

Witness: Externalizing the Mission

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[0 : 00] My name is Tochi, and today I'll be continuing the sermon series in Deuteronomy on mission. Today's title is Witnessing, Externalizing the Mission.

This is a series that started after Easter in response to the question, what's next? Which usually comes up right after Resurrection Sunday.

After Jesus has been crucified, buried, and risen from the dead, what's next? What do we as disciples do, and what are we led by?

Part of this answer to the question comes in the verse today, Deuteronomy 6, 1-9, which some of you may know as the greatest commandment. But before we dive into this commandment, let's look at the context.

So last week, Pastor Tannetta preached on the Ten Commandments. After announcing the Ten Commandments, the greatest commandment is the first instruction that Moses gives to the people.

[1 : 03] This instruction comes after the people request Moses to stand as an intercessor between them and God. As an intercessor, Moses would be a bridge to God and the people, but also a bridge to the Ten Commandments and all the numerous other statutes and ordinances that follow the commandments.

So fast forward. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus quotes the same scripture, stating that all law and the prophets have hang on this one commandment.

And loving your neighbor as yourself is the next. So this commandment serves as the full revelation of Jesus' life within the gospel and the basic tenet of all prophetic revelation prior to.

Let's take a look. These are the commands that the Lord your God directed me to teach you.

To observe in the land that you are crossing into so that you, your children, and your children's children may fear the Lord your God and enjoy life by keeping the decrees I give to you.

[2 : 18] What decrees? Well, rather than repeat the whole Ten Commandments again, Moses states, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

Before continuing to the rest of the scripture, let's try to unpack that verse. As a lawyer, I have seen all kinds of laws. I've seen unfair laws. I've seen practical laws.

I've seen unrealistic laws. And I'm also aware that there's probably certain things that you just don't legislate. So at first instance, when I hear this commandment to love with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, I wonder, how do you enforce that?

Is this something that can be taught, yet alone measured? You might think my concern is legislating love. And while I do have some questions on why love has to be legislated in God's kingdom, whether on earth or in heaven to come, I have a bigger concern.

You see, at least love is clearly defined. Love is patient. Love is kind. See, 1 Corinthians 13 for the rest. Or listen to the song by Lauryn Hill, Tell Him.

[3 : 38] That's actually even good, too. But my actual concern is the extent that we are commanded to love. And quite frankly, whether I, me, Tochi, can live up to that.

Yesterday, my husband asked me if I love unconditionally. I had to think about that. Because prior to becoming a mom, I never had the expectation for myself to love anyone unconditionally.

As a partner, I love with boundaries. There's a list of things I just wouldn't accept. Abuse, infidelity, there's a list.

But to be frank, I'm not sure that I love myself unconditionally. There are clear mistakes or crimes that if I committed afterwards, I'd have to question whether I truly valued myself.

So when the command comes to love to the full extent possible, my initial thought is, well, that's inconvenient. Maybe even impossible.

[4 : 43] The inconvenience of this love is seen throughout the life and death of Jesus. How many times do you forgive? 77 times 7.

Who will feed the multitudes? You give them what you have and let God multiply the rest. When all the alcohol is under the party and it's not my time yet to start my mission, because the woman I love has asked me, I become vulnerable and I start this mission.

So we've seen Jesus do it. You see, the problem is, with this kind of love, is that I'm not Jesus. And while I do often ask myself, what would Jesus do?

The answer, which is always to love, because to be honest, that's always the answer, it's still a hard answer to arrive at. It takes effort. It requires communication.

It's based on a commitment. And according to the scripture, it's also a commandment. This means that it's not something you do one day and then you're off the hook the next day.

[5 : 52] Love is something that you have to show up with every single day and in every aspect of our lives. Let's break it down. Love is not conservative.

Love is not moderate. Love isn't even liberal. It's far out there. It's radical. It causes us to act beyond ourselves and in spite of ourselves.

Not only in relation to our families, but in places of our employment, in our politics, in places of our worship, literally in all aspects of our community, we are supposed to lead with love and lean into love.

So, I do get why love is a commandment, but I still question the extent we are called to love. In 1 John 4, 18, we are introduced to a perfect love, one without fear, without punishment, a complete love.

God calls us to this love because this is the love that has been shown to us time and time again.

We witness this love through God's provision, whether it's the manna presented to the Israelites or that last-minute check that you need right before you pay all your bills.

[7 : 14] We witness this love through salvation, both physically and spiritually, whether physical forms of captivity or mental ones. We witness this love through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, both in Jesus' life and in Jesus' death, a physical expression of the divine love story that God intended for us.

And I, too, have witnessed this love in my life, and I've seen countless number of times that God has shown up for me in a real and tangible way. And if I had the time, I would account for all of these instances, but I'm sure you have your instances in mind, too.

But if I'm being honest, that doesn't make loving God easy. I understand that love is not simply the internal admiration or awe that I have for God.

Love requires me to go further. It has to be expressed outside of me and in spite of me. Love requires me to live up to the commandment that God asks, to love with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind.

And God commands, and this command it's not so much my willingness that I'm concerned with, but it's my capacity. While I'm fully willing to love perfectly and unconditionally, I'm not always sure I'm capable of it.

[8 : 46] As a woman, matters of the heart can sometimes be overwhelming. I feel deeply, and as a result, I express myself in an intense way, which doesn't always come off as loving.

As a human being, I constantly fight insecurities of worthiness, of whether I'm sufficient. Like, is my soul actually good as God proclaimed when I was created?

As a finite expression of God's infinite experience, I also question my strength. I wonder just how far my influence or power can go.

In essence, I'm not sure that my heart, soul, soul, or strength is sufficient to love in the way that God is calling me to. I mean, commanding me to.

And I feel like this, I imagine you probably feel like this too. Maybe your heart is broken from trying to love hard before, only to be let down and left behind.

[9 : 47] Maybe you struggle with mental health and don't have this ability to love in the way that meet your others' expectations. Maybe you're neuro-spicy and people just can't handle your love.

The limitations are endless and yet God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. As a witness of God's love and as a Christian, how do I show my capacity for understanding and accepting the love that God called me and every one of us here today towards?

How do I radiate my faith in God's love such that it goes beyond my incapacities so that my children, my community, and the world can witness the perfect love too?

God is not asking us to be perfect. God is asking us to get out the way and let love flow through us and let that be expressed in every opportunity.

This is why the commandment is underlined by the artillery requirement. So let's go back to the scripture. Impress these commandments on your heart, on your children's heart. Talk to our children about it at home as we walk down the road, when we lie down, when we wake up.

[11 : 04] Find them on our hands, on our foreheads, write them on the doors and on the gates. We are called to reaffirm, to remember, and to replay this commandment in our lives and our families' lives and our communities over and over again.

When we bind them on our hands, it essentially becomes part of our identity, our legacy. Moses is instructing us to renew our minds to God's commandment so that it doesn't fall on deaf ears, but rather on fertile ground so that it can become implanted within us.

In our society, there are so many broken records that crowd out God's commandments to love.

There are marketing strategies that are targeted to make us feel less than or lie to us about what real love is.

There are media streams that demonize citizens of other parts of the world or even other specific members of our society. There are systematic forms of oppression and isms that rob black people and people of color, women, queer people, poor people, and old people of their humanity.

Unless we constantly are on alert and choosing to love, we can easily fall prey to any and all forms of discrimination because, unfortunately, in our society, it's in the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the music and the discourse that we listen to, and the images that we are bombarded by.

[12 : 45] It is so overwhelming that unless we impress God's commandments in our lives and in our children's lives, we'll forget the greatest commandment of all is ultimately to love.

This is an individual mission, yes, but it's also a corporate one. As a church, we commit to justice, liberation, and human dignity of all God's people.

This mission is renewed every Sunday in this building and it's expressed outside of this building every day of the week. We help those who suffer injustice and empower them to claim their voice.

This commitment to justice and liberation is revealed in our lifestyle, our economics, our politics, our culture, our communities. It's expressed in our love.

This is not just our mission statement. It's our ministry, a worship that we practice and impress on our hearts and our children's hearts.

[13 : 48] We bind God's commandments on our hands and we write them on the doors and on our gates. We walk it out more than we talk it out. And yes, it all points back to Jesus.

While I started this discussion with Moses, we also have to see the full scope of the story with Moses. While Moses proclaimed God's commandment to love with all your heart, soul, and strength, he still had some limitations.

Moses ultimately fell short by failing to live up to God's commandments. When the Israelite community asked Moses why did he bring them to this barren wilderness where there is no water to drink, the Lord instructed Moses to speak to the rock in front of the community.

But in his midst of anger and frustration, Moses told the community, listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of the rock? Rather than speak to the rock as commandment, he struck the rock twice and water gushed out.

Yes, water ultimately came. But Moses didn't lean in on love. He was led by anger and impatience. God's love still flowed out in the form of water, but unfortunately not through Moses in spite of him.

[15 : 17] This shows that love isn't ultimately a destination or an outcome. It is the way of life. It's the way we live each and every day in faith.

Where Moses fell short and failed to see God's promise, Jesus lived out God's love literally to his death so that we can see what God's love and promise looks like, not solely as a commandment, but as a commitment in spite of our limitations.

Through God, we too can love unconditionally as God loves us unconditionally and the way is through Jesus. I would like to leave you with one tangible yet tall measure of how to really determine whether we are rising to the invitation to love and love more fully.

If the families we are a part of, if the communities we reside in, if the institutions that we make up do not reveal this radical love that Jesus called us to, that led Jesus to the cross, then let's accept and

understand that there's still more work to be done, that there's still more love for us to do.