

*The Jesus Creed*

Mark 12:28-33

Sermon

*Hobart, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

*Devonport, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011*

*Launceston, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

© *Phillip C. Hopwood, 2011*

## OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**

<sup>4</sup> “Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>\*</sup> <sup>5</sup> And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. <sup>6</sup> And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today.

<sup>7</sup> Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

<sup>10</sup> “The LORD your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give you when he made a vow to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. <sup>11</sup> The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, <sup>12</sup> be careful not to forget the LORD, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. <sup>1</sup>

### **Leviticus 19:18**

<sup>18</sup> “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. <sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>\*</sup> Or *The LORD our God is one LORD*; or *The LORD our God, the LORD is one*; or *The LORD is our God, the LORD is one*.

<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Dt 6:4-12). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Le 19:18). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

## **GOSPEL READING**

### **Mark 12:28-33**

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. <sup>30</sup> And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’\* <sup>31</sup> The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’\* No other commandment is greater than these.”

<sup>32</sup> The teacher of religious law replied, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. <sup>33</sup> And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.”

<sup>34</sup> Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.<sup>3</sup>

---

\* Deut 6:4-5.

\* Lev 19:18.

<sup>3</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mk 12:28-34). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

### **Luke 9:57-62**

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

<sup>58</sup> But Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.”

<sup>59</sup> He said to another person, “Come, follow me.”

The man agreed, but he said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.”

<sup>60</sup> But Jesus told him, “Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! \* Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>61</sup> Another said, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.”

<sup>62</sup> But Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

---

\* Greek *Let the dead bury their own dead.*

---

---

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. WHAT WE BELIEVE IS CLEARLY VITALLY IMPORTANT!

#### A. BEING ABLE TO EXPRESS WHAT WE BELIEVE CONCISELY CAN BE OF GREAT VALUE

1. It can help us keep our hearts, minds and lives centred on what is good, right and important
2. It can help us explain the hope within us to others

#### B. FOR THIS REASON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH HAS HAD CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF FAITH SINCE THE BEGINNING

---

## S.P.S:

#### A. TODAY I'D LIKE TO LOOK AT A SIMPLE CREED, OR STATEMENT OF BELIEF THAT JESUS' GAVE US

1. And discuss how it can help us in our daily Christian walk and our spiritual growth

#### B. TRINITARIAN THEOLOGIAN, SCOTT MCKNIGHT CALL'S IT,

1. "The Jesus Creed"

#### C. PRAYER

---

## BODY:

### II. THE “SHEMA”

#### A. EVERY DAY, WHEN THEY WOKE AND WHEN THEY WENT TO BED OBSERVANT JEWS RECITE OUTLOUD A CREED, CALLED THE “SHEMA”

1. It comes from the passage we heard read earlier, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 along with parts of two other passages.

a) It is spelled, SHEMA, pronounced “sheema” or “shh-mar”

b) *Shema* is the first word of the creed, and means “hear” or “listen”

#### B. THE NORMAL SHORTER VERSION IS AS FOLLOWS:

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>a</sup> <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

<sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. <sup>4</sup>

#### C. THE ORIGINAL VERSION WAS JUST DEUTERONOMY 6:4

1. The full version has another two sections from *Deuteronomy 11:13-21*, and *Numbers 15:37-41*

a) These two sections are used on more formal occasions by more conservative observant Jews

<sup>a</sup> Or *The LORD our God is one LORD*; or *The LORD is our God, the LORD is one*; or *The LORD is our God, the LORD alone*

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Dt 6:4). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

**D. THE SHEMA IS THE FIRST PRAYER OR CONFESSION THAT JEWISH CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT TO SAY,**

1. According to one Jewish theologian it is the “quintessential expression of the most fundamental belief and commitment of Judaism.”<sup>5</sup>
2. According to another Jewish authority

The *Shema* is an affirmation of Judaism and a declaration of faith in one God. The obligation to recite the *Shema* is separate from the obligation to pray and a Jew is obligated to say *Shema* in the morning and at night ([Deut. 6:7](#)).

Since the *Shema* reaffirms the basic tenets of Jewish faith, it is important to hear clearly what one is saying. The *Shema* may be said while standing or sitting. The Jews of Israel used to stand to show the *Shema*'s importance and to demonstrate that saying *Shema* is an act of testifying in God.

It is customary for worshipers wearing a [tallit](#) to hold the four fringes in the left hand while reciting the *Shema*. In the third paragraph of the *Shema*, when the word "[tzitzi](#)" is said three times and when the word "emet" is said at the end, it is customary to kiss the fringes as a sign of affection for the commandments.

When a person is praying alone, he begins the *Shema* with the phrase "God, Faithful King" (*El melekh ne'eman*) to bring the number of words in the *Shema* up to 248, the number of parts in the human body. This indicates that the worshiper dedicates his or her whole body to serving God.

Jewish law requires a greater measure of concentration on the first verse of the *Shema* than on the rest of the prayer. People commonly close their eyes or cover them with the palm of their hand while reciting it to eliminate every distraction and help them concentrate on the meaning of the words. The final word, *echad*, should be prolonged and emphasized. Often, the last letter of the first and last words of the *Shema* verse are written in larger print in the siddur. This is because these letters form the word "ed,"

---

<sup>5</sup> Jeffery Tigay, *Deuteronomy, Commentary*, Jewish Publication Society, 1996, p.441

witness, and remind Jews of their duty to serve as witnesses to God's sovereignty by leading exemplary lives.<sup>6</sup>

### **E. SO CLEARLY THE “SHEMA”**

1. Expresses the central beliefs and of Judaism, that God is one, and that they are to love God by remembering and living the Law or “Torah”

---

## **III. THE JESUS CREED**

### **A. JESUS, WOULD HAVE KNOWN THE SHEMA BY HEART, AND MOST LIKELY HAVE RECITED IT TWICE A DAY, AS ALL UPRIGHT JEWS DID**

1. In Mark 11 and 12:28 Jesus challenged the practices and teachings of many of the Jewish religious authorities, telling them in
2. Mark 12:24

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “Your mistake is that you don’t know the Scriptures, and you don’t know the power of God.”

3. One of the teachers in Jewish law was more impressed with Jesus than the others
4. And he asked Jesus what was the most important of all the commandments

### **Mark 12:28-33**

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD.’<sup>30</sup> And you must love the LORD your God with

---

<sup>6</sup> Shira Schoenberg, *The Shema*, Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shema.html>



all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’\* <sup>31</sup> The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’\* No other commandment is greater than these.”

**B. WHERE DID JESUS GET THE FIRST PART OF HIS ANSWER?**

1. The *Shema*! Deuteronomy 6:4
  - a) Jesus clearly valued the *Shema*
2. But he does something very bold, which fits in with what he has been doing in his previous interchanges, he brings a new authority and perspective to how we are to view as priorities in what we believe and how we live our lives in relationship with God

**C. WHAT DOES JESUS ADD, THAT IS NOT IN THE SHEMA?**

1. That loving your neighbour as yourself is equally important, and inseparable from the first
2. What difference does this amended creed of Jesus’ make to the old *Shema*?
3. Instead of a “love God” creed, Jesus has created as Scott McKnight puts it,
  - a) “a Love-God-and-Others-Shema.”
4. Scott McKnight says;

What Jesus adds is not unknown to Judaism, and he is not criticizing Judaism. But the emphasis on loving others is not found in Judaism’s creed the way it is found in the *Jesus Creed*. Making the love of others part of his own version of the *Shema* shows that he sees love of others as central to spiritual formation.<sup>7</sup>

---

\* Deut 6:4-5.

\* Lev 19:18.

<sup>7</sup> Scott McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others*, Paraclete Press, 2004, p.9

---

---

### **Mark 12:32-33**

<sup>32</sup> The teacher of religious law replied, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. <sup>33</sup> And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.”

5. The teacher got to the heart of what Jesus was teaching

a) He saw that a relationship of love with God and our neighbour is what God is all about, not religious rules, rituals and observances

6. Jesus heartily commends him for his understanding

<sup>34</sup> Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

---

---

## **IV. LUKE 9:57-62 FOLLOWING JESUS**

### **A. JESUS MADE PLAIN HOW WE ARE TO LIVE HIS CREED, THE TWO GREAT COMMANDS**

1. He shows how we live them by following him
2. The writers of the NT later go on to show how clearly Jesus reveals God, who he is, and how he acts
  - a) And how we are to live by being the people he created us to be, by following Jesus
  - b) Letting Jesus bring God to us, and us to God
  - c) Letting Jesus, through the Spirit, live his modified Shema, his creed for us, and in us and through us
  - d) Enabling us to know God and his love for us, and in response to love God and love our neighbour
3. Many passages in the Gospels show how people asked, or were invited, to follow him

## **Luke 9:57-62**

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

<sup>58</sup> But Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.”

<sup>59</sup> He said to another person, “Come, follow me.”

The man agreed, but he said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.”

<sup>60</sup> But Jesus told him, “Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead!\* Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>61</sup> Another said, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.”

<sup>62</sup> But Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

### 4. Jesus was showing in each case that it would take commitment to follow him

- a) There is more than meets the eye in the case of the man who asks to first go home and bury his father

### 5. Burials took place in two stages separated by a year

- a) First, immediately after the death of a father, the family led by the oldest son placed the body in a tomb in a casket
  - (1) They then stayed and mourned for seven days
- b) After one year, the bones were then taken and placed in box called an *ossuary* and buried permanently
  - (1) McKnights says;

This was how good Jews showed respect for a father, how they applied the commandment to honour one’s parents, how they loved God by following the *Torah*.

Many today think the proper context of Jesus’ encounter with this man is between the first burial and the second burial. To being with, it is unlikely that a family member sitting *shiva* (after the first burial) would be out and about anyway, and it is hard to imagine Jesus’ refusing this most sacred

---

\* Greek *Let the dead bury their own dead.*

obligation. *If the encounter with Jesus occurs between the first and second burial, then as much as a year's lag could occur before he would begin to follow Jesus.*

The man is caught in the dilemma that the *Jesus Creed* creates; Should he follow Jesus or (how he understands) the *Torah*?

Jesus calls the man to follow him and, *in so doing, equates loving God to having a personal relationship with Jesus.*

To use other terms, the *Shema* of Judaism becomes the *Jesus Creed: One loves God by following Jesus.* This is a revolutionary understanding of the *Shema*, and it is what the spiritual life is all about for Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

**B. SO JESUS MAKES CLEAR THAT HIS WAY, HIS CREED IS REVOLUTIONARY IN TWO WAYS;**

1. Life is about *love for God and others*
2. *Loving God and loving others consists of following Jesus, of fully sharing in his life and all it involves*
  - a) Letting him live his life of *loving God and others* in us and through us
  - b) And not letting anything else get in the way
  - c) Not our worries, our guilt, our religious rules, or our personal pursuits

**C. MCKNIGHT SUGGESTS THAT JESUS' DISCIPLES MAY HAVE RECITED JESUS' AMENDED SHEMA**

1. What he calls the "Jesus Creed", which briefly put is;
  - a) "*Love God, love others*".
2. And they clearly lived the Jesus Creed, by following Jesus
3. McKnight says,

Jesus calls each of us to offer our vocations to him so that we might, in the words of Parker Palmer, "let our life speak." What you become and what I become will be different, but it will be the life we have been given to speak to others—and that life is to be shaped by the *Jesus Creed*.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> McKnight, p.11

<sup>9</sup> McKnight, p.13

**D. WHETHER WE CHOOSE TO RECITE IT MORNING AND NIGHT OR NOT;**

1. Loving God and loving our neighbour by following Jesus; is the *centre of the new life* we are called to live.
2. Keeping it in our hearts and minds helps centre us and focus us on God and his will for us and all mankind
3. Just as the *Shema* was used to keep the Jews focused on God and their calling as his people

**E. IT REMINDS US THAT GOD IS ALL ABOUT LOVE**

1. Loving relationships
2. We are to love him and one another because that is what God knows is best for all of us
3. Love is who God is
  - a) His life is a life of love
  - b) The Father, the Son and the Spirit are one
  - c) In love they give, share, communicate, and work together for each other and for their united purpose

**F. WE ARE CALLED TO JOIN IN AND SHARE THAT LIFE OF LOVE**

1. To be loved by God, by the Father, the Son and the Spirit
  - a) And not let any barrier get in the way or any wrong thinking or feelings that deceive us into thinking God doesn't love us
  - b) Not letting our hearts believe that God loves us less because of anything that has happened to us, such as illness, calamity or injustice
  - c) Not letting our hearts believe that God loves us less because of anything we have done or not done
2. That sort of thinking makes God into a fair-weather friend or a contract, legalistic God
  - a) That was the way the pagan religions looked at their gods

b) It was all a matter of doing exactly the right thing in order to get the gods to do good things for them, and prevent calamities

3. It was assumed, even by the Jews that God would only bless the good

a) And inversely that if you suffered a calamity or illness, then you must be sinful and under God's punishment

4. These were distortions and deceptions people had fallen into at the time of Jesus and that he worked hard to remove

**G. AS WE BECOME MORE DEEPLY CONFIDENT OF GOD'S LOVE,**

1. as we grow in our understanding of the depth of service and self-giving, willing sacrifice that Jesus has given for us

a) The more we are led to love him, and the Father who sent him, and the Spirit who is God with us

2. And the more we know, appreciate and live in God's love, in a free, trusting and intimate relationship with him,

a) The more we are inspired and enabled to share in living his life of love for others

b) The more we are led out of our own self-focused worlds to see others, and the world around us through God's eyes

(1) To feel for others with his heart

(2) And to serve others with his love and strength

3. Scott McKnight talks about how true love and worship of God happens;

When I comprehend (1) who I really am before God—a love-violating sinner, (2) how faithful and gracious God is to his sacred commitment of love for me, (3) how incredibly good God is to open the floodgates of that love to me.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> McKnight, p.50

When we genuinely love God with *all* of our souls, *all* of our minds, and *all* of our strength, this sacred love will transform our speech, convert our actions, and inspire our worship.<sup>11</sup>

#### **H. IN PUTTING THE COMMAND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR ALONGSIDE THE COMMAND TO LOVE GOD,**

1. Jesus is showing that really loving God, is sharing in, and participating and partnering in his unconditional love for all

#### **I. THIS IS WHY WE WERE CREATED**

1. As Robert Webber writes in his book “Divine Embrace”,  
God created us in his image and likeness, to live in union with himself, to be what he created us to be, and to do what he created us to do; take care of the world and make it the place of his glory.<sup>12</sup>

#### **J. LARRY KREIDER, JIMMY SEIBERT,**

1. *The 3 Loves: Loving Jesus, Loving God's People, Loving a Broken World*

Most believers throughout history have affirmed the great importance of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, yet it seems that seldom have these truly been our core values. If we are honest, are these central values of Jesus the focus of our lives? We often get complex in our ministry, doing everything well except that which matters most. We allow controversies, not our central values to define us. Our journey is one of learning to put first things first—to radically love Jesus, His people and the lost.

You might well say, “I’m not a missionary; I’m just a businessman.” Well in God’s kingdom, no one is “just a businessman.” ...the Great Commandment and the Great Commission need to be lived out in their business world. The same is true for...every other field. Whatever God calls you to do, that is your place of influence and ministry.

When we really take hold of Jesus’ values, and walk them out every day, we cannot help but have an impact on the world around us. As we

---

<sup>11</sup> McKnight, p.47

<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Divine Embrace*, BakerBooks, 2006, p.86,87.

personally experience His love, presence and power, God brings us into a family of believers who can change our lives. We can take part in transforming the world around us so that His purposes can be fulfilled on earth, and we can be a dynamic community of people... Of course, we won't get it all right, all of the time, but we can start on a path toward seeing God do great things in and through us as we live out the simple values of loving Jesus, loving His people, and loving those around us in our broken world.<sup>13</sup>

---

## CONCLUSION:

### V. RECITING

#### A. THERE IS THE OLD SAYING, "YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT"

1. But how much more true is it that we are what we think

#### B. RECITING CREEDS AND MOTTOS, OR RESOLUTIONS ON A REPETITIVE BASIS IS A PRACTICE THAT IS BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN

1. It is proven to be a way of inculcating beliefs, values and priorities deep inside our consciousness

a) It is what God instructed the Israelites to do in Deuteronomy 6:6-8

<sup>6b</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

---

<sup>13</sup> Larry Kreider, Jimmy Seibert, *The 3 Loves: Loving Jesus, Loving God's People, Loving a Broken World*, Gospel Light, 2011



b) By reciting, regularly, even a very brief version of the “Jesus Creed” quietly to ourselves or even out loud, as we get up, as we go about our daily activities, or as we go to bed,

(1) it can help keep God’s priorities at the front of our mind, and deep within our hearts and minds

c) And that can help us share and participate in living Jesus life, expressing and living his love for God and for others

### **Mark 12:29-31**

<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. <sup>30</sup> And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’\* No other commandment is greater than these.”

### **C. PRAYER**

---

\* Deut 6:4-5.

\* Lev 19:18.