

“DARE TO FOLLOW”
by Rom A. Pegram (6/4/17)

Do you guys know the television game show called ‘Jeopardy?’ Well, as we begin a new worship series today called “Dare to Be Great,” I want to do our own version. Are you ready to give it a try? Our theme for Jeopardy today is going to be ‘GREAT THINGS,’ so let’s see how you’re going to do today...

- **We’ll start with ‘great things’ for \$100.** Frosted Flakes mascot Tony the Tiger is famous for this catch phrase. If you know the answer, just shout it out... (What is ... ‘They’re great!’?) All right. Very good. Now, let’s go to for the next one...
- **Here are ‘great things’ for \$200.** Cartoon character Scooby Doo ... is based on this breed of large dog. (What is a ... ‘Great Dane’?) You’re exactly right. Now, shall we try again?
- **Here’re ‘great things’ for \$300.** This famous wonder of the world is old, long, and found in China. (What is ... ‘The Great Wall of China’?) Exactly right! O.K., here’s the last one...
- **‘Great things’ for \$400.** [Beep!] Oh, it’s the Daily Double! ‘Great things’ for \$400. This soon to be famous TUMC worship series begins today. (What is ‘Dare to Be Great!’?)

Exactly right. Today, we’re kicking off a brand new worship series, and we’re going to be looking at 3 foundational passages from the Bible, all of which Jesus said were ‘great.’ We’re going to look at what’s known as 1) The Great Commandment, 2) The Great Compassion, and 3) the Great Commission. And, in order to get the most out of this series, you’re also going to have to have a *great ‘commitment’—commitment to the great commandment and the great commission, all done with great compassion ... will grow a great church made up of great Disciples!* Isn’t that a GREAT statement? Let’s go to Matthew 22 ... and pick up with Jesus, having just put the Sadducees in their place, now turning to the Pharisees (Matthew 22:34-40, NLT)...

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” ³⁷ Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Jesus gave a great response here—one the Pharisees couldn’t really argue with. But, let’s face it, *how in the world would you or I have answered that question?* Folks, with over 800-some laws in the Old Testament, they were asking Jesus which was the most important. Jesus, desperately wanting to simplify our relationship with God, narrowed it

down for us—from 800+ down to 2! And the reason the Pharisees couldn't argue was ... Jesus was quoting a famous scripture known as the *Shema* (the central prayer in the Jewish prayer book, Deut. 6:5). I'll come back to that in a bit, but the bottom line is, *if you didn't get this one right, nothing else was going to make sense. So, if you want to be GREAT in God's eyes, here's how you do it (and help me out here, would you?):*

- Love the Lord your God with all your (heart)...
- With all your (soul)...
- And with all your (mind)...

That's the first and greatest commandment. So, what did Jesus say? IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE! Love for God. That's the greatest commandment. If you want to be great in God's eyes ... *you need to learn how to love!* First God, then your neighbor (more on that next week). If you want to be GREAT in God's eyes, though, you've got to take up Jesus' challenge, starting here:

FIRST CHALLENGE: LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. Verse 37a tells us, "Jesus replied, 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart....'" What in the world does that really mean? In other words, what was Jesus' idea here ... in his context? Well, here it is: *To love God with all of my heart ... I must give God my worship!*

Now, why would Jesus start here? Let me explain. To those in Jesus' context (Jewish), *the heart is the center of your being!* Remember, what Jesus is saying here comes from the *Shema* (Deut. 6:5), and when the Old Testament was originally written, it was written in Hebrew. The Hebrew word used here for heart is ... *splatnah*. And that is becoming one of my favorite words in the entire Bible, because it's so much fun to say. 'SPLATNAH' means *the center of your being...*

So, Jesus here is basically saying, "If you're going to live a life for God, you have to first make sure that God is at the center of your being!" Love the Lord your God *with all your heart!* So, the challenging question for us today is this: *What's at the center of your life?* What or who are you living for? Center = worship ... and worship = center. You worship whatever is at the center of your life; and whatever is at the center of your life, you worship...

Now, some might say, "Golf is at the center of my life, but I don't worship golf!" Not true. If golf *is* at the center of your life, you worship golf! Now, nothing against golf; it depends on what place it takes in your life. (Remember the 'idolatry' from last week?) Folks, we don't have to look too far to know this: Many people put other things in their life ahead of God ... and the worship of God. Sunday mornings are as much for secular activities these days, as they are the worship of God. Whatever is at the center of your life—whatever you put before God—is what you worship; 'doesn't matter what it is...

Now, you know why I call this *a challenge* from Jesus! It's not easy in this world we live in to keep God in first place, but, we must! And the hardest thing to overcome—at the center of our lives—is *ourselves*. What did Pogo say again? "We have met the enemy ... and he is us!" Whatever we place (a choice) at the center of our lives ... is what we

worship. Jesus says, if you want to be GREAT in God's eyes, *you must worship the Lord your God with all your heart—God at the center of your being!* So, being GREAT in God's eyes starts with 'idol cleansing,' doesn't it—moving some things out of the way ... so you can love God with all your heart. Then, we move here...

SECOND CHALLENGE: LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR SOUL. Verse 37b says, "Jesus replied, 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul....'" What does Jesus mean by that—all your soul? It's like this: *To love God with all my soul ... means I must give God my obedience!* So, it starts with our heart, then our soul, and finally moves to loving God with all our mind (and I'll get to that in a minute)...

I want you to think about what's going on here in this way: *Jesus' challenges to us are like going on a journey. First, you choose the mode of transportation. Will I take the bus, the train, or will I fly—say, if I'm going from Chicago to Los Angeles. What's the best mode of transportation? That's the 'heart' of the journey—what I'm going to choose to be the 'central' mode of getting me from here to there. And, as we've already talked about, that needs to be God. God needs to be at the center—at the heart...*

Next, we need to decide this: Loving God with all your soul means asking the question, "Who or what is going to guide my life?" 'Soul' in this sense may be like our 'conscience.' What's going to be the 'conscience' of my life? And maybe we could think of it in this way: Our soul or our conscience is kind of like a 'GPS' in our lives. It's the voice we listen to. I don't know about you, but I always like to set my GPS to the most pleasant voice possible ... and the most trustworthy, to get me to where I need to go...

So, what voice are you listening to in your life? What's the loudest voice in your life? Is that voice something that's shutting out God's voice? Or, is it God's voice you're truly listening to, in order to get you to where you need to go? This is your GPS, so to speak. You want to be able to trust the voice you're listening to! You need to make sure it's a trustworthy voice—one that's good to listen to ... in every way! So, which voice will that be? Loving God 'with all your soul' means that God is the one you've chosen as your GPS; God is the voice you listen to ... always...

The truth is, many times throughout life, each and every one of us will come to a crossroads ... where we need to ask, "Which way now?" *Choosing the route* may be part of our spiritual journey. It may be the journey of our professional lives or our family lives. But, that time will come for all of us. And when it does, "Which voice are you going to be listening to?" There's Jesus' second challenge, and here's the last one:

THIRD CHALLENGE: LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR MIND. Verse 37c continues with this: "Jesus replied, 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'" Let me do a quick review here, for a moment: To love God with all my heart, I give him my *worship* (place God in the center of my being)! To love God with all my soul, I give him my *obedience* (his is the voice I listen to)! And now, what does Jesus mean by this—and *all your mind*? Here it is: *To love God with all my mind ...*

means I must give God all my focus! Why does Jesus offer this challenge? Because ... we so easily lose our focus!

'Remember my illustration? God speaks and says, "You need to get to Los Angeles." The *first* thing you do is *choose your mode of transportation*—the right way to get there (with God at the center). I'm going to fly ... so the *next* thing I do is *choose the route* (*loving God with all my soul*—listening to God's voice to know best). *Then* we've got to *choose what kind of pilot* we're going to have ... and hopefully not one who's distracted in the middle of our journey!

Do you remember me telling you about Deuteronomy 6:5—what Jesus was quoting here in his challenges—and that it's known as the 'Shema'? One of the reasons Jesus elevated this scripture is because it's a famous passage, especially amongst devout Jews—even today. Devout Jews repeat the Shema six times per day (i.e. on El Al flying over to Israel...)

Why does God instruct his chosen people to repeat the Shema—*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*—six times per day? Here's why. WE GET DISTRACTED ... and God knew that. If we're to be GREAT in God's eyes, we need to be constantly reminding ourselves who is in first place in our lives! Let's face it, folks, when Monday comes (and our weekend worship seems like it was 100 days ago), isn't it hard to stay focused on God? In the midst of our busy lives? In the midst of our challenges at work? In the midst of our responsibilities at school? We offer God our minds, so that God can help us stay focused on what's the most important—HIM...

Folks, we began this time today by playing our version of Jeopardy. So, I'd like to end with *Final Jeopardy*, just to wrap up this session. So here's Final Jeopardy ... and here's the Final Jeopardy answer. The answer is ... "This person loved God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind." So, "Who is...." Do you see the blank up on the screen? I left a blank there because *I want you to fill in your name*; I want you to choose today to be great in God's eyes...

Choose today to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind!

Will you accept this challenge? Will you accept the DARE TO BE GREAT challenge—allowing God to be at the center of your life, choosing to be obedient to God's voice and direction, and focusing your mind on God's word? Will you choose to FOLLOW? At the end of your life—the *real FINAL JEOPARDY*—when you meet Jesus face-to-face, I want you to hear these words come out of Jesus' mouth: "Well done ... good (GREAT) and faithful servant!" Let's take up this challenge together—right now, right here. *Let's choose to be great for God!* LET'S 'DARE TO FOLLOW' ...