

WHAT IS THE MAIN THING?

Matt. 22:34-40

Intro: Every person -- whether Christian or not, whether deliberately or not -- is answering the question, What is the main purpose for my life?

A look at American life will show that many people are answering this question by their constant search for pleasure; their main reason for working is to have money to buy things and to be able to go places so as to have a good time! This is what is called hedonism -- "the doctrine that pleasure is the principal good and should be the aim of action" (Webster's New World Dictionary, p. 347).

The sad thing about this is that the people of God are often caught up in this same philosophy. It even finds its way into our churches.

For a few minutes tonight let us look at the Word to see how this has been answered by the people of God in past days. The Bible gives us a number of very interesting answers from the past.

I. SOME WAYS THE QUESTION HAS BEEN ANSWERED.

We do not have time for all of the answers, but let us look at some of the most outstanding answers.

A. First, the testimony of the Israelites during all of their years of journeying from Egypt to Canaan.

What do the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy tell you was their answer to the question, What is the main thing?

For them it was one thing. Moses probably would not have had nearly the trouble he had with them except for this one thing: They not only wanted their needs met, but they wanted to know how their needs would going to be met.

This runs all of the way from what they were going to do about the Egyptians, to what they were going to eat, and what they were going to drink, to their questions about the guidance that God was giving to them.

B. Second, the period of the judges.

We think that it is new for everybody to want to do his own thing. That philosophy is as old as the garden of Eden -- and it has always gotten people into trouble!

It was during the times of the judges that this became especially prominent. In Judges 17:6 we have this:

"In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Do you remember as a child how you often longed for the day when no one would tell you to clean up your plate, when no one would tell you when to come in from playing, and especially when no one would tell you when you had to go to bed?

Right now this philosophy has us by the throat -- and it always leads to disaster!

C. The times of the prophets.

Take Isaiah's day as an illustration. And this is especially significant for us as the people of God. They were a people who could excuse the grossest kind of sin on the basis that:

- not a feast day was being ignored,
- not a sacrifice was being omitted,
- the people were coming faithfully to pray.

Everything outwardly was in order, but nothing was really right!

This is what the Lord said about it:

"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men" (Isa. 29:13).

They were answering the question and using it to cover up other things, but this was not what the Lord wanted.

Let us move into the New Testament. What do you find there?

D. The time of our Lord's earthly ministry.

What were the more devout doing and saying? How would the Pharisees answer this question? In what area did the Lord have the most trouble with them?

Without question it was concerning the Sabbath! In fact, this was so acute that it ultimately led to the death of the Lord Jesus.

Here again it was all outward -- and evidently from what our Lord said in John 8:7 this was a cover-up for sins of the heart.

Let us take one more example from . . .

E. The early church.

One local church will give us plenty of answers to the question, What is the main thing? It is the Corinthian church.

What was important to them? Notice some of the evidence found in 1 Corinthians alone.

1. Men were important.
2. The ordinances were important.
3. Knowledge was important.
4. Methods were important.
5. What was going on in the world was important -- to show them what they should do.
6. Liberty was important.
7. Spiritual gifts were important.

Now -- no one would deny that these are important. BUT how do you account for the fact that the Corinthian church was riddled through and through with every kind of a problem and sin -- divisions, immorality (worse than what you would find in the world), heresy, pride, and confusion -- to name a few.

As right as these things might be in their own place, when they or anything else becomes the main thing, then you face the kind of a situation that they had in Corinth.

Let us now see . . .

II. THE LORD'S ANSWER.

One day a certain lawyer, probably a scribe, closely related to the Pharisees, dared to ask our Lord this question.

Aren't you thankful? We no longer have to guess at it -- if we ever did!

Turn to Matthew 22:34-40. The question of v. 36 could be paraphrased into our subject tonight: What is the main thing? Why are we here? What should be our main objective

in life?

What did the Lord say?

Instead of directing their attention to Ex. 20 where you have the 10 commandments, or to Deuteronomy 5 where they are repeated, he took them to what was the key chapter for the Jewish faith: Deut. 6, and v. 5.

(Note the Deut. passage.)

THE MAIN THING IN LIFE IS THAT WE LOVE THE LORD -- WITH ALL THAT WE ARE: heart, and soul, and mind!

THIS is the main thing in life! And, when this is as it should be, then everything else will fall into place.

III. THE EVIDENCES THAT WE DO LOVE THE LORD, OUR GOD.

The first one:

- A. The one who loves God will also love the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what James says in Jas. 1:1, "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In John 5:23 we have these words of the Lord Jesus:

"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father, who hath sent him."

Also John 14:6.

The second one:

- B. The one who loves God will love the Word of God.

Cf. John 14:21, 23. And John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Third:

- C. The one who loves God will love people -- especially the people of God.

Note the second commandment given in our text, and then follow it with 1 John 3:14.

Fourth and last for now (although there are others):

- D. From Deuteronomy -- the one who loves God will be teach-

his children to love God.

Concl: There is a sense in which loving God is synonymous with knowing God, but loving Him certainly goes beyond the knowledge of Christ as Savior. This has to do with the complete transformation of our lives -- so that everything revolves around Him -- not around us!

All of these other things are important, but they have to be subordinate to the main thing. The true value of everything that is dear to us as the people of God increases when the Lord Himself is kept at the very center with a love that surpasses every other desire in our lives.

This is what Paul has said so clearly and so wonderfully in Phil. 3 -- he ceased to be the center; he gave the Lord that place.