

**Opening Scripture**

**Psalm 18:1-6, 20-29 ESV**

**Opening Prayer**

**Scripture**

**Mark 12:28-34 NIV**

**Message:** As I mentioned in last week's recording, I will be retiring from the pastoral ministry here at Germantown Church of God at the end of January. I have served as pastor here for 15 years. I have enjoyed my time here. I have made many friends in the Church and in the Community. I am looking forward to this new season in my life. I would ask that you pray for Germantown Church as we will be going through a season of transition..

As I am thinking about moving on, there are some thoughts that I want to share. I say them for my benefit, but also for the benefit of members of our Church family. Today I want to talk about a challenge. Stephen Covey, who has written extensively on the subject of leadership is credited with a statement that is the subject of my message today. **Keep the MAIN THING, the MAIN THING.** Successful leaders and organizations, must determine what their **MAIN THING** is. Main Thing refers to mission and purpose. **What is their mission? Why do they exist?** Then they must keep their attention focused on that **MAIN THING**. They must not become distracted by secondary things. They must not lose their focus on their mission, why they exist. If they lose their focus, they will fail. This is probably a good challenge for anyone, even those who are not in positions of leadership. For Churches this challenge is extremely important. I am concerned that in our day, many Churches are paying more attention to "secondary" things. Things in the area of politics. Some of the "secondary" things are important. Some are not. Some of these secondary things distract us from our focus on the Main Thing. So what is **THE MAIN THING** for Christians and the Church. There are many "Big Themes" in the Bible that could be suggested as the **MAIN THING**: Justice, Repentance, Compassion for the poor, Preaching. But I would suggest to you that the **MAIN THING** comes out of this passage that we read from the gospel of Mark.

Jesus has been in dialogue with religious leaders. They were asking him questions, trying to trip him up which would give them some excuse to discredit Him, or arrest Him and have Him eliminated. Now another teacher comes to Jesus with a question. He does not appear to be as combative as the others who came to Jesus. He respects Jesus and recognizes His knowledge. So he raises his question: **"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"** Jewish rabbis counted 613 commandments in the Pentateuch. Far more than most people could learn. So there was a debate that was going on about 1 Commandment that could sum up all the others. Jesus begins his answer by repeating the foundational statement from Deuteronomy 6:4-6: **Hear, O Israel: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one."** That was the heart of Israel's covenant relationship with God. There is **only one God**. Yahweh, is not one of many gods. He is the only one. So obedience must start with that affirmation. Our God is the only God. **SO, the consequence of that affirmation lays the groundwork for the greatest commandment.** This then is the **MAIN THING**. **"Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these"** As Matthew records this conversation, he adds the comment from Jesus: **"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."** In other words, if you do these two things, you will perfectly please God. I think we can be safe in assuming that these words at **the MAIN THING for followers of Jesus**. So if we are going to keep the Main Thing, the Main thing, we will love God and love People. And we will be a Church that lives out Loving God and Loving people.

What does that look like? To answer that question, would require an extensive study and several sermons. So let's just try and get it down to its simplest explanation. **LOVE** is a pretty strong word. It is not a neutral word. Perhaps we would have preferred Jesus to have simply said, **"Acknowledge" God**. To simply agree that God exists. Or **"Respect God"**. We could recognize His authority and respect him like we do a police officer. But **LOVE** is a strong word. To love someone is **to put our entire being into that relationship**. And

Jesus says that. Heart, mind, soul and strength. Love demands action. To love someone is to **desire an intimate relationship with that person**. To love some is to **want to spend time in that person's presence** and to **please that person to the best of our ability**. The scholar who had come to Jesus gets it. He recognizes that to love God is more important than just going through ritual acts of worship – like offering sacrifices and offerings.

As we are thinking about what “Loving God” looks like, one thing that we must not overlook is this: To Love God is to embrace God's mission. What is God up to in the world? How are we involved in helping to fulfill His mission. God declares His mission in Genesis 12 when He calls Abraham.

**“I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”<sup>[b]</sup> Genesis 12:1-3**

So my challenge to you today is that you Love God, and join Him in His mission in the world – to create a people who He has redeemed from sin. Keep that as the **MAIN THING**. Build relationships with people who do not yet know Jesus. Be attentive of moments to share the story of your spiritual journal.

Now that leads us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the **MAIN THING**. **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** The apostle John in his first letter emphasizes several times that if a person loves God he will love others. Germantown Church is involved in a lot of loving activities toward others. – Help Hotline, Rescue Mission, Shoeboxes. But we have not fully loved until we have shared the gospel and invite someone who is lost to invite Jesus into their lives as their Savior.

Over the past few years, we have tried to follow a mission statement: ***Germantown Church of God exists to move people who are broken spiritually, physically, emotionally, or relationally into the presence of Jesus where they can be healed and transformed into the image of Jesus.*** I think that is a good statement. I plan to live that as a theme for my life for the rest of my days. You will have a new pastor coming to lead you in the future. That pastor may help you to make adjustments to that statement to guide your ministry in the future. It is important to evaluate and adjust mission and purpose statements. But I hope you will continue to prioritize ***Loving God and Loving people.*** **Keep the Main thing, the main THING!**