

Simple Commandments Matthew 22

Introduction

- Two topics that your aren't supposed to talk about; religion and politics
 - Yet, they are two topics that everyone has an opinion on
 - If they are brought up, they have the potential to create a firestorm
 - Despite the warning; there's a pretty good chance that you have gotten caught in one of these discussions
 - Around the water cooler at work
 - At a family Reunion
 - Just watching a game at home on the couch with friends
 - At the end of the day, what was accomplished by the conversation? More than likely nothing productive was accomplished except that the pot was stirred enough to make everyone retreat to their separate corners.
 - This very same thing is what occurs in the passage that we will look at today, but the result is that Jesus boils the pot-stirring fest down to two simple points that we all need to apply to our lives.
 - I'll come back to those points in just a little while.
- Vision 2020, using the year to reinforce clear vision
 - Keep It Simple
 - While we may yearn for simplicity, we've probably experienced that the complexities of life sometimes get in the way of our true focus.
 - A simple focus on God can enable us to apply our faith to the complexities of life and keep us true to the core of our calling and purpose.
- Matthew 22
 - Part of a larger context
 - Week leading up to Jesus crucifixion
 - He has returned to Jerusalem to a warm reception
 - His fame had spread, the crowds had heard of his miracles and his teachings
 - By the time Jesus made it back to Jerusalem, people were beginning to discuss whether Jesus might be the long awaited Messiah that the prophets had talked about many years ago.
 - Not everyone though was excited about Jesus
 - Pharisees and Sadducees- the religious order
 - Wanted to maintain control of the religious and the political landscape
 - Jesus was viewed as a threat to their power and influence
 - The circumstances surrounding Matthew 22 were similar to what we might experience in a presidential election year

- So in order to create a distraction and discredit Jesus' following the religious leaders devise ways to stir the pot: they question Jesus with discussions about religion and politics
 - On the political side they asked an absurd question about whether they should pay taxes to Caesar. Paying taxes, like today, is something they were obligated to do as citizens within Roman rule. However, the religious leaders questioned whether paying taxes was against their faith.
 - On the religious side, they asked an absurd question about a widow who remarried and who would be considered her husband in heaven.
 - All of the pot stirring was related to the Jewish Law that God had given to Moses. The theory of the religious leaders was that if they could get Jesus to say something that went against the law, they could discredit his authority and dismiss his influence on the people.
- Jesus was well aware of their scheme
 - He knew they really weren't interested in what was right or what was wrong, but more concerned in catching him in a trap.
 - You know how if you take a pot that is stirring and stick a spoon right in the middle of it, the pot will slowly stop stirring?
 - This is exactly what Jesus does. His response stops everyone in their tracks and Jesus is able to refocus the discussion on what really matters.
- There were over 600 laws in the Jewish faith
 - All were given by God
 - All were significant
 - However, the religious leaders were not using the law to live a life of integrity. Instead they were using the law to oppress those who were under them.
 - What they try to do to Jesus, by stirring the pot, is a perfect example.
- You can imagine how complicated it might be to live out, not to mention remember, all those commandments!
 - Begin to live a very legalistic lifestyle
 - Yet, Jesus boils all 600 laws down to two simple commandments
 - **Matthew 22:37-40**
 - Boiled down to
 - Love God
 - Love Others
 - *All 600 laws and everything that the prophets before depend on these two commandments!*
- Life can get complicated and who we are called to be can get lost, but Jesus has a way of bringing everything back into focus
 - Two simple commandments can offer a foundation to the way we live, the decisions that we make, and ultimately the person we become.
 - Today, I want to help put these two simple commandments into focus for our life.

Losing Focus in the complexities of Life

- Ice Skating
 - I hadn't been ice skating in 15 years
 - 15 years ago it came pretty naturally to me
 - Before I took the kids around the rink I wanted to get comfortable first
 - I carefully make my way around the first lap. Slowly the balance of being on ice skates eased my anxiety.
 - ½ way through the second lap I decided that I would test my speed. As I picked up speed I seemed to be alright until I noticed that the top part of my body was going faster than my legs. Before I could recover I belly flopped on the ice.
 - Any pride I had at that moment was lost. The ice had no give! I gingerly made my way back on my feet, wiped off the ice that had accumulated on my legs, and slowly returned to the kids.
- I wonder if you ever feel as though your life mimics my ice skating experience
 - You start out a little shaky, but then find your balance
 - But, as life picks up speed, there's one part of you that is out in front of the rest of you and before you know it you are face down
- I watched little girls (5 year olds) who were effortlessly gliding around the rink
 - At times these girls would twirl on the ice and without hesitation continue on their way around the ice
 - I twirled on the ice, but it was an accident and I didn't come out of the twirl nearly as gracefully as those girls.
- The religious leaders that we encounter in Matthew 22, reflect this same kind of condition as what I experienced on the ice
 - Their influence on society and their desire to be in control caused them to lose focus of what God's real purpose for them and the law as all about
 - The focus turned from God to themselves
 - They took the simple commandments of love and made it complicated and ultimately they diluted God's truth.
- Examples of the religious leaders' fall due to a loss of focus
 - They asked questions to test him (35). They weren't interested in the truth, they wanted to show Jesus up to fulfill their own purposes.
 - "No one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask I'm any more questions (Matthew 22:46, ESV)."
 - "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29, ESV)."
 - The religious leaders lost the simple focus on God.
- This can easily happen to us
 - Don't know God's Word
 - Never experienced the true power of God or work of God in our lives
- Life can get complicated and who we are called to be can get lost, but Jesus has a way of bringing everything back into focus

- Two simple commandments can offer a foundation to the way we live, the decisions that we make, and ultimately the person we become.
- Love God, Love Others- all the law and the prophets depend on these two!

Two Commandments for Our Core

- Think about the reason that you have participated in Scouts
 - I'm going to guess that at least one of the reasons that you have invested in scouting is because there is a shared value that scouting upholds that you want to instill in your son.
 - Scouting is not just about going on fun camping trips, but about instilling core values that are important in becoming a good citizen.
- Scout Oath
 - "On my honor, I will do my best, *to do my duty to God and my country*; To obey the scout law....
 - The scout oath, the core of scouting is a duty to God and Country
 - It reflects the simple commandments that Jesus provides of Love of God and Love of Others
 - Everything depends on these two simple commandments
- Here's what happens
 - We get caught up in life, its like ice skating, at first we think we have our balance and then all of a sudden one part of us his ahead of the other and then we fall down
 - We live in a culture that goes as fast as possible and doesn't concern itself with the consequences of the choices we make
 - As a result, We have lost the core of who we are called to be.
- My daughter loves ice skating so, we've gone ice skating a couple of times now and while its been a long time since I first ice skated, each time I go skate I get a little better. I'm growing into this new experience.
 - Life is more than just living by a couple of simple commandments, just like going to one scout meeting or event doesn't necessarily make you a scout.
 - Over the course of investing yourself, like building a relationship, these simple commandments begin to manifest themselves in our lives
 - Our faith is not based on commandments as much as it is a relationship with God
 - As we grow in our relationship with God
 - Knowing the scriptures
 - Experiencing God's presence in our lives
 - Our faith grows and we can apply our simple faith to the complexities of life.

Simple Focus to apply Simple Commandments

- What does this kind of life look like?
- **Matthew 6**
 - Treasures on earth Vs Treasures in heaven
 - Anxiety of life

- Simple Focus: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33, ESV).”
 - Simple doesn’t always mean small
 - “All these things will be added to you”
 - Simple focus means that we are focused on what really matters.

Conclusion

- Life can get complicated and who we are called to be can get lost, but Jesus has a way of bringing everything back into focus
 - Two simple commandments can offer a foundation to the way we live, the decisions that we make, and ultimately the person we become.
 - Love God, Love Others- all the law and the prophets depend on these two!
- I wonder if you ever feel as though your life mimics my ice skating experience
 - You start out a little shaky, but then find your balance
 - But, as life picks up speed, there’s one part of you that is out in front of the rest of you and before you know it you are face down
- Return to your core
 - Our faith is not based on commandments as much as it is a relationship with God
 - As we grow in our relationship with God
 - Knowing the scriptures
 - Experiencing God’s presence in our lives
 - Our faith grows and we can apply our simple faith to the complexities of life.
- These Simple Commandants reflect a growing relationship with God