

**FROM DUST TO DIAMONDS – IN 40 DAYS
YOU WERE PLANNED FOR GOD’S PLEASURE
MARK 12:28-31 (NLT)**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. WORSHIP IS A RELIGIOUS WORD THAT SIMPLY MEANS LOVING GOD.

I. WORSHIP IS A RESPONSE (Vs. 28-29)

GOD IS THE ONE WHO FIRST LOVED US.

²⁸One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the discussion. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.

A. A RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD (V. 28)

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WORSHIP IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

³⁰And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, your entire mind, and all your strength.’

A. WITH ALL YOUR HEART

B. WITH ALL YOUR SOUL

C. WITH YOUR ENTIRE MIND

D. WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

III. WORSHIP IS WORK (V. 31)

WORSHIP IS A VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

³¹The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

A. TRUE WORSHIP HAPPENS ALL THE TIME

B. WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE THROUGH OBEDIENCE

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I would like to start this morning’s sermon with a thought from that great modern day philosopher and theologian, Tina Turner. She asks, “What’s love got to do with it?” What role does love play in our everyday lives, especially in our relationship to God? We all talk about love, we sing about it, and we chase after it, but do we ever truly find what we are looking for?

Those of you, who know me, know that I’m a real romantic, and I can really interpret things that way. When my wife Luing and I were dating, she had a weekly television show. All the guys on my baseball team would find a television set, gather round it, and we would watch Luing’s show. I was so cool I naturally thought she felt the same way.

One day she took me to the television studio in Taiwan to see the taping of her show. It was busy and crowded; it was wall to wall people. She reached over and took me by the hand. I said to her, “You want all the people to know that I’m with you. I’m bad. I’m cool.” She rolled her eyes and said, “When it’s time to go, I don’t want to have to come and look for you, you stupid man.”

This morning, I want to remind us first of all that God passionately loves us and all He wants from us is to love Him passionately as well. What’s love got to do with it? Everything! Christianity is all about love.

It seems that there are two fundamental questions that all of us should ask. First of, “Is there a God?” The second question should be, “If there is a God, what does He expect from me?” I think the way we approach life depends on how we answer these two questions. If there is no God, and if there is no judgment after we die, then we should spend all our time and energy chasing after the things of this world. We should be trying to get all the pleasure we can; we

should eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. But, if there is a God, and if there are eternal consequences for how we live our lives, then we ought to spend our lives, doing things that please God since He is the One Who will reward us in heaven or punish us in Hell.

As we said on Ash Wednesday, and last week when we discussed purpose, life only makes sense when we discover that God created us out of love and has a purpose for our lives. This morning, we are going to talk about the purpose of worship. If you are not a religious person, you may think the word means something mysterious, something people do in a church, a monastery, or on a temple, high in the mountains of Tibet.

If you have been a Christian for a while, you may think that worship is what we do on Sunday mornings, we sing, we pray, we read and study the Bible. Some people even think we can distinguish between worship songs and praise songs.

This morning, I would like to make this easy because it is easy. Here is the main idea: **WORSHIP IS A RELIGIOUS WORD THAT SIMPLY MEANS LOVING GOD.** Does that sound simple? It should, because it is. God created us so that He could be in a love relationship with us.

I. WORSHIP IS A RESPONSE (Vs. 28-29)

GOD IS THE ONE WHO FIRST LOVED US.

Let's start from here; verses 28-29 illustrate the point that worship is a response: **GOD IS THE ONE WHO FIRST LOVED US.** Look how this passage starts out. There is a debate going on between Jesus and some religious leaders, this had been an ongoing debate concerning the claims of Jesus.

A. A RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD (V. 28)

²⁸One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the discussion. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

Verse 28 reminds us that worship is a response to God's word. Jesus had been saying and doing things that were meant to prove that He was the promised Messiah, the Christ. Jesus had been claiming to be the Son of God, who came to rescue Israel and the world from the grip of sin and death. If we were to read the gospels in light of all the prophecies made in the Hebrew Scriptures, we could easily see that Jesus not only claimed to be God in the flesh, He validated that claim by His resurrection from the dead.

God inspired many men and women to write and preserve the Bible and today, we can easily buy and read many different translations. A couple of weeks ago, the movie, "The Passion of The Christ" was released, it is a movie based on the Bible's account of the suffering and death of Jesus. As we hear the Bible read, taught, and preached, we are called to respond to the Word of God, this should cause us to fall in love with Him. On this occasion, the teacher asked Jesus, "Which of the commandments is most important?"

B. A RESPONSE TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND PROVISION (V. 29)
²⁹Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.

This question brings us to verse 29. Worship is a response to God's presence and provision. Keep in mind that the Hebrews had a total of 613 commandments to follow in the Judaism of Jesus' day: 365 of the commands had to do with prohibitions, they were the "Thou shalt nots" and they had 248 positive commands, "You must do this." Can you hear this guy's frustration? Don't we feel like that sometimes? I don't think I will ever be able to keep all the commandments. So the guy asks Jesus, "Help me prioritize my religious life since I will never be able to get around to all 613 commands, which should I work on first?"

Jesus responds to the question by describing the nature and character of God. Every time Jews gathered for worship, they would use this phrase as a call to worship, "Hear O Israel! The

Lord our God is the One and Only Lord.” Let us think about what that means. For the Hebrews, God was holy. The word holy is another religious word that means “set apart.” The Hebrew God, Jehovah, the Latin pronunciation, or Yahweh, the Hebrew pronunciation, is different from all other gods. There is no other God, He is unique, He is one of a kind and He is the One True and Living God.

God demonstrated His love in creation. Before God created, He existed in a perfect love relationship as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But because of the overflow of this love, He created us. He created us in order to share this passionate love. If we look at the beauty, and power, and intricate design of all of creation, we can get an idea of God’s passion and love.

Out of love, God chose the Jewish nation to be a visible sign of His love. This One and Only God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; He is the God of the Hebrews. When God the Son, Jesus takes on human flesh and comes to live among us, His desire is to bring both Jews and all the other nations together in love for God and for one another. God the Father demonstrated His love for us through creation. God the Son, Jesus, demonstrated His love for us by dying for us. All of us are born physically alive, but spiritually dead. We have a natural desire to be selfish and self-centered and because we are like this, our judgment should be to spend an eternity in hell. Since God is so perfect, and holy, and since we have all blown it so badly, we never can be good enough, nor do enough good things to get to heaven. That is where the incredible love of Jesus comes in. Jesus took the punishment we deserve by suffering and dying on the cross for us.

I think this would be a good idea. As you have all heard, the movie titled, “The Passion of The Christ” is in the theaters now. It would be good to go alone, and make this a religious experience. As you watch it, make it personal. It was for my sins that Jesus went through that

horror and it was for your sins as well. I don't really need to focus on whether it was the Jews or Romans who crucified Christ, it was me. I crucified Jesus. It was my sin, my ugliness, my attitude that crucified Jesus. It was for me He died. As I take an honest look at myself, I stand in amazement and wonder that Jesus would die for a jerk like me. Nevertheless, it's true. He died for me and He died for you, and that's what I call passionate love.

We are born again when we receive Jesus into our life and we receive Him by acknowledging and accepting that He died for me and you. The Father demonstrated His love by creating us; the Son demonstrates His love for us by dying for us and The Holy Spirit demonstrates His love for us by living in us. When we ask Jesus into our life, the Holy Spirit comes into us and He will never leave us nor forsake us. He gives us spiritual gifts and He empowers us to live life the way God designed it. God has loved us by His presence, He lives in us and He has provided a way for us to be saved.

When we worship, we are falling in love with Him anew, as a response to what He has already done for us. I am hoping that we can see that worship is a love response to what God has already done. We love Him, only because **GOD IS THE ONE WHO FIRST LOVED US.**

II. WORSHIP IS A PASSIONATE ACT OF LOVE (V. 30)

WORSHIP IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

³⁰And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, your entire mind, and all your strength.'

The way we should come to worship is to have squarely fixed in our minds, how much God loves us. And now we can see in verse 30 why Jesus answers the way He does; He tells us that worship is a passionate act of love, **WORSHIP IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.** Once we understand, receive, and feel this intense love of God in our lives, the only proper response is to love Him back – as passionately as we can. That is why Jesus

goes on to say, “And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all of your mind, and all your strength.”

A. WITH ALL YOUR HEART

You are to love God with all your heart. When I think about it, God’s love for us is totally irrational and makes no logical sense. He gave everything He had so that we could be in a right relationship with Him but from our perspective, I don’t see any other appropriate response but for us to give ourselves to Him totally in love. The heart here is not referring to the physical organ that pumps blood through our bodies, the heart is that place deep inside of us that determines who we are. It is where the direction of our will lies. It is that place where we determine who we belong to. Do we belong to the world, to another person, to ourselves, to the devil, or have we given ourselves to Jesus Christ. In reality, there are only two choices; either we belong to God or to Satan. There is no middle ground. Jesus said that wherever our treasure is, there our heart will be as well. Remember, even if you are living for yourself, then you belong to the devil. So loving God with our heart means that we have decided to give our lives to Jesus. We give Him ownership.

B. WITH ALL YOUR SOUL

Next, you are to love God with all your soul. The Greeks felt that the soul was the part of our existence where emotions were located. We often talk about love as if it were only an emotion, however it is much more than that. We are to be passionate about our commitment to God. We sometimes forget that the God we worship is an emotional God. He describes Himself as happy, sad, angry, jealous, and sometimes emotionally perplexed. Jesus was happy. He celebrated life’s blessings with His friends. He was angry with the religious leaders who were keeping people away from God’s love. He wept over the death of His good friend Lazarus. In

many Eastern cultures and in much of American culture, emotions are downplayed and it is reason and logic that are elevated above emotion. But let me remind all of us that there is no logical or reasonable way to explain God's plan of salvation. The plan was born out of raw, passionate, emotional, and unrestrained love. God wants all of our emotions; He wants our joy, our anger, our frustration, and our happiness. He wants all of me. He wants all of you.

Now unfortunately, many of us who tend to be emotional people, end it there, but Jesus goes on to point out that God wants us to love Him with our minds as well. God wants us to worship Him in truth and here is where many Christians fall down in their faith. We have come to a place in modern day Christianity where people no longer read, study, and memorize their Bibles yet the way we get to know more about God is through serious study of the Bible. If we are like the typical congregation in the United States, most of us will never pick up the Bible and read it during the week, so that is why we have all these cock-eyed views of God and life. We are living according to rules we have made up.

C. WITH YOUR ENTIRE MIND

Think about neglecting the Bible in this way. A wife may repeatedly tell her husband that she hates roses, but loves carnations. Well the husband is a modern day, enlightened guy and he knows that every woman loves roses. So he ignores his wife's desires and buys her roses, even though they are very expensive. He tells her what a good guy he is because he buys her roses every chance he gets. Even though she hates roses, he thinks he is a great guy for buying her the roses. In reality, the carnations are a lot less expensive and the wife loves them. We go about life thinking God wants this or that from us and we go about making up our own religion. In the end, it doesn't make God happy in fact, we make Him angry. We need to learn to love God with our minds.

We can also look at the Bible as God's love letter to us. When we were dating, I was playing baseball, and Luing was traveling with her show so we wrote a lot to each other. I can remember going to my mail box, eagerly awaiting a letter and when I got it, I couldn't wait to open and read it. Why? Because I loved her and I wanted to hear what she had to say. I feel that way about the Bible. Every time we open it and read it, God is showing us something about Who He is. God has revealed truth in the Bible; He wants us to love Him with our mind as well.

Let me make a generalization here; I know it is not absolutely the case, but I think we can find ourselves in one of two camps. First there is the camp that focuses on loving God with all our minds, but not with our emotions. The people in this camp are focused solely on gathering truth. They read books, read the Bible as a text book, and are interested in maintaining correct doctrine. The problem is that they have not fallen emotionally in love with God.

On the other hand, there are people who love God with their emotions. They will be loud, vocal, weep and be very emotional about their worship; however, there is not much concern for right doctrine. These people are easily led astray through wild evangelists and faith healers.

We must be balanced. We must worship God in spirit and in truth. We must love God with our heads, our hearts, and our wills.

D. WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

And finally, Jesus says that we should love God with all our strength. To be sure, this means that we are to use all of our physical strength and emotional energy in loving God. But as we look at this in context, I think it means that we should love God with our bodies, we occupy earth in physical bodies. If I want to go from point A to point B, I have to go there in my physical body. The body is where my mind, my heart, my soul, and my emotions are. The Apostle Paul said that our act of love towards God should be to offer our bodies as holy and

living sacrifices. Now let me explain to you how the people of Jesus' day would understand this. Animal sacrifices were slaughtered, cut up, and completely burned up on the altar. They were totally dedicated to God and consumed totally. When we come to the end of our lives, we should be able to say, "I gave everything I had to Jesus." That is love. That is dedication. That is love.

Do you see? We have come full circle. God loves us. He gave Himself completely to us. He did not hold anything back. Worship is when we give ourselves totally back to Him.

Here is what I want us to understand this morning. Worship is not just coming to church here on Sunday, and worship is not whether I like the songs or the sermon. Here is a wrong model many churches have adopted, we look at the congregation as the audience, the pastor and worship team as the performers, and God as the One who helps the team. That is all backwards. God is the audience the congregation are the performers, and the worship team and I are the ones who help the congregation. Worship is coming here to return our love to God for what He has already done.

Let me take a moment here to throw out a whole range of appropriate love responses. For example, if your lover has given you a gift, the appropriate response is one of thankfulness. If your lover has accomplished something great, praise is the appropriate response. If you have done something to hurt your lover, then a heartfelt apology is in order. Listening to our lovers and doing things they like are appropriate acts of love. These are all legitimate expressions of love. These are the ways in which we worship God. They are the bottom lines for worship and

WORSHIP IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

III. WORSHIP IS WORK (V. 31)

WORSHIP IS A VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

³¹The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

So far we have seen that worship is a response and God is the initiator of love towards us. We have also seen that for us, worship is a passionate act of love. But love doesn't end there. In verse 31, Jesus says that worship is work; **WORSHIP IS A VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.** I think the analogy carries over nicely to love as well, and any one who has a good relationship knows that it is work. Here is an interesting note. Our English word, "liturgy" comes from the Greek word for worship, which actually means work. What is the upshot of all that? True worship happens all the time Jesus makes it very practical. He says, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

A. TRUE WORSHIP HAPPENS ALL THE TIME

When I was going to school in the 60's, I was part of the "me" generation where it became popular in religious circles to talk about loving ourselves. The theology went like this: In order to love someone else, I must first love myself. Tell me, am I missing something here? Is that really a problem for us -- loving ourselves? I can't speak for you but when I take time to examine my schedule, my checkbook, my visa card statement, there is no doubt who I love most. If I take time and examine my thought life, I find that I reference every piece of data I take in as to how it has affected me, how it is affecting me, or how it will affect me.

Jesus says that we are to love the people we come in contact with as we love ourselves. Loving God results in loving the people and activities God loves. He wants us to forgive others, minister to others, help others, and care for others. That is why worship happens all the time and not just on Sundays, and not just in church.

B. WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE THROUGH OBEDIENCE

Jesus went on to say that no other commandments are greater than these two. These are not suggestions. These are not theories. These are not requests. They are commands. We

demonstrate our love through obedience. We have all sorts of motives for doing things, and a lot of those motives are religious. But you know, if you are trying to beat an addiction, if you're trying to remain sexually pure, if you are trying to forgive someone, the only motivation that will help you change your life permanently is your love for God. I am glad we are studying this passage and relating it to worship because there are a lot of hypocrites who go to church week after week and do a lot of religious stuff; I have told many people to quit giving money to the church because it is not doing them any good. I have also told people to quit serving because they were giving and serving out of wrong motives. You may say, "Hey John. Wait a minute. I take care of my family; I come to church each Sunday; I give 10% of all my money to the church, I teach Sunday school, I sing in the choir, I lead worship and I am an elder and I'm a pretty good person." To be sure, all of those things are good, but they have nothing to do with worship unless our sole motivation is our love for God. Anything we do that is not motivated out of our love for God is useless. If we are doing things in church out of any motive other than love, then we are just self-righteous hypocrites. Listen, righteous living is all about love. Why don't I steal? Because I love God. He is a giver and I want to be like Him. Why am I not sexually immoral? Because I love God. He is holy and pure and I want to be like Him. Authentic Christians live holy and pure lives because they have fallen in love with God. Living pure and holy lives is not easy, but if we truly love God, we joyfully work at it. Good relationships take work and commitment. **WORSHIP IS A VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.**

Worship is our passionate act of love towards God in response to His love for us. It takes a lot of dedication, commitment, and hard work to live the way God wants us to live, but our daily lives should be characterized by worship. We should love God with all our heart, soul,

mind and strength and we should so love others. This type of love should motivate all that we do. We should be living lives of worship. We should be living lives characterized by love.

WORSHIP IS A RELIGIOUS WORD THAT SIMPLY MEANS LOVING GOD.

Love can make us do all sorts of crazy things. Love for God motivates us to do and think some incredible things. Let me paraphrase William Temple's description of personal worship, "Worship sharpens our conscience with the holiness of God. It feeds our minds with the truth of God. It purges our imagination by the beauty of God, it opens up our hearts to the love of God and worship devotes our wills to accomplish the purpose of God."

That is what loving God is all about. Loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength is what the Bible calls worship. Have you fallen in love with God yet?

One of the most famous worship leaders and songwriters had to learn this the hard way. Matt Redman along with the pastor of a mega church in England noticed that their time of worship on Sunday mornings had lost its power. Even though the musicians were playing better, the sound system working nicely, and the lighting was perfect, something was missing. Here is how the pastor, Mike Pilavachi describes it, "Then it clicked. We had become connoisseurs of worship instead of participants in it. In our hearts we were giving the worship marks out of ten: 'Not that song again ... I can't hear the bass ... I like the way she sings.'" We made the band the performers of worship and ourselves the audience. We had forgotten that we are ALL the performers of worship and that God is the audience. We had forgotten that sacrifice is central to biblical worship. ... Certainly no sacrifice on our part can earn God's forgiveness or our salvation; the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross has done that for all time, yet we are called to bring sacrifices in worship. ... We were challenged to ask ourselves individually, 'When I come through the door of the church, what am I bringing as my contribution to

worship?’ The truth came to us: worship is not a spectator sport, it is not a product molded by the taste of the consumers it is not about what we can get out of it; it is all about God.

“We needed to take drastic action. For a while, in order to truly learn this lesson, we banned the band. We fired Redman, got rid of the sound system, overheads, stage lights, everything. Then we sat around in circles and said that if no one brought a sacrifice of praise, we would spend the meeting in silence. At the beginning, we did virtually sit in silence. It was a very painful process; we were learning not to rely on the music. After a while we began to have some very sweet times of worship. ... The excitement came back. We were not having church; we were once again meeting with God. With all the comforts stripped away, we worshipped from the heart. “When we learned our lesson, we brought the band back. It was at this point that Matt began to sing the song he had written out of this experience. I wept as we sang it for the first time; the words expressed exactly what was going on.”

(Ken and Worship team sing the song with words on the screen)

**When the music fades, all is stripped away,
And I simply come longing just to bring
Something that’s of worth,
That will bless Your heart.**

**I’ll bring you more than a song.
For a song in itself is not what You have required.
You search much deeper within,
Through the way things appear;
You’re looking into my heart.**

**I’m coming back to the heart of worship,
And it’s all about You, All about You Jesus.
I’m sorry Lord for the thing I’ve made it.
When it’s all about you, It’s all about You Jesus.**

**King of endless worth, No one could express,
How much You deserve.**

**Though I'm weak and poor,
All I have is Yours,
Every single breath.**

**I'll bring you more than a song.
For a song in itself is not what You have required.
You search much deeper within,
Through the way things appear;
You're looking into my heart.**

**I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
And it's all about You, All about You Jesus.
I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it.
When it's all about you, It's all about You Jesus.**

Let us remember, true worship is about loving God. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and let us love one another even as God loves us. It is not about what I like or dislike it is about expressing our love for God.

This morning we are celebrating this type of love in communion. The bread and wine are symbols of God's incredibly passionate love for us. Our appropriate love response is to take them with the spirit of repentance, love, and commitment to obey.