

# What is Important to Jesus

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Preacher: Chris Blackman

[ 0:00 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[ 5:00 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Mark 12, 28 through 34.

And hear now the word of the Lord. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked them, which commandment is most important of all?

[ 8:48 ] Jesus answered, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall 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, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. The scribe said to him, you are right, teacher, you have truly said that he is one and there is no other beside him.

And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared ask him any more questions.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. And let's pray one more time. Father God, we thank you that your word describes you as a loving God.

[ 9:49 ] Lord, there are so many competing voices that we all face day to day that cause us to question or to doubt whether you are loving.

There are so many competing offers of religion to seek out gods who are described in many different ways. But Lord, we thank you that your word speaks most clearly about you and your love for humanity, your love in creating all of this and your desire that we would know that love and live out that love.

Holy Spirit, as we meditate on your word, open our eyes to who you are. Open our eyes to this love more and more. We cannot truly understand it or apply it apart from your work in our life.

And thank you most of all, Heavenly Father, that you showed the extent of your love by sending your son Jesus. Lord, we thank you for the love that you have borne through this church and this community over many years, many decades.

And Lord, we pray that you would further that as we consider this in the new year. Lord, how we would love you more and love our neighbor more. We pray all this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

[10:54] Well, happy new year to you all. Some of you maybe are the kind of people when it comes around to new year, you're making resolutions. Someone asked me the other day if I made any resolutions and I laughed pretty hard.

It's like, I'm not in a season of making resolutions. We've got a newborn baby. We're just trying to survive. But often resolutions reflect what are the things that are important to you, the things you want to emphasize in the new year.

It's a good practice. I'm not knocking resolutions. But in this passage, we see something similar. We see that the scribes, the religious leaders, they're coming to Jesus and they're saying, Jesus, what is important to you?

You can tell a lot about someone when you think about what is important to them. In the bio that Brother Burke shared a few minutes ago, it said that I got overly competitive when it came to four square.

That's because I used to be a middle school teacher and there's no better way to prove your dominance as an alpha male over middle schoolers than by slamming the ball on them real hard in four square.

[12:04] But I bring that up because I noticed this trend where we'd go out to lunch. It was lunchtime, recess time, and they would often skip eating so that they could go play more.

Even though food is essential to life and body and brain function, there was something more important to a middle school boy and girl, and that was to play, particularly four square and get beat by their teacher.

We can see a lot about what's important to someone by what you prioritize, what you think is important. The scribes are asking Jesus, what commandments are the most important in the Bible? And Jesus focuses on love.

He focuses on love, specifically the love of God and the love of neighbor, that these are the most important things in Scripture. These are the most important things to Jesus himself.

These are probably very familiar verses to you, whether you grew up in church or not. So we want to just approach this very simply. The main thing I want you to take away as we study this text is that Jesus desires for his people to know him and his love through his word, which should lead to sacrificial love for our neighbors.

[13:14] I've got three points this morning. The first will be the importance of love. The second will be the problem of love. And the third will be the power of love. And for each point, I'm going to refer to a different grandma.

I got three grandmas as well. Not my grandmas, but grandmas that we ran into during a road trip this past summer. Because what better model is there of the love of God than grandmas?

Am I right? Can I get an amen for the grandmas out there? Amen. Grandmas, if you're here, thank you for all you do. All right, let's look first at the importance of love. The importance of love.

Look back at the text here. Jesus, in most of Mark chapter 12, he's having these series of debates with religious leaders. They keep coming up to him and keep trying to get him with a different kind of gotcha question.

So earlier they came up and they said, you know, Jesus, what's your view on paying taxes to Caesar? You know, are you a big government, small government guy? Like, what's your view on all that? And then later on they say, Jesus, what's your view on the resurrection?

[14:18] You know, is it real? Is it not real? And they keep trying to get him. But, you know, Jesus, he's always like one step ahead of everyone. He always finds a more wise way to answer that shows the hollowness of their question.

But finally here in this one we see a scribe comes up. He sees that these people have been disputing with Jesus. He sees that Jesus answers them well. And so he gives a more thoughtful question.

And there's a way we can read this and think, oh, this is like a good scribe. You know, like, you know, Jesus commands him at the end. But understanding it in the context, this is another kind of gotcha question, even though it's framed a little less hostile.

Because he's saying, Jesus, what do you think is important? And Jesus, is what you think important going to line up with what I think is important? And in all of these, Jesus reveals just how deeply these religious leaders don't truly understand the heart of God in Scripture.

They know the words of Scripture. They know it well. That's why they're testing Jesus. But we see that their hearts are quite hard towards the things of God. And so I mention that up front because this should give us pause.

[15:29] You know, we're here in church. We never want to assume that everyone in church is a Christian. But this is a critical mass of Christians here on a Sunday morning in a church. And you can grow up in church.

You can be very familiar with the Scriptures. And yet you can totally miss the heart of God. That you can have a heart that's hard towards the things of God. Lord, have mercy on us if that would be us.

As Walker Percy once said, you can get all A's and still flunk life. That the Pharisees here, they would get all A's if they were taking a Bible test. They'd know the information.

We'd see that they're failing to understand what God is really getting at here. Let's ask ourselves the question, how often are we going to the Bible looking for it to reinforce what you think, what you think is important, your wants, your preferences?

How often are you going to Scripture with a teachable attitude? Humble and willing to let it affect you and change you and challenge you in ways that you wouldn't expect. This scribe, he's a very religious man.

[16:38] He's familiar with the Scriptures. He's asking Jesus what's important and Jesus focuses on love. Why does Jesus focus on love? I mean, we live in a time where, you know, love is everywhere.

You know, it's on t-shirts, it's on billboards. Every advertisement, you know, incorporates love in some way. We're saturated in the language of love. But it's easy for us to miss that in Jesus' day, this was not common.

You know, Roman soldiers weren't scrawling love on the walls when they attacked cities. No, they were scrawling, you know, you guys stink, Rome rules, you know, Israel drools. Like, that's the kind of attitude people had back then.

It was very much a dog-eat-dog world. For Jesus to call people to love was quite challenging to them. And even for Jewish people who grew up understanding the Scriptures and hearing mention of God's love throughout it, even for them it would have been somewhat challenging.

I love how one scholar puts it, he says, Jesus was not the first or only teacher to link these two love commands, but Jesus appears, is the first teacher to define these two love commands as the most important of the commandments.

[17:47] Jesus here, he's referencing Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 when he mentions the love of God and the love of neighbor. He's not just making this up on his own, no, he's actually quoting Scripture and saying that this is the ultimate guide of Scripture and everything God is doing.

He's not saying that we should ignore the rest of the Old Testament laws or commandments, but he's saying that this commandment defines all the others. That, you know, when you're going to the Old Testament, it can be confusing, right?

You know, you get to those commandments and it's like, I don't really understand how this applies to being a follower of Jesus. You know, how do all the Ten Commandments really apply to me now? I'm not building idols in my backyard and bowing down to it.

But Jesus is saying, no, this law of love, to love God and to love neighbor, is working itself out in all of those commandments. That Jesus is putting love in the place of importance.

What does it look like to put love, the love of God in the place of importance in your life, to let that guide you? Well, here's one example. It's my first grandma.

[18:52] Her name is Mrs. Nita. And we were on a road trip, a long road trip. We've got three little kids. And we were like, man, long road trips, three little kids. That's a lot. Let's break it up.

Let's find some place to stop. But we were reaching out to friends and see if anyone knew a place we could stay about halfway through the trip. We didn't really know anyone there. It was kind of the middle of nowhere.

But one of our friends reached out and said, oh, my mother-in-law lives there. Let me ask her. So this sweet lady, Mrs. Nita, she reached out and she said, oh, yeah, you can stay at my house.

We're like, wow, that's amazing. You know, like, that's really generous of you. We can't wait to meet you, Mrs. Nita. And she's like, oh, I'm not even going to be there. But I'm going to leave the door unlocked. You can use the whole house.

Feel free to eat anything you want. You know, like, you are welcome to use my house. I was like, does this lady know that we have three kids? You know, like, they're a little feral, you know, like.

[19:49] But she opened up her home even though she's never met us from, she doesn't even know what we look like. And yet, because of her faith in Christ, she was willing to take the risk to show love, to welcome us into something that was valuable to her.

That it was a reflection of love in her life that she would open up her home. Then we see that Jesus is pointing us to love in the place of importance here, which forces us to reflect on our own life, to reflect on what we put in the place of importance.

Maybe you're not Mrs. Nita, but we all have a kind of an internal, like, list of what we think is valuable and important and who we would sacrifice for and who we wouldn't. Jesus is challenging us with the same question here.

What commandment is most important of all to you? It's a very revealing question if we let it do its work on us. Because it's not that we don't know the words of Scripture here, it's really that we don't know our own hearts.

Which commandment is the most important of all to me? Well, it's probably the commandment that I deem what is right and wrong. That I decide who deserves love and who doesn't.

[21:00] That I want God to vindicate my decisions. Which commandment do you see as the greatest? Probably the commandment to love yourself and demand that everyone else love and obey you too.

That like the Pharisees, we often use Scripture to justify putting ourself in the place and the source of love. And we often justify ourselves with the noblest of reasons.

You know, in the name of honoring God's holiness, we can set excessive boundaries that would cause people to feel like they're not welcome in church. To feel like they're not welcome to hear the good news of Jesus.

They're not welcome to hear and fellowship with Christians. In the name of speaking the truth, we can sound harsh. Forgetting that we speak the truth in love.

That that's the call of Scripture. In the name of advocating for Christian convictions, we can wed ourselves with political movements that care nothing for the heart of God. That only want to use our vote to further their ends.

[ 22:03 ] What personal preferences are you putting in the place of the commandments of God? Well, this brings us to my second point, which is the problem of love.

As Jesus is revealing here, the problem is really a heart problem. It's not a knowledge problem. Mainly that our hearts don't want Jesus to command us.

When the scribe says, Jesus, what's important? He says, you know. You already know the command. You know the commandment to love God and love neighbor. You know, you don't need to challenge me. You don't need me to tell you.

These guys knew it up here. But what Jesus wants to reveal is that these are not easy commandments to follow. To love God, let alone love your neighbor. I love how St. Augustine said it.

He said, look, the essence of sin is disordered love. It's disordered love. It's that we love the wrong things. It's not a lack of love. It's that we constantly are loving and pursuing the wrong things.

[ 22:59 ] We love success, comfort, and security more than God. I love how Jesus confronts us with this. He says, you know, you've heard it said, you know, love your friends.

But I'm calling you to love your enemies. And then I love how Jesus just says it. He's like, what good is it if you love the people who love you back? Don't even the pagans do that? I want you to love your enemies.

That's the kind of love I want you to show. This is the problem of love. It's revealing to us. It's revealing that our hearts lack love towards God and toward neighbor.

Jesus calls us out on the extent of the love when he says, look, it's not just love in a vague term. No, I want you to love with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your soul.

What does Jesus mean by these things? Well, let's look at them one at a time here. He's saying, look, I want you to love with all your heart. That it's not just an intellectual matter. I'm not just calling you to love with your mind here.

[ 24:01 ] I know we're Presbyterian and, you know, we love a good intellectual kind of love, right? Yeah. But Jesus says, no, like, love is a feeling too. Come on, y'all. Like, you're made in God's image.

You've got emotions. Don't be afraid to show it. Show it in your love of God. Show it in your love of neighbor. That's a good thing. Also love God, yes, with your mind. You've got to know him to love him.

You can't just say, well, I love people. I'm like, okay, but have you spent time with people? You know, like, the more you get to know people, actually, the more your love is challenged. To show true love is not a mindless thing.

To love with all our strength. Love is a verb, too. It calls us to action. We can write lots of great books about loving people, but we actually got to go out there and knock on some doors.

We got to go pray with some people. We got to go to India where they might reject us in the name of love. Finally, love God with all of our soul. That, look, we're not just bodies.

[ 25:01 ] We're not just brains on a spine. We were created body and soul. Think of Psalm 42, right? As deep calls to deep, so my soul longs for the living God. That there's something in all of us that yearns for a connection to the divine and transcendent.

That God wants us to love with our complete self, not just a little bit. There are ways that we can give God just some of our love. We can love our neighbors with some love, but we find it nearly impossible to love this way all the time.

Do y'all feel that? You're trying and you're trying and you feel like, man, my love has limits. Even to the people that, like, I know I love, let alone my neighbor who I barely know.

The truth is that it's revealing to our hearts. Our finite limitedness as created beings, but also how our sin limits our ability to love well.

And man, I was really confronted with that when we ran into our second grandma on this road trip. We stopped for lunch, you know, about halfway. And if you've ever been on a road trip with little kids, you hit a certain point in the 12-hour drive where you're tired, you're irritable, your love has hit its limit.

[ 26:18 ] And that was true for me, if I have to confess. So we stopped for lunch in Tupelo, Mississippi. We found this little soul food restaurant. And we walked in and, you know, we're talking to the lady who runs it.

Her name is Miss B, just this sweet lady. And we're getting to talking and, you know, she's asking what we're doing and who we are. And I mentioned I'm a pastor. And she's like, oh, that's great.

You know, we're talking about church stuff. But she could tell I was stressed. She could tell I was grumpy. And, you know, after a while, she just looked me in the eyes and she said, now, pastor, relax.

Relax. Relax. We love the little kids. You know, it's going to be okay. We're going to get you some food. We're going to get you a break. It's okay. Everything's going to be all right.

And, you know, it immediately convicted me of my grumpiness and my lack of love. Because, you know, I'm the pastor. I'm supposed to be the loving one here. And here Miss B is telling me, oh, yeah, and you can pray for, you know, my cousin.

[ 27:17 ] She's sick, you know, and you can pray for this. Like, she just mentioned people I've never met or never will meet. And she's showing a more godly loving attitude than I was in that moment. But she reminded me of God's grace.

She reminded me of God's grace. And look, y'all, I told that story to some of my college students. And now they're constantly saying, pastor, relax. So I can't live it down.

Constant reminder that I need God's grace to love well. Look, y'all, the problem of love is being revealed here in Jesus' words. And it's being revealed in even the Pharisees' questions.

Because they're asking Jesus, just tell us which one is important so we can follow it. Because they think if we can just, like, boil it down to one commandment, then we'll be good.

Just give us the one thing. I can check off my list and I'll be good with God. They think they can actually obey it and be righteous with God. That it's purely a matter of intellect or body.

[ 28:18 ] What Jesus' words reveal is that we cannot keep these commandments in our own strength. We don't have enough love. We don't have enough patience. We don't have enough self-control or selflessness.

That the heart of the problem is my heart is the problem. What we need is someone to come and obey this command for us. This command to love God with all of ourself.

And to love our neighbor as ourself. Now what we see in the Gospels is that God gave what was most beloved of himself to us. What was important to him so that we would know the full extent of his love.

That Jesus, the beloved son of the father, shows us just how beloved we are in God's sight. By offering himself. You know the most famous Bible verse in the world.

John 3.16. For God so loved the world that he sent his beloved son. That Jesus has to change my heart. Jesus has to turn me away from the love of self to the love of God.

- [ 29 : 20 ] And to the love of neighbor. He does this by obeying this commandment in our place. He loves God the father so completely and without division. That he can truly pray, not my will but yours be done.

The night before going to his death. That he loves his neighbors so completely and selflessly. That he would live a perfect life for them. And then still die on the cross to pay for all of their sins.

You know as the scribe said. You can never offer up enough sacrifices up to God to earn his love. That God actually had to come down and show you his love by sending his son.

As Romans 5.8 says. But God showed his love for us. That while we were still sinners. Christ died for us. That God didn't love us when we had figured it all out. That when we had made enough resolutions.

You know and cleaned our house enough. And got to the gym enough. And drank enough water. That then God loved us. Now that God loved you while you were a mess. And he still loves you when you're a mess.

- [ 30 : 25 ] Amen. I love how Oswald Chambers puts it in his little book. The Love of God. He says this. Look. It is too difficult. No it's impossible.

To determine that God is love by mere unaided human intellect. But it is not impossible to the institutions of faith. The love of God performs a miracle of grace in the graceless human heart.

Human love and lesser loves must wither into the most glorious and highest love of all. The love of God. Then we shall see not only each other's faults. But the highest possibilities in each other.

We shall love each other for what God will yet make of us. Nothing is too hard for God. No sin too difficult for his love to overcome. No failure that he cannot make into a success.

Let me read that again and then get an amen. Nothing is too hard for God. No sin too difficult for his love to overcome. No failure that he cannot make into a success. Amen.

- [ 31 : 29 ] All right. So that brings me to my third point. Which is the power of love. The love of God and Jesus empowers us to love.

That that's what we're getting at here. That now that Jesus has given us his life, we now seek to obey God in this as a response to his love. We don't try to love him to earn his love back.

No, that he loved us first. And that we love in response. And what Jesus is getting at here is that love can truly change people. I love the way, I just quoted from Chambers.

He says, we shall see not only each other's faults, but the highest possibilities in each other. We shall love each other for what God will yet make of us. I think that's getting at Jesus saying, love your neighbor as yourself.

He's saying, look, that kind of love, to love your neighbor as yourself, is to see more in them. And not just who they are right now. Because if you look at someone who they are right now, you're going to think, you know, going through that list in your head again.

[ 32:29 ] And I can love maybe this much, for this long, at this amount. But when God has changed our life through his love, then we can have the Holy Spirit give us eyes to see our neighbors in a different way.

To look for the highest possibilities in them. To engage in a sanctified imagination. To dream what God could yet make of them. I love how the pastor of my church often says, he says, look, as people with the Holy Spirit in us, we should always be the most creative and hopeful in any situation.

If God truly is who he says he is in his word, then why are we limiting ourselves on what God can do in someone's life? Why are we saying, well, it's a hopeless situation, you know, we'll just write them off and try again with a new crop of people.

No, God loves his creation. And he's willing to stick it out with them in love. And look, this is something that New City Fellowship is famous for.

To look beyond what society said at the time was possible about race relations in the South. To look beyond what business leaders decide about certain parts of town. To know that if God's love can change my sinful life, then maybe he can change my neighbor's life.

[ 33:45 ] And maybe he can change a whole neighborhood too. That that's what God is working out through a church like this and throughout the church around the world. That God, yes, can change a place like India, which seems so far from the gospel at times.

I love the movie Aladdin. I think it's a great example of this. Any Aladdin fans? Look, you know, in Aladdin, the whole story is about like, looking for the diamond in the rough.

You know, and there's that great song where, you know, he says, you know, street rat, I'm not like that. You know, I've got so much more to me. That the people in his society, all they could see is, you know, a poor guy living in the gutter.

And yet there was a diamond in the rough in him. That there was so much more that could be of his life. And that that's what we want. We want the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see the diamond in the rough in people.

The diamond in our neighbor that God can do in them. Look, as we go further in this passage, we see that actually the love of God is given a little more detail here in the scribe's response.

[ 34:51 ] You know, Jesus tells him, you know, you know what the greatest commandment is to love God and love neighbor. The scribe says, you're right. It's more than all the burnt offerings or sacrifices. And that tells us something really key about the love of God.

Something we've been getting at already, which is that the love of God is not transactional. The love of God is not transactional. Thank you. Now, look, that's how we often treat love in our society.

That's often how we treat loving our neighbor. If you do this for me, I'll do it for you. Or because you do this for me, I guess I'll do this for you. No, that's not how the love of God is.

It's not a commodified exchange. You can't buy it or sell it. You can only give it away. I have another friend who works in RUF. And he had an international student from China who, you know, wasn't a Christian but was wrestling with faith.

And he said, you know, I don't understand, like, how Christians deal with money. Because it seems like people give money, but then you're also, like, giving it away. And, like, I just don't get it.

[ 35:52 ] What's going on there? And he's like, well, as Christians, we don't really, we don't really believe we actually keep money. Like, we don't really get to own it. God gives it to us so that we can use it to serve the kingdom and give it away to others.

That in the same way, God gives us love so that we can send it out into the world, to send it out to our neighbor. That he's not calling you to love your neighbor as yourself because you just naturally have an abundance of love in you.

No, he's saying, I'm going to give you that kind of love so that even when it's hard, that even when you're lacking the feelings of love, or you don't want to love in action or in word, that I'm going to give you the strength to do that.

That it's not easy to love people, but we're called to it because of the abundant love of God. And, look, this should have profound implications of how we do so much of life. Think about parenting.

You know, the Bible calls us to love our kids well and, yes, to lead them in discipline, in gracious discipline. And so, yeah, we want our kids to learn what it's like to listen and obey to their parents.

[ 36:57 ] But, hey, what if they don't? What if when they don't listen to you, how are you going to respond? Are you going to respond with, well, you didn't listen to me, so now you're immediately getting the consequences?

Or are you saying, the love of God is not transactional for me, so your obedience is not transactional for me either? That, yes, I want to model discipline, I want to model obedience, but also I can model mercy.

I can model forgiveness. I can model that kind of love because that's just as important to God. When we show love, even when obedience is missing, we show the very heart of God for his children.

Loving your neighbor as yourself is making your neighbor a priority just as you prioritize your own life. This should have implications for how we think about boundaries.

That's a hot topic today. You know, every Instagram post is like, boundaries you should have with your family, or, you know, when to cut someone off. Or, I don't know, as a young person, I guess that's the messaging that's often sent out to us.

[ 37:59 ] But look, the truth is, there are times when an appropriate boundary is necessary, a godly boundary that would lead to flourishing and limit sin. But there are ways that we are too quick to jump to that.

That we can boundary ourselves to death. The death of our relationships with other people. That don't be quick to boundary yourself into irrelevance in your neighbor's life.

Maybe they didn't return your lawnmower. And that stinks. But guess what? You can forgive and buy another lawnmower and move on. That we want to keep loving our neighbors so much so that if we died today, they would miss us.

If you died today, would your neighbors miss you? Would they feel the loss of that in their community? Would they say, man, like, maybe I didn't know them super well, but they were well known for their love in this neighborhood.

And, man, we are feeling the lack of that now. That's how Christians should be in this world. That God's love should be so evident in us that there would be a hole in our communities when Christians are gone.

[ 39:05 ] So that reminds me of my third grandma here, which is Miss Dorothy. And the power that love can have on a community. Because we were on the final leg of our trip and we stopped at a Waffle House on a busy Saturday morning.

And if you've ever been to that glorious place, Waffle House. It's both, you know, full of the beauties of God's world and also its sin and failure.

We were there, you know, we're juggling kids. We're trying to order and get a meal. And as we're sitting there, there's this sweet old grandma sitting across from us. You know, and I'm holding our baby, you know, while we're trying to help our kids cut their waffles and all that stuff.

And she was just staring at us for a while. And then finally she just got up and walked over to me and looked me in the eyes and said, Can I hold your baby? Can I hold your baby so you can eat? And I was like, sure.

My wife was like, what are you doing? You know, why are you hitting off our baby? Even my elder two were like, Daddy, why are you hitting off the baby? I figured I could outrun her if she tried to take off, you know.

[ 40 : 15 ] But it was a beautiful moment because it wasn't just like us, but the whole restaurant saw that and heard that. And it was like record scratch. Like the cooks in the back like stopped and, you know, like everyone, like you could just see the smile dawn on their face.

You know, what was like a stressed, intense Saturday morning at Waffle House quickly became this kind of joyous atmosphere because this grandma loved us so in this way.

There was an old cowboy sitting right behind her and I swear he even like cracked a little bit of a smile. You know, like it even had an effect on him. Now imagine if she didn't do that.

Waffle House would still be Waffle House. You know, we still would have been there. Everyone else still would have been there. It would have been just business as usual. But because this grandma chose to love us in that way, it had an effect on the whole community.

That that's the effect of God's love working through us to our neighbors and our neighborhoods. Look, y'all, Jesus engaging these Pharisees' questions over and over again actually shows us the full extent of his love.

[ 41 : 22 ] Because he could just shut them down. He could be like, look, Pharisees, I'm tired of your questions. You're not listening anyways. I'm going to go home. I'm going to hang out with the 12. We're going to go, you know, somewhere else where people will actually listen to us.

No, he sticks it out. He sticks it out and answers their questions as annoying as they probably were. And it says, like, they stopped coming to him because they were frustrated that they weren't getting what they wanted out of him.

But Jesus was willing to show the full extent of his love that he would even stick it out with the hard-hearted. And that that should give us hope. Jesus even says to this guy, you're close to the kingdom.

You know the importance of the commandment to love. The only thing you lack is that you are loved. That you don't know that you are loved by God. And that that changes how you love others.

The love of God can melt the hardest stone and change the fiercest enemy into a friend. So, look, as we close, I was thinking of a story a friend of mine told.

[ 42 : 28 ] There's a little church plant in our presbytery up in Elegy, Georgia. So, if you're ever on vacation there, check it out on a Sunday. And one of the elders there is a good friend of mine. And I was visiting with him.

And he was saying, hey, have I told you about our egg evangelism? I was like, I don't know what that is. Please enlighten me. They moved from Florida up to Elegy, Georgia.

Georgia, they wanted to buy some land up there. And his wife really wanted to raise chickens so they could have eggs. And he was like, I don't know. I'm, you know, I'm a Florida guy in IT. I don't know anything about chickens. This is going to be so stressful to have to manage this.

So, they still set it up, though. And eventually, they were trying to get to know their neighbors well. Do this whole love your neighbor thing. And their neighbors were like, I don't know who these Florida people are, but we don't want them here.

You know, like, they kind of kept them at arm's distance. But they noticed they had chickens. And they noticed they had eggs. And so, finally, the guy was like, well, hey, we have extra eggs.

[ 43 : 24 ] Would you guys like some of the eggs? And so, over time, the neighbors were like, well, yeah, we want the eggs. You know, and so, like, they started sharing eggs with them. And that eventually opened doors into their homes where they would hang out.

They'd have meals together. They'd spend time together. And they'd ask them, hey, like, what are you doing up here? And they're like, well, you know, we're a part of this church plant and stuff like that. And they became well known in their little community as the egg people who go to this church.

And that was really the extent of it. They weren't, you know, being pushy or, you know, obnoxious. They were just trying to love on their neighbors well. Well, finally, one of their neighbors, the wife calls kind of late at night.

She says, hey, you know, my husband's in the hospital. And he's asking if you could come and visit him in the hospital. So he goes down there. You know, he's visiting with the guy.

He's very sick. And he says, hey, look, you know I'm a Christian. Would it be okay if I shared about Jesus with you and prayed with you? And the guy said, yeah, that'd be fine. So they talk for a while.

[ 44 : 23 ] They pray. It's late. So he goes home. A couple days later, the wife calls and says he passed away in the night. And so they go to the funeral.

And when they get to the funeral, my friend's there. And the guy gets up to lead the funeral. And he says, you know, this friend of mine who passed, he grew up going to church when he was really young. But, you know, he stopped going, you know, around, I don't know, high school years.

And I don't really know what his relationship was with God. But a day ago, he called me. And he said, hey, I want you to do my funeral. And when you do it, I want you to tell people about the gospel of Jesus.

That all this came about because this family decided to share their eggs. To share what they just had extra of. That they were willing to do it.

And it opened the door to share the gospel. And that all the people at the funeral then got to hear the gospel as well. And look, maybe this won't be your experience. You know, maybe you sharing what you have an abundance of with your neighbor won't turn into, you know, hundreds of people hearing the gospel.

[ 45 : 29 ] But maybe one. Maybe just one. Trying to love your neighbor well will lead to one person hearing the good news of Jesus. Hearing the love of God shown in Jesus Christ.

That that's what he can do. What is important to Jesus? That his people would know the love of God in Christ so that our neighbors would experience the love of Christ as well.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for the good news. We thank you that you loved us while we were yet sinners. Lord, we thank you that you love us when we struggle to love.

Lord, we thank you that we can't earn your love, but you've given it in abundance. And Lord, that we love out of that abundance. Lord, I thank you for this church and the ways that you have worked through it to love on Chattanooga well and on this community well.

And the ways that it continues to reflect the love of God in Christ. Lord, I pray that in this new year that you would further their love. That they would be famous for their love of God in Christ here.

[ 46:30 ] We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.