

Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Shema

by Rachael Bernardi

In Mark chapter 12, the Bible says that one of the teachers of the Law showed up late to a lively debate between Jesus and some Sadducees, with Jesus ending his brilliant response to their seemingly tricky little question with, “You are *badly* mistaken!” We are fairly certain some feathers were ruffled in the synagogue that day, right? Here’s what happened next:

Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. 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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”—*Mark 12:28-31*

Ok, here’s a trick question! What was the answer that Jesus gave as the most important commandment? Read the passage again, out loud if you need to. What is the *first* thing Jesus says in response? Did you catch it? His answer is not what you may think!

What Jesus says in response to the teacher’s question is to first directly quote Moses’ teaching in Deuteronomy 6:4:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”

He does continue with “Love God and love others,” like we always say, but that wasn’t the first thing he said in response to the question. So let’s start with the first word of His response, which in the original Hebrew is “shema,” (pronounced “sh[h]-MAH” “), which means “to hear, to listen, to obey.” Shema doesn’t mean different things depending on the context, but that you listen and perceive what God is saying to you, and then you obey! When you hear, then you obey. Shema.

Jesus is referring back to the key verse in Deuteronomy that summarizes the Old Testament law, reminding the listeners (and us!) with, “Hey! Shema! Listen up! There’s only one Almighty God, so when you hear His voice, obey Him! Love Him as your One and Only (like the love

of your life—the only one!) with all you’ve got—all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength! And oh by the way, you know how much you love yourself, right? Well, the outgrowth of how much you love God will play itself out, will prove itself, through loving others the way you love yourself.”

Hear Him, listen to what He’s saying, and obey His voice. His voice is calling you to respond in love to Him! Your heart is what He’s after; your soul is what He created to be in relationship with. He loves you dearly! Your in-step obedience to His kind direction is what is best for you, because He knows you best! And you’ll see it played out on the daily in your interactions with others—whether they love you or hate you!

We practice the depth of our love for God by loving others—doting on them, caring for their needs, noticing their hurts and taking care of them—in the exact same way we do for ourselves, even if they don’t reciprocate.

Personal Application: Pray, “Holy Spirit, what are you whispering to me about today? In what way are You asking me to obey you?”

Take Action: What do you need to do today to obey Jesus’ command to love those who hate you? Phone a friend—whether it’s your mentor, your best friend, or your accountability partner, and tell them what you sense the Lord is impressing on you today is your next step!