commandment of all? would be like a trainer at the YMCA asking someone on the way up the stairs, “What is the most important guideline for exercise?”

---

<sup>2</sup> Homiletics Online contributors, “Moving the Chains,” *Homiletics Online*, [http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/btl\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=93040491](http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040491) (accessed May 24, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Homiletics Online contributors, “Moving the Chains,” *Homiletics Online*, [http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/btl\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=93040491](http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040491) (accessed May 24, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy D. Smoak “Scribe.” In Volume 5, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine D. Sakenfield, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> James W. Watts “Torah.” In Volume 5, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine D. Sakenfield, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia contributors, “613 commandments,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=613\\_commandments&oldid=591037007](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=613_commandments&oldid=591037007) (accessed May 24, 2014).

## Transition

Well, what is it?

“Which commandment is the most important of all?”

## The Most Important Commandment

Jesus responds with a simple answer in [Mark 12:29-31](#)

Jesus replied, “The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

What is the most important? These things:

There is one God, love God and love your neighbor.

## There is One God

### Shema Yisrael

When Jesus is answering this question, he replies with the beginning of a prayer in Judaism which is known as the [Shema Yisrael](#). This prayer contains two portions of scripture from Deuteronomy and one from Numbers. It captures “the core beliefs of Judaism.”<sup>7</sup>

The word Shema means “to hear or listen” and Yisrael is “Israel.” Listen, Israel. These are the opening words of the Shema, Moses speaks when he is summarizing the entire law which he has just given the people. Moses says, in [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#)

Israel, listen! Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD! Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength.

### Importance of the Shema - Morning, Night, In, Out, Dying Breath

The Shema Yisrael is so important to the Jewish people that a faithful Jew, even today, is meant to say these words when they wake up in the morning and repeat them again before they go to bed at night. They are meant to remember them when they are going out and coming in. Often Jews will place these words on a scroll and place them inside a small container called a mezuzah which they place next to the door. You are meant to remember these words when you wake up in the morning, when you leave for the day, when you come back home and before you go to bed. It is the hope of a faithful Jew, that they would recite these words as their final words, with their last breath. That when they are lying on their deathbed, they might be able to say, “Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD! Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being,

---

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman “The Shema.” In Volume 5, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine D. Sakenfield, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

and all your strength.”<sup>8</sup> Then you are prepared to meet God.

## Jesus and the Shema

When Jesus is asked, what is the most important commandment? He instantly says, Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Jesus knew that this was the foundation of Israel’s faith and Jesus had said these words every morning when he got up, every day when he walked inside, every night when he went to bed. He was a faithful Jew and this had been the tradition since the time of Moses. These words formed and shaped Jesus and how he encountered the world. They formed Jesus, he says they are part of the most important commandment of all.

## Statement of Faith - There is one God.

The most important commandment of all begins with a statement of faith:

“Our God is the one LORD”<sup>9</sup>

In these words, God is claiming I am the source of life itself. Everything else is dependent on me. This is a fundamental claim of Christianity. There is one God and this God, the father of Jesus, is the source of all things.

## Transition

There is one God is the beginning of the most important commandment of all which continues with how we live in response to this truth by loving God and loving our neighbor.

## Love God

Jesus invites us to love God with all our heart, being, mind and strength. Loving God begins with recognizing that we mess up and do not live the way God hopes for us. We say, I am sorry and ask for God’s forgiveness. We do this every week in worship as part of our prayer together. Then we say to God, I want to follow you. Help me to live as a disciple of your son, Jesus Christ. This is the beginning of a life-transforming relationship with Jesus in which “We love because God first loved us.”<sup>10</sup>

Just like any relationship, we have to pay attention to our relationship with God. Some of the basic ways we do that are:

- Prayer
- Reading the Bible
- Receiving Holy Communion

This is how we stay in love with God.

---

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-5, CEB.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 12:19, CEB.

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 4:19, CEB.

## Transition

Loving God is not the only response to the truth of one God. The most important commandment of all is that there is one God, love God and love your neighbor.

## Love Neighbor

We remember that loving our neighbor does not mean having a warm fuzzy feeling toward them. Loving our neighbor as ourself is a way of acting to bless, encourage and build up the other person, especially those in need. This means that we seek to live our faith in our everyday life and think about what would actually encourage and build up the other person.

Loving our neighbor means that we engage in the important issues in our community, country and world. We seek to shape a world that looks more like the Kingdom of God. Some of the basic ways we do this are:

- Serve others in our local community
  - FaithWork
- Serve others beyond our local community.
  - Chabadza
  - Connectional Giving
- Stay connected with other people for support and accountability.
  - We care about

## Conclusion

### Good News

The good news is that there is one God who invites us to love God and love our neighbor. This is the most important commandment of all.

### Call to Action

This sermon concludes our series, Restoring Joy. We have looked at the five most essential teachings in the Bible about how to live a life that really is life and how to restore joy that we may have lost somewhere along the way. I want to put these five themes back on the screen:

- Treat people in the same way that we want people to treat us.
- Do justice, embrace love and walk humbly with God.
- Ask for and offer forgiveness
- Live generously toward others
- There is one God, love God and love your neighbor.

I invite you to choose one, just one, to take the next step on this week. That you might grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ and that together we might be part of God transforming the world.

## Invitation

My hope and prayer for me and for each one of you is that we might respond in the same way the scribe does in this scripture. When he hears Jesus tell him the most important commandment of all, he says, “Yes. That’s what I want.”

And that Jesus words to the scribe, might be his words to us - “You are not far from God’s Kingdom.”<sup>11</sup>

Will you pray with me?

## Closing Prayer

---

<sup>11</sup> Mark 12:34, CEB.