

If I sat beside you, and asked: *how we should live?*

What would you say?

If I asked you to sum up "*how we should live*" – in just 1 sentence, in just 1 idea – how would you respond?

If I asked people in Lewes, who aren't Christians, that same question they may well answer

"Well if I had to sum up it up then I guess its about being good and respecting others".

Indeed many Christians would say the same,

"It's all about being kind and loving your neighbour".

That's what most people would settle for as a good answer

That's what many Christian's would say

But according to Jesus it completely misses the point

"How should we live" is the biggest *practical* question we will ever face in our life.

It's the question that is asked of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 22v36 by an expert in the law

Have you ever seen one of those old fashioned "all-comers prize fights"?

You know, where a champion rolls into town,

sets up a boxing ring and

then the biggest and the strongest of the village men attempt

(to impress the ladies and earn a few coins)

by lasting a couple of rounds with the champion.

I have only seen it in films.

(To your surprise I have never actually taken part in one myself)

But the climax in the films is always at the end when the biggest and meanest of the village bullies climbs into the ring to challenge the Champion.

Well this is what is going on in Matthew 22.

For the past few weeks we've been watching Jesus deliver theological "*knock out blows*" to a series of challengers.

It began with the little fella's in v15.

Jesus has rolled into town

he has turned the benches in the Temple over and evicted the money changers

The Champion has arrived...

and so a few verses later the Pharisees

"get together and laid plans to trap him in his words".

Ding, ding –

Round 1.

They team up with the Herodians v16 and

they say "Is it right to pay Taxes to Caesar or not".

Jesus gives them a superb answer and the crowd v22 are amazed and delighted.

Round 1, Jesus.

Round 2.

v23. The Sadducees climb into the ring

and they set up a preposterous story about a woman who

marries 7 husbands and all of them die on her

(You would have thought the 7th husband would have spotted a worrying trend)

and again Jesus shows that they do not know what they are talking about

and v33 the crowds are astonished at his teaching.
Round 2 Jesus.

Round 3 – our passage, v34

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees (silenced them – a knock out blow)
the Pharisees got together (team huddle) and*

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him...

One of them, an expert in law, their champion, their heavy weight,

The Mike Tyson of the Jerusalem Theological Seminary.

tests Jesus with the most profound of all the questions

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important"

"If this is the hand-book on life"

"What, is, God's primary instruction on how we should live".

"his number one commandment?"

And I imagine the crowd hushes as they wait for Jesus' answer.

And he says

v37 Love the Lord your God.

Love him with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment.

"What is life all about?", "how should we live?"

In one sentence... Love God, love him with everything that you have and everything that you are...

That's what Jesus said.

And of course everyone who doesn't believe in God will disagree with that –

"no! life is all about respecting and loving each other";

And everyone of us who loves their family, loves their job, loves their house, loves their comfort – will feel -
not a little disconcerted by Jesus' statement...

Love God with everything that we have and are?

What does that mean?

Why should we do that? and

How does that change our life?

That's what I want us to think about this morning.

What does that mean to love God with everything?

Why should we? and

How does this change our life?

1. What does it mean "to love God with everything that we have and every fibre of our being".

Well, I think it is about recognising that there is no other competition for our love...

All though our life – different people and different things compete for our affection.

All through our life – different people influence us, different people demand priority, different people
compete for who/or what is more important.

To love God with everything is to recognise that there IS no competition....

Look, I know you'll have trouble believing this but when I was 11 I was actually quite short.

*And I remember, being volunteered by my "so called friends"
for the School Sports Day hurdles race".*

When I saw the hurdles I wasn't entirely sure I could climb over them let alone hurdle them!

*And I remember thinking, as I looked down the track on the day,
that in front of me was the certain prospect that I would finish last,
that I would fail to clear even a single hurdle and
that I would be the laughing stock of the whole school.*

*The gun went off and we raced.
To this day I am not quite sure what happened but I managed to clear the hurdles
(I have a sneaking suspicion I went under a few of them) and I came **second**.
I was delighted.
My friends were amazed.
My house captain clapped me on the back and said well done David
(David is my older brother)
but that didn't matter. As I walked home, I felt like a hero. I was on top of the world.*

*When I got home my Dad was standing at the sink and
I remember excitedly telling him how I had cleared the hurdles,
how I had scored 5 points and
how I had come second in the race, and
he replied "second is OK".*

*Second is OK!
Now, that's not what I wanted to hear!
I wanted him to be pleased with me!
It sounded like he was disappointed
And that wasn't good because what my Father thought of me was the most important thing in my life.*

*Fast forward a couple of years to when I was 13.
Imagine. I am standing in front of my house having a picture taken.
I have thick curly black hair (yes use your imagination!),
I am wearing a white polo neck jumper with a heavy imitation gold chain around my neck.
I am wearing high beige waist band baggies and
coffee and gold coloured **huge** platform shoes.
Now by any objective measure - I looked a complete wombat.
My Dad told me so (many times), but to my friends - I looked cool.
So clearly it no longer mattered what my dad thought about me –
it was what my friends thought that counted.*

*Go forward a few more years. I am 17.
I am at a disco, and my friends and I are nonchalantly leaning against the wall.
All of a sudden in walks "Amanda Lee" (not my wife Amanda) –
But Amanda Lee, blue jeans, white tee shirt fluorescing in the ultra violet light.
Everything a 17 year old could want and so completely out of my league!
It was then that the DJ played "3 slow in a row".*

*Somehow, my friends managed to talk me into asking her for a dance.
And as I went up to her, all I wanted was for her not to laugh.*

*My pulse was racing,
I felt physically sick...
but then she was leading me onto the dance floor!
She was tall and my nose came up to her chin.
But it didn't matter.
I had arrived.*

I remember looking at my friends (whose jaws were resting gently on the floor and thanking God (which is theologically dubious)).

*The dance ended
and then it happened –
totally unbidden she kissed me.*

*For weeks later my friends told me that the only thing they could get out of me was
"Did you see that, she kissed me".*

*And question was answered with the same phrase
"Did you see that she kissed me"*

For a few glorious weeks the only person in the world that mattered to me was Amanda Lee.

Do you see my point?

All through my life there has been a competition about WHO is the most important.

They competed.

They competed for my time, for my priority, for my values, for my affections!

I am not alone in this, this is true for all of us.

The things we want, the things we strive for, the things we believe we need –
are often dictated by what *others* want, what others strive for, what others think they need.

The influence of other people's values in our lives is all pervasive,
and we can't escape it. We are all shaped by it.

But to be a Christian is to *break free* from this.

To be a Christian is to do away with the whole idea of competition and to say,
Enough!

It is what God thinks of me that counts.

It is his smile, his approval, his pleasure I seek.

And so to be a Christian is not to think that God has
most of our heart, the majority of our mind, a large portion of our soul.

To be a Christian is to say "God there is NO competition, you are the only show in town".

Now immediately we'll say!

But what about my family?

Can I not love my family?

Can I not love my work, my hobbies, my friends, my comforts?

And the answer is "yes, absolutely"

Because

Loving God IS the key to unlocking all our OTHER loves

Loving God is the way to loving ourselves

(how do we know how precious we are – by discovering God's love for us)

Loving God is the way we know how to love our families

Loving God is the way we work out how best to love our work, our friends, our hobbies, our comforts.

There is no competition!

It is not like this... (where there is competition)

It is like this... loving God is the frame by which we love everything in our world!

So there is no contradiction in saying

"I love God with everything that I am and everything I have"

because by doing that “I will discover how to love my family and my friends and my neighbours and my very life”

This is why Jesus says “the most important lesson that God wants us to learn, the greatest commandment on how to live: is to love God with everything...”

It unlocks the key to life!

In fact, unless we are able to say that, this is what we want,

unless we are able to say to God “I love you, or even “I’d love to love you” with all my heart – then we are not yet a Christian”.

It is this fundamental to living.

So that’s what it means.

The next question is obvious!

2. Why? Why should we love God with everything?

I’d like to give three reasons:

2.1) Firstly, because God is GOD

Because he made you, created your soul, gave you life,

Because he designed this world and provides you with breath and surrounds you with beauty and bestowed you **with every** good thing

Because he made you for eternity with him

Why should we love God with everything?

because everything we have and are comes from him.

He is God.

2.2) Secondly, because He is everything that we need.

He is our Father, our Friend, our Lover

If our Parents give us a sense of belonging and security in this world –

Our heavenly Father gives us this but forever.

If our friends share our passions with us, shape our values and make life sweeter

Then Jesus dies the same but perfectly!

If those we love are let behind our ‘emotional’ defensive screen so that we may be known and still loved

Then God Spirit searches our hearts and knows our thoughts and loves us unconditionally despite all our flaws and hang-ups and vulnerabilities and insecurities.

True security and purpose is found in the Father, true peace in his Son, true joy through his Spirit!

Why love God with everything?

Because he IS Everything (He is God)

Because he can be OUR everything

2.3 And finally because HE loves us with HIS everything!

I gave this illustration a couple of weeks ago in the evening –

but it expresses everything I want to say right here...

We don’t know how much to give of ourselves to God until we realise how much of himself he has given us.

Look imagine a friend of mine comes to me and says

“hey, I was at your house the other day and someone asked for a bill to be paid - so I paid it for you”.

We won’t understand how to respond to that until we know how much it cost them to pay it.

If it was just the postman asking for postage “a few pence” – then we’d say to our friend

“thank you” - but it won’t change our life

*But if it was the Bailiffs threatening to foreclose on our mortgage,
if they were threatening to take our home and all our possessions away?
If the bill was for tens of £100,000 and
If our friend paid it and saved us from destitution and homelessness.
That is a completely different matter!*

Until I understand how much it cost my friend to pay my debt
I will never know how to respond to him.
Until we understand how much it cost God to save us – we will not know how much to give him

If my friend paid a debt...
I will not know whether to say “*thanks*” and pat him on the back, or
whether to say *nothing* and fall at his feet.

When we finally admit that God has “to be God” in our life – he has to be everything
When we see that in him we find **our** everything; and
When we finally see that it cost **him** everything to love us
then (and not before) then we will say
God I will love you, and will love you with everything that I am and have.
Because you have loved me with all that you are and have...

That’s when we live a renewed life,
That’s when the Spirit of God can work in us
Its radical, Its total and It makes perfect sense!

3. That’s when it changes our life.

The key to life is found when we place God at the centre,

When we stop trying to make everything revolve around us; and
when we make the decision to see everything in our life as centred on God.
That is a decision all people must make to become a Christian.

*C. S. Lewis said “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen:
not only because I see it,
but because **by it** I see everything else.*

*Do you know that as little as 500 years ago people used to think that the sun went around the earth.
They used to think that the earth was the centre of the universe.
They used to proudly think that they were the centre of everything.*

*When they looked at the heavens and observed how the stars moved,
they created the most complicated and bizarre formulae to explain it all.
The maths was torturous but it seemed so wise and clever.
“The Sun went around the earth. The stars orbited us, we are the centre of the Universe” they said.*

*And then some guy called Copernicus came along and he had a bright idea.
What if we aren’t the centre of the Universe?
What if the earth went around the Sun?*

*And when they did the maths and when they looked hard - it became obvious.
It was so obvious, they couldn’t believe how they had **never** seen it before.
Suddenly everything fell into place.*

You know it is the same for you and me.
We all like to believe,
we all want to behave
as if **we** are the centre of our universe.
“Let everything revolve around me and my needs and loves”
It doesn’t work...

God comes along and says “let your world revolve around the Son”.
Jesus is bigger than you,
He is more glorious than you,
He is much more powerful than you.
He is much more attractive than you.
Put him at the centre and you will see life in a completely new and liberating way.

I know it’s a radical idea.
I know it means changing absolutely every assumption we have made about our life

But let your world revolve around Jesus and everything will fall into place.
The meaning life,
the knowledge of who you are,
a sense of eternity,
a knowledge of being loved.
It all falls into place.

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One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to not give God our everything.
What happens then is that
the person we are at work, is different to the person we are at home,
the person we are at home is not the person we are at Church, and
the person we are at Church is not the person we are with our friends.

But when we place God in the centre of who we are
when we see everything through his eyes,
then everything comes under his influence

we see that loving God is expressed in loving our neighbour
we see that loving God is expressed in being the best husband, parent, friend we can be
we see that loving others even sacrificially is but a pale reflection of the glory that has been revealed to us.
As the moon reflects the glory of the Sun
So loving each other becomes just a small reflection of the life of God in us.

I simply want you to respond this morning by corporately, and individually committing the whole of your life to God;
I want it to be everything
I want you to know that it is absolutely radical.
To want to give it all to God, to “want to want to” give it all to God
So that we are in this boat together
a single people who have placed God at the centre of everything we want to be, and everything we want to do?