

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church
950 Santa Cruz Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025 650-323-8600

Series: The Ripple Effect
Mark 12:28-31

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“Making Waves”

Kevin Kim

Good morning! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Amen! It's good to be here with you guys, but I know what you guys are thinking. You guys are thinking, *Last week Gary Hamel; this week Kevin Kim...Lord, have mercy...we're never going to get out of church.* But this week is a special Sunday with all the things that are going on. It's a sermonette...so, 20 minutes...I promise. All right? Pray for me...alright?

If you've been with us for a while, we are in a series called *The Ripple Effect*, where we are talking about making an impact in our world and what that involves and how we should position ourselves to change...to respond to God's call. So this week, I want to continue in that trajectory of thought...how to make an impact in our world, how to navigate change well...by looking at some truths that if we hold on to it will help us grow wiser, stronger, more gracious and loving, as we explore the question...*What does it mean to be a Christian in the 21st century?*

Back in seminary...that's where you go if you want to get paid to be a Christian (it's not a bad gig)...our Practical Theology professor was talking to a group of us seminarians about the most important thing to remember in ministry. If you want to be effective, if you want to make an impact, if you want to navigate change well...what is central? What is primary? What is the main thing? And he said, "If you want to make an impact, if you want to be effective, if you want to navigate change well, *the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing...that's the main thing.*" The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing...that's the main thing because side things will try to become the main thing, and your job is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Now, as a church, we will do well if as we ask God, "God, what are you calling us to do? Where are you calling us to go? How are you calling us to live in the 21st century?" And as we respond to God together, we'll grow stronger, wiser, more loving and gracious if we keep the main thing front and center. So...what's the main thing? Well, that's the introduction to our text, Mark 12:28-31. Let me read it, and you can follow along.

"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked Him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.'"

This is one of the most familiar and well-known passages in the Bible, and that's not a good thing for most of us because what ends up happening is a wallpaper affect. You see something so often that it becomes

invisible. So let me warn you up front...don't let the familiarity of this passage hijack any of its meaning, any of its power, any of its splendor, any of its glory. This is a staggering passage because here's what's going on. We have a law professional coming up to Jesus and asking Him what is the greatest commandment? And he is in the presence of Jesus Christ, Son of God, whose Spirit has inspired all the law and the prophets, who knows the mind of God because He *is* God and has been with God for all eternity, and this Jesus says, "You take all of God's Word, everything He has ever said, and the most important thing, the greatest thing is this: love God. Love God with everything you are...love God."

One writer put it like this, "You have the greatest Person whoever was or ever will be surveying the greatest Book that ever was and ever will be, telling us with the greatest authority that anyone could ever have...what is the greatest sentence and what is the greatest point is in all that greatness, and He says, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength."*** That's staggering! And if that's not the main thing, I don't know what is.

So with the time that I have, I want to walk through what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, and what it means to serve the world. Hopefully we can put that at the forefront of our lives in our church.

First, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is so much in that, but just for the sake of time, I want to talk about one thing...the comprehensiveness of that command. When the law professional comes up to Jesus and asks Him what is the greatest commandment in Scripture, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4, which came to be known as the Shema. *Shema* is the Hebrew word *to hear*. ***"Hear, O Israel."*** It is a core confessional text of Judaism. Every observant Jew would recite the Shema every morning and every evening.

If you turn back to Deuteronomy 6:4, you'll get an idea of what God is getting at with this command. This is what it says, ***"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*** Do you get what God is saying here?

See...*in the home and on the road* means your private life and your public life, when you go off to work. *On your head and on your hands* means what you are thinking inside and how you act outside. There is no fragmentation of your faith. *When you go to bed and when you get up*...that is your entire waking life. Are you guys starting to see the comprehensiveness of this? *To write the laws on the doorposts of your home and to impress them on your children* means to apply them to your family, and *to write them on the gates of the city* means to apply to the economic, the political, and the civic life of your whole society. This is what the Shema is saying.

If you love God with all your heart then you will love God with all your life. If you love God with your whole heart, you will love God with your whole life, every aspect of your life. You won't just love God on the weekends, and you won't just love God in your private life but not in your public life. You won't just love God with this person but not that person. In other words, this is your entire being. Every facet of your entire waking life...public, private, inner, outer...you should be constantly asking this question...*How does who God is and how does what He says affect this? How I think here? How I act here? How I live here? How I relate here? How I speak here?* Everything. You want every single aspect of your life to be

affected by the love of God. That's what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Now how do we do this? I don't know...so I'm in like the same boat you're in, right? But I think it requires at least this: a commitment to relentless prayer as individuals and as a church. Because if we are asking as individuals, "God, how do I love you here? How I love you in this situation? How do I love you with this person? How do I love you with my finances in this area?" And as a church, as MPPC, if we are asking, "God, how do we love you here and with this and with this?" It just assumes this constant communion and communication with God. So as individuals and as a community, I think...at the very least...it requires a commitment to prayer.

I think it also means that it requires a renewal of our commitment to God's Word because you can know God without loving Him but you can't love Him without knowing Him. Can I say that again? *You can know God without loving God but you can't love God without knowing God.* You can know lots of things about God. It is quite possible to get all the theology right without actually loving Him. It is very possible. But you cannot love God; you cannot love anybody, without knowing anything about them. So the call to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is a call to dig into His truth, to discover who He is, and to hold on to His promises. It is a renewal of our commitment to God's Word.

The last thing I think to love God means is to commit to community. Look at what Deuteronomy says. It says to talk about this stuff when you're in the home and when you're on the road. One of the strengths of our church is that we have great teaching...not me...you guys are looking to me like...*What are you talking about?* You know, like John and the rest of the preaching team, right? But we have lots of people who come to our weekend services and listen to the sermons. They download all the material. They podcast all the stuff. They read all the sermon notes, and they are learning a lot, but they aren't growing. They aren't changing. And it is because Deuteronomy doesn't say *listen* and that's how you'll grow; it says *talk*.

In other words, if you want to change, if you want to make an impact, if you want to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength...you have to make yourselves available to be in communities with other people who love God and are rigorously trying to figure out what that means for their lives.

One of the churches I used to attend on the East Coast had this thing called the Center for Faith and Work. It was this venue for professionals to get together and talk about what it meant to love God in their profession. So doctors would get together, lawyers would get together, actors and writers would get together and creatively and practically work out their faith in their particular fields. It was really cool!

From Gary Hamel's talk, our San Mateo campus is having something called Dream Night where we are coming together as a church, as a community, and were asking the question...*What does it mean for our north campus, our San Mateo campus, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength?* I think it is going to be really exciting.

See...we have to get together and we have to talk. Deuteronomy says if you want to grow, if you want to change, if you want to make an impact, if you want to love God, you have to get into these types of communities and talk it out...talk it out what it means to love God, talk out the sermons. So if you are not in this type of community, you ought to get into one. To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength means to love God with every aspect of your life, and we do that by committing to the Word, committing to prayer, and committing to community.

The second part of the greatest commandment of Jesus is this, **"...love your neighbor as yourself."** This

comes from Leviticus 19:18. Scholars have noticed something interesting. In the past, loving God was always over here, and loving people was always over here, and they were both affirmed, but they were always affirmed separately. Here, Jesus ties them together. Prior to Jesus, they were never combined. Here, Jesus ties them together. Do you know what that means? It means according to Jesus the difference between the first and second greatest commandments is not a marathon, but a sprint.

Have any of you guys ever run a marathon? Oh...one person. You are so sick! Why would you run a marathon when you can eat a Twinkie? That's what I say... In a marathon, so I've heard, the first-place runner comes in and then minutes later, the second-place runner comes in, and the difference between first and second can be pretty big. In a sprint, however, the difference between #1 and #2 is a split second. It's a photo finish. You can't see #1 without seeing #2. What Jesus is saying is loving God and loving people is not a marathon...it's a sprint. It's a photo finish.

You cannot see loving God in your life if you do not see loving people in the picture. This is what the apostle John says in John 4:20, "If we say we love God but we hate our brother or sister, we're liars." If you say you love God, but you are a hater...you're not just a hater, but you're a liar...John says. That's rough. If we cannot love people that we see, how can we love a God that we do not see? He has given us this command...those who love God must love one another. And you know what...God is saying this. He is saying, "You know, I really don't care how many prayer meetings you attend, and I really don't care how many verses you've memorized, and I really, *really* don't care how sound and how pure you think your doctrine is...if, in your heart, in your mind, and with your words, and with your deeds...you do not love people.

People matter to God, and if you love God, people will matter to you.

So what does loving people mean? Two things, I think. First, a spiritual vicariousness, and a second, a deep social conscience. This is what I mean by spiritual vicariousness... The picture here that Jesus is presenting is a mirror effect. The image is to take the shell of yourself off and to enclose the shell around another human being so that you feel you are that person. All the longings and desires that you have for your own happiness and your own safety and your own welfare...you feel for them as if they were you. And with all the passion that you pursue your own happiness and success and safety, you pursue for them. It is to see yourself in the person in need and ask the question...*If I were them, what time would I want to receive from somebody? What questions would I want them to ask? What help what I want to receive? What conversations when I want to have?*

Last week, I met up with a good friend of mine from church at the north campus, and she was telling me about one of her relatives who was just messing up his life from the poor decisions he was making. She and her husband were wrestling with how involved they should be because he is not their kid, and they have three kids of their own, and they are just crazy busy. Yet, they are getting together with each other, with community, with a group of friends, and they are wrestling with this question. They are wrestling with...*If this were my son, how what I want people to come around him and be his advocate? If this were my son, how involved what I want other people to be?* See that's what it means to love your neighbor as yourself.

Second...loving people means having a deep social conscience that launches us into the world and radical loving service. This is significant because in both the Mark account and the Shema in Deuteronomy have parallel passages where they link the love of God and the love of people to social action. In the Gospel of Luke, we have a similar account that we find in Mark. We have a teacher of law coming up to Jesus and

asking Him what is the greatest commandment. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus answered him, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength...love your neighbor as yourself,"*** but in the Gospel of Luke, the law professional follows up and says, ***"And who is my neighbor?"***

Then Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan, and the parable of the good Samaritan is a case study that answers the question who my neighbor is, and according to Jesus, that's anyone in my path that is in need. And what does it look like to love? What does it look like to love? The Samaritan in the parable shows neighbor love by giving time, medical attention, financial subsidy, transportation... This is social action. It is meeting actual physical needs. It is accompanying the love and faith with radical deeds of service.

In the Shema, the parallel passage is Deuteronomy, chapter 10, and this is what it says, ***"Hear, O Israel, what does the Lord ask of you but to love and serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul? For the Lord shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow. He loves the [immigrant and the] alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are [immigrants and] aliens, for you yourselves were once aliens in Egypt."***

God is saying, "If you love Me with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength...if you love Me you will love the marginalized." God is saying, "If you love Me, you will love the fatherless. If you love Me, you will love the homeless. If you love Me, you will love the widow, you will love the orphan, you will love the people who are under resourced. If you love Me, you will love them and you will give them food and clothing. You will show no prejudice. You will show no racism or classism. You will never look at or wield power in the same way if the gospel has affected your life. Everything you do will have a gospel dynamic." My life given over to You in radical love and service because God's life was given over to me in radical love and service.

Paul says if the Church responds to this, if we take this seriously, there will be an aroma and a fragrance that comes out of this building. Last week, in Gary Hamel's message, he talked about a few things, and I sat there, and my heart just broke. He said, quoting Barna, "Research shows that our local churches have almost no influence on this culture." And then quoting Kinnaman, "Outsiders' perceptions of Christianity reflect a Church infatuated with itself." And in the society at large, the perception of evangelical Christianity is disproportionately negative. The ratio is 16 to 1. Sixteen negatives to one positive.

I thought to myself, *How did we get here?* See, but there's hope because Gary mentioned the fact that the early church grew from a handful of apostles and believers after the resurrection to fifty-six percent of the Greco-Roman world. Do you guys know how that happened? The great plagues....the plagues, disease. It is the best thing that happened for Christianity.

There was a huge plague in 165 A.D. it went through and killed almost twenty-five percent of the entire population in the cities. Huge numbers of people dying, and then one hundred years later there was another horrible plague, and this is what happened, if you want to read more about this, it is in Rodney Stark's book, *The Rise of Christianity*. He is a sociologist at Baylor.

Basically what happened was the plagues hit, and it was just a catastrophe. It was a disaster. It got so bad that all the rules were out the door. Mothers and fathers were throwing children out there carts into the streets before they were dead, hoping to avert contagion. People were betraying friends and everybody was just in for themselves. The most famous doctor of that area was a doctor named Galen, and when

sickness hit, he took off for the hills.

And from Dionysius...this is what he says, "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains." They lost their lives in this manner, many elders and ministers as well. Many of the Christians cheerfully took their neighbor's death on themselves by nursing them back to health, and in the process, died in their place.

I mean, talk about a church growth strategy..."Hey guys, going to the elders...this is how we're going to grow the church. All the leadership, all the best strategists, all the pastors...you can go out there, and you're going to drop like flies. You're going to die. You're going to die serving your enemies." That was their strategy. This was the gospel dynamic at work.

See, what's so funny is that it wasn't a slick program. It wasn't a well thought-out strategy. It wasn't great teaching. It wasn't a beautiful building that grew their early church. It was Christians who embodied the gospel and lived it out in living sacrifice, and as a result, by 350 A.D., fifty-six percent (over half the Roman Empire) was Christian.

I know what some of you guys are thinking, *That's crazy! I don't know if I could live like that. I don't know if I could love God and love people like that.* You're right...you're absolutely right. You can't. I can't. And neither could the early Christians until they worked the gospel into every facet of their lives. Do you think that the early Christians were just better, stronger, more virtuous people? Absolutely not! You read the accounts...they struggled with the same stuff we struggle with. They had the same fears we have, but they let the gospel in.

In communities, they worked it out, they talked it out, and they tried to figure out what it meant for them. And it transformed their view of money, power, relationships, and death. Their understanding of what Jesus did for them, their understanding of their ultimate future in Christ. Their understanding of the death of Christ changed the way they lived. And it will change the way we live here if we embrace the gospel as well.

People, we are the Church...we are the *Church*. We are the Church of the eternal God. We have the Spirit of God. We are united in His Spirit. We are called the fragrance of Christ, the aroma of life by Paul. We are called the salt of the earth, the light of the world. And we are called by God to creatively and authentically...and proclaim hope...the hope of the gospel...to a world that needs us, and we have this amazing opportunity to participate in the mission of God and to figure out what part we have to play in that story, and it is exciting, and it is awesome, and it is humbling.

This should generate a lot of debate, a lot of conversation, a lot of introspection, a lot of prayer. Through it all, through the challenge of living out the call of God in the 21st century, we will be stronger, we will be wiser, we will be more gracious and loving if we remember this: the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing: love God, love people, serve the world in radical gospel love.

Let's pray: Father, we thank You for who You are, and we thank You for Your love poured out to us in Jesus Christ and through everything that's going on this Sunday, would You pour out grace upon grace upon us, and would You help us to catch a picture, a glimpse, of Your beauty and Your majesty and the

hope that we have in You, and may it transform...*transform*...our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.