

August 7, 2016
Matthew 24:34-40
Focus on the Basics

Our car came with a 167 page "Owner's Guide" in the glove box. The book was in there to provide information on how to use the car. It has been helpful. In it I found how much air to put in the tires, the capacity of the gas tank, how to turn the radio on and instructions on programming the automatic garage door opener.

However, when I needed to change garage door openers, there was nothing in the Guide to help me deprogram and reprogram the mechanism. Eventually, I was led to a website where I could download a 661 page "Owner's Manual", which I did and found what I needed.

More and more this is what I am discovering. When you need to learn how to do something, or work something, you can try the "guide" but may eventually need the "manual". This week's passage from Matthew is like that.

In Matthew 22 (also see Mark 12 and Luke 10), Jesus is asked about and he shares the "greatest commandment". Probably every Sunday School in the world, at one time or another, teaches these verses to the children - and this is good. But, the Great Commandment is more like an "Owner's Guide" for Christians than an "Owner's Manual". The "commandment" is necessary, but not sufficient, for Christian life.

What that means is, while we must understand (necessary) that love needs to be the basis of our relationships with God and others, knowing that fact is not enough (sufficient) for life. We do need that "Owner's Manual" to help us through life.

The "Manual", of course, is the Gospel beyond those three verses on loving God and loving our neighbor. Unfortunately, the tendency is to stick with the guide and never "download" the entire manual.

What do the Gospels tell us about love? Well, the word, "love", is specifically used fifty-seven times in the four Gospels and, if you throw in the Letters of John, you can add another 39 references. This may not be 661 additional pages, but there is certainly more depth than the bumper sticker slogan found in the Great Commandment.

Let me share just a few thoughts about love we may not want to think about:

1. We don't love first, God loves us first. (1John 4:10) Which means that true love is more than the romantic or TV love we often think it is.
2. The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give all you have - your life - for them. (John 15:13)
3. It doesn't count if you only love those who love you or do good for you or who will give you something back. (Luke 6:32,33,34) Love is not about "easy" or "gain".
4. And, you even need to love your enemy. (Luke 6:35)

Get the message? This "love" thing is not easy, or pleasant, or convenient. It is about going out of your way to deeply care for others regardless of who they are, or what may / may not be in it for you.

While it may be easier to stick with a short form of the Gospel, it is important to dig in and strive for the true message.

Grace & peace,
Pastor Ron