

## The Big Picture: Affection for Direction

Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 28:16-20

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If you are a student or a parent of a student or two, or perhaps four, then this weekend you are highly attuned to the fact that we are at the beginning of a new season. It is back to school again.

And there is always something exciting about back to school. New friends. New classrooms. A new start.

And new starts are important for people. We get rusty. We get dull. We make decisions that later we wonder whether we should take back. And so we need opportunities to redouble our efforts and retarget our focus.

And it's not just important for people to do this, it's important for churches too. We get rusty and dull. And we need new starts to redouble our efforts and retarget our focus.

So go ahead and grab your Bible. We are going to be in Matthew 22 and 28 today, and for this season, as we look at who we are as a church.

And we are living, right now, in an incredibly unique time. The world's all but shut down and if things go one way or the other everything that is normal today could be totally different by next week. These are just the days we are living in.

Everything's been affected and of course the way we live out our faith as individuals and as a church has been affected. I mean, if you told me a year ago that there would be 30 to 40 people attending our services and everything else would be happening online I would have written you off as a crazy conspiracy theorist.

But it turns out stuff happens that we don't expect. And so we need to hold our plans for the future in open hands while being confident about who we are. And that's because who we are governs how we live. And that's true regardless of the circumstances around us.

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A little back story: at the end of 2016 our church worked hard to establish a statement that lays out the things we value.

And that statement says: **At Fort George/Lighthouse we seek to glorify God by being conformed to the image of Christ.**

And what that means is that we are about glorifying God. This is what we value. So we seek to bring God glory by shining His light into the world. And we do this by growing to look more like Christ. And we've talked about this as our job or our vocation.

Now get this, that means your job or vocation isn't to be a mechanic or doctor or student or pastor or retired person. That's not your calling. Your job is to bring glory to God. That's your calling. That's why you exist and that's why our church exists. We've all got the same calling.

But here's the deal, each of us do this differently within the sphere of influence God has given us. So if you are good at changing hose clamps and pumps and figuring out how engines work then it is likely you are going to end up in a shop. But your calling is not to be a mechanic. Your calling is to be a God glorifier. And if you've got a brain that understands medicine and an ability to endure eight + years of post secondary then you might become a doctor. But that's not your calling. Your calling is to be a God glorifier.

And similarly, I would say, if your passion is to make plain the truths of scripture, and you love seeing faith come alive in other people then pastoral ministry or missions might be where you end up. But guess what, the guy who got chosen to be Jesus' number one disciple – Peter – said this about calling to all of us. He said:

You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Friends, we've all got the same call. We are all priests. We just serve in different perishes using the different gifts and abilities we've been given.

And it's not just individuals that work like this, it's churches too. So every church has the same job – bring God glory. But we have all been put in different neighbourhoods and given different abilities. So we are the church here, and our job is to figure out how to best bring God glory with what we've got.

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Now three or four years ago we worked, as a church, to look at what we were good at and passionate about – that's a good way to see what your gifts are – and we put some practical points to our vision. So we seek to glorify God by being conformed to the image of Christ by – five things – preaching God's word with conviction, participating in God's mission local and global, worshipping passionately, praying whole heartedly and putting the people around us first.

And if you have been with us over the several years you know that our church pours our energy and passion and resources into those areas.

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That's back story. Well over the next several weeks I want to look back at those values so we can redouble our efforts and refocus our eyes on what we have discerned to value. And I want to do this by looking primarily at two passages of scripture that speak to our identity as Jesus followers. And that would be the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

We will read these passages in a second, but if you are a Jesus follower you already know them. You know that just before Jesus went back to heaven he told us to go and make disciples. That's Matthew 28.

And you know that when Jesus got asked what the most important commandment was He replied love God and love your neighbours. That's Matthew 22.

And my hope and intention as we look at these passages is that they are going to enable us to hone our efforts and sharpen our focus as we seek to bring glory to God by imaging Christ as individuals and as a church.

So let's do a little discussion as we get started. Go ahead and turn around to the people you were facing when you came in tonight. And you've got three minutes to go over the three questions on the screen. Go

- 1.) What is your name?
- 2.) What is the difference between a nice mechanic/doctor/pastor and someone who brings glory to God as their job?
- 3.) Jesus says love God and love others. What is love?

Okay, go ahead and open your Bible to Matthew 22 and would you stand up with me as we read. We will pick it up in verse 34.

[Read Matthew 22:34-40]

Now we are going to come back to this passage over and over again throughout this series and we will pick apart a different line in this passage each time. But today I want to draw our attention to the overarching point that Jesus is making. Jesus says our relationship with God – that's what the law was all about, it governed our relationship with God; it can all be boiled down to one concept – love of God.

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Now we live in a world that loves love. And so if I said "Jesus says our relationship with God can be boiled down to one concept – love." Everyone would say "mmm, yes." But that's not what Jesus says. Jesus doesn't say "love", He says "love God."

Now when I say I love Nikki, my wife, I'm saying several things. I'm saying I'm committed to her. I enjoy her company. I like being on a team with her. She's beautiful and smart. It's awesome being married to Nikki, and I'm the only one who gets to do it – Too bad for the rest of you. I'm saying all that.

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And then I turn around and say things like "I love cheeseburgers." It's the same word, but it's not the same thing. And that's okay. We all understand that the word "love" works like this. Love means all sorts of different things in different contexts.

So my love of cheeseburgers means I've got an affection for them. But when I go to earls it's okay if I order a steak – I'm not cheating on cheeseburgers. Love of cheeseburgers doesn't require commitment, it just means I like them.

But if I apply this kind of love to my relationship with Nikki very quickly I'm in big trouble. Because with Nikki love also has to include exclusivity and responsibility. So in different contexts love means preference and passion and responsibility and duty. It includes all these things and more, but it is greater than any one of them.

And this is important because, for example love is not duty. If I come home and tell Nikki "It's our anniversary so I'm going to take you out for dinner because I have to." I'm going to win a free ticket to the couch. Nikki doesn't want duty. She wants love. She wants me to want to take her out for dinner.

So here's how I'm going to define love today: love is an affection or a desire for someone or something that plays out in all sorts of different ways depending on what the context is. But one thing all love includes is affection and desire for the thing you love.

Now I say all this because I had a real problem knowing what Jesus meant by love of God – after all you can't take Him out for dinner, and it has to be more than just duty to obey His commands. So for a long time love of God was just cerebral for me. It was just an idea. But Jesus isn't inviting us into an idea, He's inviting us into something real.

You see when Jesus saves us, He saves us into a relationship that is constantly increasing in affection for God. That's what it means to love God.

So love of God is not duty. It's not showing up at church or giving money or doing anything. Love of God is affection for Him. It's desire for more of Him. And so you can look at yourself and determine whether you are a Christian or not by whether you have an affection for Jesus.

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Now I need to clarify: There are days, married people, when your feelings of affection for your spouse wax and wane. And it's the same with our relationship with God. So I'm not saying if your affection for Christ isn't white hot today then you aren't a Christian.

But I am saying that if you have no affection for Jesus at all; you just don't care whether you live in a way that pleases Him or not, then you should look at that and say "Hey, I might not be a Christian."

And that's because an affection for God is essential to following Jesus. This is what He says "Love God."

So this isn't a "Here are some things to do" passage. This is a "This is who you are passage." You see the things we have affection for sit at the very core of what makes us who we are.

So what do you love? What do you desire more of? Do you want more money? Is that what motivates you and gets you excited? Do you want more popularity? Do you want people to like you? Is that what would make you happy? Do you want more entertainment? You are just bored and want your mind to be pacified? Do you want more respect? Is that why you are trying to climb the ladder? Will that make you worthwhile?

What we desire; what we have affection for, motivates us to live the way we do.

And Jesus says if you want to have a right relationship with God you need to love Him. "You need to love Me", Jesus says. You need to have an affection for Me. You need to desire more of Me.

So if the glory days of your faith was the summer after grade 10 when you were out at Ness Lake Bible Camp. And that was years ago and nothing's happened since then. That's a problem.

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I met some people the other day that told me "We just had our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. I can't believe we've managed to stay married that long."

It was supposed to be a joke. But it wasn't funny because we've all seen marriages that are more marathon than party. "We are just hanging in there. We aren't getting divorced. Isn't that great?"

No, that's not great. Not getting divorced is not the goal of marriage. Love, and more and more affection and desire is the goal of marriage. Marriage is supposed to be good. It's supposed to be a win. That's the design.

Now perseverance is part of marriage. But don't make it your goal to stay married. That's a way to lose at marriage. Make it your goal to win. I mean winning at marriage is way more fun than enduring. Right? I mean are there any "amens" out there from people who are winning?

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As an aside if you are married and you aren't winning. If it's all duty and no desire. I don't care if you've been married 1 year or 50, get some help. Jesus doesn't want you to endure marriage. He wants you to win.

And that's what Jesus wants from us with our relationship with Him as well. He doesn't say "Give me your duty. Make sure you show up every day to pray at least 15 minutes, and if you can force yourself to give 30 that would be better.

God doesn't want your duty, He wants your love. And so the Christian life is about growing in affection for Jesus Christ.

And guess what, growing in affection for Jesus is something that can be cultivated just like growing in affection for your spouse. You aren't stuck with what you've got. You can increase your desire for something. And when your desire for something good increases things get better.

So I think everyone gets born with a desire for pizza and ice cream – right? Did anyone need to cultivate a desire for that, or was it innate?

But here's a crazy thing. When you start taking care of your body and getting some results your desires start to change. And so the cool thing about being in shape is that you aren't miserable you can't eat pizza and ice cream every day. Instead you just love kale and quinoa – no cheers for kale and quinoa? But you start liking things that are good for you.

So wouldn't it be amazing if in your pursuit of God it wasn't duty but you actually wanted to spend time with Him because you were getting results? It was desire? Would it be a little easier if you enjoyed it?

Well guess what, this is what happens. You see God isn't interested in making us do what He wants us to do, He's interested in changing what we want to do so that we want what is good for us.

God told Ezekiel:

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put My Spirit in you so that you will follow My decrees and be careful to obey My regulations. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

When your old stubborn heart gets replaced with a responsive one you start actually wanting to follow God's decrees. And that's where abundant life happens. Holiness isn't about duty, it's about desiring the right things.

And so are you willing to participate with Jesus as He does that work in you? Will you let Him change out your heart and give you a new one? Will you let Him lead you to cultivate a new love?

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Alright, one thought in closing from Matthew 28. Turn over there for a minute. We will pick it up in verse 16.

[Read Matthew 28:16-20]

Again there is a ton of stuff in this passage. So I love for one that Jesus can stand right in front of His disciples, full of abundant life, and yet some of them, some of us, can doubt. I think there is hope in that – Jesus can handle our doubt if we let Him. And we will get into some the details around this passage in the weeks to come. But just one thought in closing today.

When you have an affection for something it affects your actions. So people who love the Canucks talk about hockey and watch hockey and buy paraphernalia and try to get other people to understand how getting depressed on a yearly basis is fun.

But the reality is everyone is a natural salesperson for the things they have affection for. When you find a great show you tell people about it. It's not something you have to do – there's no duty in it – it's just that we share what we love. And so there is a natural outworking of our affection for Jesus as well. And Jesus tells us what this looks like. He calls it discipleship.

So people who love Jesus are disciples of Jesus. And a disciple of Jesus is someone who does what Jesus did.

And so we here at Lighthouse/Fort George seek to glorify God because that's what Jesus did. Jesus pointed people to how to win in their relationship with God. And so we do that too. We keep looking for new ways to point the people around us towards the abundant life that following Jesus provides.

But here's reality, we don't do that perfectly all the time. Do you have any relationship were you wish you were a better reflection of Jesus than you are? We get rusty. We get dull. Our light doesn't shine like it is supposed to. And so we constantly need to refocus our attention on what we value in order to keep moving towards it.

And that's what this series is about. It is about stirring up our affections for Jesus because abundant life doesn't happen when you know about Jesus, it happens when you follow Him and lead the people around you towards Him.

And that's what Jesus wants for us. He saved us not just to save us, but so that we could experience the joy of shining His salvation into the places He has put us.

And so the encouragement here is to seize the opportunity for a new beginning. If you're married and it is duty not desire. If you're working out and gorging on pizza. And if you believe in Jesus or want to believe in Jesus but recognize your affection for Him could use some fire and perhaps your following Him and leading people towards Him could grow, then let Him put His Spirit within you, and participate with His desire to change what you love.