

Tour 4 Themes

Tour 4 - Engagement - The Royal Task

Themes & Further Study

Introduction

Thus far our journey has taken us through the first three major epochs of God's Meta-Narrative: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. In this Tour, we will finally get an up-close look at the epoch in which we live: the epoch of Engagement.

As we travel through this epoch we'll be brought face-to-face with the answers to our three Guiding Questions: Why did Jesus leave? Why are we still here? And What is Jesus asking us to do? The last of these will receive the heaviest emphasis. The epoch of Engagement is the era in which we are given a job. Now is the time and today is the day when the King's messenger comes knocking at the door bearing orders from our Sovereign in his hand. This is when we begin to fulfill the Royal Task.

At this juncture, our definition of agape love – the one we spent so much time hammering out in Tour 3 – will be given practical application. The “sacrificial zeal” of that “steadfast love” will now be directed towards a real, solid, flesh-and-blood object. In this episode that object is given a name – neighbor – and we discover what the Scripture means when it declares that the entire Law can be summed up in “one word.”

Themes

Love – the Crown Jewel in the nature of God – is itself the fulfillment of every command handed down to us in the pages of Scripture. This is the thought that runs through Tour 4 like a continuous bright thread. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments;” but when He departed the scene, instead of loading us down with 6,468 meticulously detailed instructions, He left us with only one: love. Dr. Tackett says that this single all-encompassing mandate comprises within itself a “trinity” of three “component” loves – what he terms the “Meta-Commands”: Love of God, Love of Neighbor, and Love for One Another.

Every epoch we've studied thus far was initiated by some extraordinary event, an event with eternal ramifications. Creation left the imprint of God's Image upon mankind. The Fall marred that image and made us heirs of Adam's “original sin.” Redemption turned the tide by renewing abundant life through the greatest sacrifice of all time. But the epoch of Engagement, says Dr. Tackett, begins with two major events: 1) the departure of Jesus, and 2) the sending of the Holy Spirit. The upshot of these two events is that God has come to dwell within us, but not for our own sake. His indwelling has a very specific point and purpose: it equips and enables us to fulfill the Royal Law by showing us how, in practical ways, to live out the commandment of agape love in our day-to-day interactions with neighbors. The good news is that this is not a heavy, crushing assignment, but a delightful, lightsome load (Matthew 11:28-30).

Points to Watch For

During the course of this Tour our glossary of terms will be expanded through the addition of a new definition. We will learn that there is nothing vague, general, or mushy about the word neighbor. This word, as it turns out, means exactly what we have always assumed it meant: the person who lives next door or across the street. Equipped with this knowledge, we'll go on to edit and expand our definition of chesed/agape love to read as follows: "a sacrificial zeal that steadfastly seeks the shalom, or true good, of the one who lives near you." This leads to an inevitable conclusion: during this epoch of Engagement our main task is to extend ourselves sacrificially to the guy on the other side of the fence.

Oddly enough, we may find that something within us reacts violently to this idea. Whether we're willing to admit it or not, the whole thing makes us extremely uncomfortable. As a result, we may rise up against it with at least six different objections: 1) "Aren't we supposed to love God first?" 2) "But what about 'The Great Commission?'" 3) "Isn't this just a general command?" 4) "What about that 'Good Neighbor Story' – the Good Samaritan?" 5) "What about the poor and the hungry?" 6) "But isn't this the church's job?"

In every case a closer examination will reveal that these are just pious-sounding pretexts. The real motivation behind our reluctance to obey the Kings Order is sheer unwillingness to jeopardize our own "scripts" by making ourselves vulnerable to the dangers of relationship with others. What's more, in every instance we'll discover that neighbor-love is the answer to all of our objections, whatever they may be. For instance, neighbor-love, according to Jesus Himself, is the evidence of our love for God; neighbor-love fulfills the Great Commission one neighbor at a time; and neighbor-love is our job because we are the church. In the final analysis, that's what makes this Royal Law so simple, so difficult, and so brilliant – all at the same time.

Questions for Discussion

1. **When you think about the task Jesus has set before us – when you consider, on the one hand, the all-encompassing love of God and, on the other, the overwhelming needs of the people around you – do you ever feel like giving up and throwing in the towel? What might prevent you from taking that way out?**

(It would be easy to feel this way, but we are prevented from going that route when we reflect that 1) This is not our work but the work of Holy Spirit who dwells within us; 2) It is the presence and empowerment of the Spirit that makes the task "easy" and "light"; and 3) We are only called to love one neighbor at a time – not the whole world at once.)

2. **Weighing all the options and taking all the relevant factors into account, which would you say constitutes the heavier burden: observing the 6,468 rules and regulations of the Law? Or "loving your neighbor as yourself"? Why does Jesus tell us that His burden is "easy and light" (Matthew 11:30)?**

(Everything depends upon your perspective. On the one hand, it sounds much simpler to observe one commandment than 6,468. On the other hand, when we think carefully about what that single command entails – a sacrificial zeal for the well-being of others that keeps no record of personal needs and wants – the mere keeping of a list of rules may appear to be the less demanding option. The paradox is that the one actually includes the many. And the difference

between the two perspectives is essentially a matter of the heart. A heart yielded entirely to God out of a deep and genuine love for Christ is eager to do the Father's will, however imperfectly. As the apostle John tells us, "We love because He first loved us." This is the secret ingredient that makes the burden light.)

3. **The apostle Paul wrote, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Can you in your own words explain what he meant by this? Why does Jesus say that love is "the greatest commandment?"**

(Anyone possessed of a heartfelt zeal that deliberately and sacrificially seeks the shalom of others doesn't need to be told not to kill, steal, envy, or bear false witness against his neighbor. Negative commands of this nature are subsumed under the all-inclusive positive injunction to love. The person who truly loves is inspired to go far beyond these rudimentary rules. In fact, love compels him to "travel the extra mile" for the sake of the beloved. To say it another way, love is self-motivating and self-propelling. That's what makes it the greatest commandment.)

4. **In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2) says that He has come "to preach the good news to the poor." What do you think He had in mind when He made this revolutionary claim?**

(During the course of Tour 4, Dr. Tackett strongly suggests that, for Jesus, the "poor" were not simply the financially impoverished. Just as the scribes and Pharisees, though they literally "had eyes to see," were nevertheless spiritually blind, in the same way we are surrounded by people who, though monetarily well-fixed, are spiritually "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" [Revelation 3:17]. These people need our agape love, our compassion, and our neighborly attentions every bit as desperately as any beggar on the streets of Calcutta.)

5. **Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to a question posed by a certain teacher of the law. The question was, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) How does the parable answer the question? Would you call it "responsive" or "non-responsive"?**

(It was characteristic of Jesus' teaching style that He seldom answered people's questions directly – especially when the question was insincere and calculated to entrap. In this case, He turned the tables on His interrogator by reversing the perspective. In one sense, the Parable of the Good Samaritan answers the lawyer's question by suggesting that "my neighbor" is any person I happen to stumble across as I travel down the road of life. But in His postscript to the story Jesus moves beyond this. He turns the entire discussion on its head by asking, "Who do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" [Luke 10:36]. Thus in a single bold stroke He changes the question from "Who is my neighbor?" to "What does it mean to be a neighbor to others?")

6. **What is God showing you specifically through this tour?**