

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus the nineteenth chapter beginning at the seventeenth verse:

***You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. <sup>18</sup> `You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.***

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

This year for MidWeek Advent I have decided to focus in on the theme, what would God want for Christmas. Now, I know this is a tall order

to fulfill and still an even more presumptuous proposition for a first year pastor to answer, and yet I still think that there is a lot to glean from the Bible in regards to what God would want for Christmas.

In particular I point us to Matthew chapter 22 where Jesus is speaking to those who would ask Him questions. In particular I point us to verse 34-40 where one of the Pharisees asked Christ which was the greatest commandment, hoping to trap Him, but instead Christ answered it more than adequately. Jesus told them, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” So, while it may not be flawless logic, what better thing could God want from us than to fulfill His first and great commandment, to love Him with our heart, soul, and mind.

Thus for MidWeek Advent this year, we will be looking at what God wants for Christmas in regards to our heart, our soul, and our mind. So this evening we will be focusing in on how ***God wants our hearts for Christmas.***

In the text before us today, Moses is relating the commandments of God to the people of Israel. This chapter begins with one of the more damning notions from God, “Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy.” I don’t know about you but whenever I hear that it makes me feel all the worse. I know that I am not holy and yet God makes this declaration. As I always tell people about a verse like this, it does not say “try” or “give it your best” or “whatever is okay,” the verse tells us to “be holy.” And I think we are all in the same boat when we have to admit that we are not holy.

After this command from God, Moses then begins to go over other commands that the Israelites are to know. Do not make idols, do not bring in every last piece of the harvest but leave some for aliens and widows, do not steal, do not cheat your neighbor or rob him, do no injustice. And then we get down to our command in our text for tonight: You shall not hate your brother in your heart. How are we doing on this, especially with Christmas right around the corner?

Can you say categorically that you do not hate another person? And while I know that hate is a strong word, it is safe to say that each and every one of us hates another person. Be they a family member, a friend, a neighbor, a political opponent... who ever the person is, we hate them. They open their mouth and their voice just sends chills down our spine. They walk into a room and we look for the quickest exit. They talk to one of our friends and we begin to have resentment and anger towards that friend because of the hatred that we have for this person.

So what is this hate that we are not suppose to have? Well the dictionary defines hate as, “feel intense or passionate dislike for (someone).” Does that define how you feel about some people? An intense or passionate dislike? What about how the Bible defines hatred... Jesus says, “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the

council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt 5:22).

Wow... have you ever been angry with someone? Have you ever shouted the equivalent of Raca to someone, by telling them that they are worthless or vain? Have you ever called someone a fool and truly meant it? Have you ever wished for someone to “go to hell” for no particular reason? If so, you have been angry with someone and you have hated them. We have had many times in our lives, probably even today, where we have had an intense or passionate dislike of someone... but we try to hide it.

We try to make excuses by saying that hate is a strong word, so we prefer to say that we “dislike” someone... which is the dictionary definition of hate; or maybe we “loathe” someone, or maybe we “aren’t friendly” with people. Because we don’t want to hate... and yet that is what we are doing. When we have this intense anger or passionate dislike, we are hating. When we are not loving with our whole self to another person, we are hating them.

However, thanks be to God that He does not hate us... or does He? God, the Father, is justice and He is love. God, the Father, hates sin but He also hates all those who perform sin. According to Psalm 5, “The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.” And according to Psalm 11, “The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.” God, the Father, does not love us when we sin. He is not in heaven having a great time when we sin. God, the Father, hates when we sin. And when we hate, we sin... and what does that say about how God, the Father, feels about us?

Yet, God in His infinite wisdom, mercy, and justice knew that we would sin. So before the world began, God started His plan. God brought forth His Son, our Savior from sin. When the time was just right, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. He sent Him so that God, the Son, could live a perfect life, one that we could not live. He did not hate. He did not become wrongly angry. He did not sin. And His reward for not sinning and being

perfect was to hang up on the cross for all of our sins. While Jesus hung upon the cross for our sins, He was punished for our sins and experienced hell itself because of the wrong that we have done. And then Jesus died.

And if the story ended there, then we could say that God does indeed hate us... however, thanks be to God, the story does not end there. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim His victory over death, hell, and sin. Jesus rose to show that His life and death were a perfect payment for all of the sin that we commit. Jesus rose... to show God's love for all of us.

God knew that we would sin, and still God wanted us in His heaven. So God took care of that by sending His Son to be our Redeemer from our sin. And it is through faith in all that Jesus has done that we know we have heaven waiting for us. Those who believe in Jesus know that they cannot earn heaven for themselves and so they rely on Christ, through faith, to have heaven waiting for them.

And this is in perfect harmony with what the Bible says, "God so loved the world, that He sent His one and only Son that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). And Paul tells us that, "therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." This is what God has done and continues to do for us. For the sake of His Son, God the Father does not smite us from the face of this earth... but because of His Son and the sacrifice that Jesus made, God the Father loves us... He loves those who are reconciled through Jesus Christ.

And what does all of this have to do with our heart? Well, it is in our hearts that we hate. And if we hate, well we know how God feels about us. However, God would much rather have us

fulfill the first commandment, not break it. God would have us love Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind. And instead of hating our fellow man, He would have us love him.

You see, when we hate another person, that is a reflection of our relationship with God. On the one hand Saint John tells us that, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” Thus, if we claim to love God, we need to love our brothers. And when we have faith in Jesus’ perfect life and death, then can love our brothers... not perfectly as God would have us do, but through Jesus who has already done it perfectly.

And on the other hand, Jesus tells us through Saint Matthew that, “where your treasure is there your heart will be also.” Instead of being so focused on pleasing everyone that we know and run into, we need to be focused on pleasing God... but we know that our sinful nature will never let that happen. So, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have kept that commandment also.

Though we are not perfect children, God still wants us for Christmas: he wants our heart, our soul, and our mind. And it is through faith in Jesus Christ that we give these to Him. We give them because He made them, He has given them to us, and we are being His loving children who are giving their Father all that they have.

Dear friends in Christ, let us consider again the text for today: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.”<sup>18</sup> `You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” We should not hate. We should not take vengeance. We should not bear a grudge. But when we do, we can run to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who didn’t. We can run to Christ who has done everything perfectly, and through faith in Jesus Christ, we can love our neighbors and we can love God. And it is only through Christ and because of Christ that we are able to do this.

Thanks be to God for His Son who gave His life for us. Thanks be to God who loves us and gave up His Son for us. And thanks be to God that through faith in Jesus Christ, we can love the Lord our God with all our heart.

Thanks be to God. Amen.