

As we've been looking at what it means to love God, what it looks like to love God, and how we can better love God over the past three weeks we've been really digging into our verse of the day. Please stand with me if you're able for the reading of our text from Mark 12: 28-30 -

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. 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, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

Jesus said that this is the first and greatest commandment. It's the foundation for everything we do. Without that love for God there's no way we can love others. Without that love for God any service we do... any worship we offer to God... it's all ultimately empty words and pointless activity. So today we're going to take one last look at this verse (I probably shouldn't say “last” because as we look at other aspects, attributes, applications, and evidences of our love for God

over the next several weeks I would bet that we'll still be orbiting around this command to love God with ALL.

The word in the command which we want to focus on today is “strength”.

And, as we have seen again and again, having a closer look at each of these words has revealed aspects of the verse that you just can't see in English.

In Deuteronomy 6:5 the Hebrew word that is used for strength is the word meode.

There are a number of Hebrew words used in the Old Testament that are translated as “strength” in English – meode is the least common Hebrew word used.

Some Hebrew “strength-words” convey the idea of physical power and might.

Some Hebrew “strength-words” convey the idea of capacity and energy.

Some Hebrew “strength-words” convey the idea of having emotional strength and courage.

None of those things express what meode means. Let’s have a look at a few verses where meode is used.

Throughout Genesis 1 we see a repeated pattern.

On day “x”, God creates “y”.

The summary of the day ... “God saw that it was good”.

However, after the sixth day:

God saw all that he had made, and it was very (meode) good. (Genesis 1:31). “very... strongly... with strength”

Psalms 92 is a psalm which describes why we should praise God.

Psalms 92:5 says, “How great are your works, Lord, how exceedingly (meode) profound your thoughts!” ...Again very, exceedingly

1 Kings 7 is describing the furnishings in the temple which Solomon built. When the passage talks about the bronze pots, shovels and basins ...

Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because there were so many (meode meode) of them; the weight of the bronze was not ascertained.

Meode is nearly always an adjective ... it gets added to a noun to give a fuller description.

Not just good ... but very good.

Not just profound ... but exceedingly profound.

Not just a quantity ... but a “beyond measure” quantity.

So, when it comes to conveying the idea of strength, meode focuses on intensification; a higher level of quality; abundance, on moving beyond.

Meode is almost always an adjective, except for two times ... two times out of 300 ... when it is used as a noun. Two times

when it stands all by itself as a describing word for strength beyond strength.

The first time is Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (meode). (And, as we'll see in a few minutes, in the New Testament when this is translated to Greek, they also use a word that's not the normal Greek word for strength or power.)

The other time is in the context of talking about the reforms of Josiah who, at the age of 18, restored the worship of the temple and the law of God.

2 Kings 23:35 says, "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did – with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength (meode), in accordance with all the Law of Moses."

Josiah's actions - Fully listening to God in repentance when the book of the law was discovered.

Removing all the false places of worship ... and all the false priest ... and all the false religions.

Restoring the temple as the only place of worship to the one and only God.

Josiah's love for God had an intensity, and a higher level of quality and an abundance that moved his dedication and commitment beyond any king who came before or after ... that includes King David.

Meode - Loving God with all his "beyond-strength".

That is how the word works in the Old Testament.

Jesus in our text takes Deuteronomy 6:5 and applies that verse as a challenge to His hearers.

The Scriptures in Mark 12:30 also could have chosen a number of different Greek words that get translated as "strength"

The most common word – 120 times in the New Testament – is the Greek word dynamis

Dynamis ... dynamic... dynamite – you see the connection don't you.

dynamis is “ability”.

dynamis is “power in action”.

dynamis is “mighty works”.

dynamis is “strength”.

But dynamis is not the word Jesus uses.

The word which is used is the much less commonly used Greek word - hiskus

Apart from the verses where the greatest commandment is being spoken about this word only occurs 7 times. But those seven times say a lot about what it means to love God with all our strength. Again, and again throughout the New Testament God uses the more common word “dynamis” or some variant when He is talking about natural strength or God-given strength in us, and He uses “hiskus” for supernatural strength-beyond-strength that only God has.

In Ephesians 1 Paul prays a prayer.

Part of this prayer reads – “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

If you look at which Greek word was used where in that passage, you would see that we have limited power, we get greater power from God, but God has power beyond power.

God extends great power to those who believe. But that power is only a reflection of the power of God - the strength which raises Jesus from the dead – placing Jesus far above all earthly powers.

Hiskus is “above and beyond strength.”

Hiskus is “defeating all the worldly powers and authority’s strength.”

Hiskus is “death conquering, grave defeating, resurrection strength.”

When the first commandment calls us to love the Lord our God with all our strength, this is the word that Jesus used – this is the type of strength Jesus had in mind.

It sounds like a strength that is so out of reach. Yet it is a strength that is totally available and accessible. Paul tells us how to access it in **Ephesians 6: 10-13**

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day

of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

Be strong in the Lord literally translated means “know that you are a recipient of the strength that has its source in the Lord”. You have no strength in yourself, but only that which comes from God Himself. That is the “source” of your power.

But – knowing that there is a source of power – and having access to the power are two separate issues.

I started out many years ago as a computer maintenance technician. Don’t ask me to work on your computers today, because everything has changed and most of what I did know is long forgotten, but I still know a quite a bit about electricity and how it works. One very common electrical fault is what we used to call “an air-gap problem”.

In other words, you haven’t plugged it in.

That outlet on your wall has the power right there. It is power backed by a system of power lines and power generation and massive infrastructure. But all that power

and energy is of absolutely no benefit unless you plug the appliance in.

God in his grace has provided all that is necessary for you to know that you are the recipient of His strength.

We are created in His image.

When we rebelled and sinned at the fall, God had a salvation plan.

When the time was exactly right, God sent His Son ... a baby born of a virgin.

Jesus paid the price for our sin and defeated death.

God's strength ... God's hiskus ... raised Jesus from the dead.

Now that same strength ... "above and beyond" ... "defeating worldly powers" ... "death conquering" ... strength is available to us.

Remember? – "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God ...

How do you love God with all your strength?

How do you bring your love for God to a greater intensity, and a higher level of quality, and an abundance that moves you beyond?

You put on the armor – God forged armor – so you can stand and stand.

Put on the Belt of Truth.

Jesus is the truth and the truth sets us free – allowing the truth to convict us daily is how we put on the belt. We don't just put into practice the easy parts of the truth, but also those parts which call for serious transformation and repentance. The belt makes us secure.

Put on the Breastplate of Righteousness

Righteousness is at the same time

... a gift from Jesus who makes us righteous.

... a response to Jesus who calls us to live in righteous obedience.

Just as the breastplate protected the most vital organs in our body, righteousness is a vital foundation in our relationship with Jesus.

Put on the Sandals of the Gospel of Peace

Peace is “shalom” ... it is a peace which comes in all circumstances and at all times regardless of what is happening around you. A peace which flows out of the reality that God has a plan and He will fulfil His purposes. When we have this gospel peace we stand on a secure footing.

Take up the Shield of Faith

Faith is the heart of our relationship with Jesus. In faith we believe all the promises. In faith we hold firm to the eternal security which is ours in Christ. When the world tries to make us doubt, we stand behind this shield knowing the doubts will be extinguished.

Put on the Helmet of Salvation

Salvation comes the moment we place our trust in Jesus' death and resurrection. Living out that salvation is a life-long journey. The greatest battlefield in this journey is our mind. It is the place which needs protection.

Pick up the Sword of the Spirit

The verse says it all ... “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”. Even Jesus would use the Word of God as His protection – the Word is the most effective weapon against temptation.

How do you love God with all your strength?

You make sure there is not a spiritual air-gap problem between you and all the power and might that God is willing to give when we are strong in the Lord.

You put on the armor.

Not just out of mere obedience. But because you are committed to living a life of love for God which has ... a greater intensity,

... and a higher level of quality,

... and a superior abundance.

**A love that is not just mere physical strength ... but is
“strength-beyond-strength”.**

**That is how we fulfil the commandment to love God with all
our strength.**

**I will be the first to admit that there are days when I forget
to put on the armor, or at least the full armor. I forget my
belt of truth and spend way too much time and energy trying
to hold my pants up. I forget to put on the breastplate and
end up pulling the enemy's darts out of my heart and having
to repent and return to the righteousness I never should
have turned from in the first place... And in all of that I find
myself struggling and falling short of loving God with ALL my
strength. How about you? Are you falling short? Are there
missing pieces of your armor that are keeping you from
focusing all of your strength on loving God? If so, the altar is
open. Come and ask God to help you keep that armor firmly**

**in place so that you can stand strong and love Him with all
of your strength.**