**LEAVE IT ALL ON THE FIELD**

***Love With All Your Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength***

I have always been a sucker for diving into trivial facts and figures. For instance, I was a rabid student of sports statistics as a young boy growing up in a world of baseball, football, basketball, and golf. I could likely tell you the batting averages of most of the major stars of the MLB (Major League Baseball), the number of touchdowns thrown by quarterbacks in the NFL (National Football League), the scoring average of most NBA (National Basketball Association) stars, the number of major championships on the PGA Tour (Professional Golf Association). I was a walking, talking statistician (which befuddled my dad, who couldn’t get me to make better than a C grade in math).

Leaving sports, I also loved to read the incredible achievements in the *Guiness Book of World Records*, and the amazing things from *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not*. I was mesmerized by all the astounding accomplishments that humans could or would do. For this article I will share one such record from Ripley’s book on the subject of Love.

In 1875 a painter from Paris named Marcel de LaKurre was so in love with a girl named Magdalena DeVilla Lora that he wanted to express his feelings for her in a letter. He hired a scribe to take dictation to accomplish his purpose. Since it was 1875 he determined to use that number to write the words “***je vous aime***” 1,000 times for each year since Christ’s birth. *Je vous aime* is French for “I love you.” Instead of just telling his scribe to write “I love you” 1,000 times for each year from 1 A.D. to 1875 A.D., he actually dictated the words to him, then had him repeat it back, and then write it down. Doing the math this means he said “je vous aime” 1,875,000 times, then heard his scribe say it back to him 1,875,000 times, and then write it down 1,875,000 times. All told the words were spoken or written 5,625,000 times! To give you some perspective on that feat, J. K. Rowling’s entire seven-volume Harry Potter series is 1,084,170 words.

My, my, my! I sure hope Ms. Magdalena appreciated Mr. Marcel’s affectionate letter / book. But my suspicion is she probably wrote him off as a nutcase and put the letter / book in the circular files (i.e. trash can). I know I would have.

While God would never be interested in such vain repetition, let me ask you something about your love for Him. When a Pharisee that was known as a scribe (one who studied and wrote about the Law of Moses) approached Jesus with a question, he was likely trying to pit Christ against Moses in order to turn the people away from His growing popularity. He asked Him, “*Which is the first commandment of all*?” The Lord did not hesitate, immediately replying with the famous *Shema* (Hebrew for “*hear*”) that every Jew quoted each morning and evening. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and to which Jesus added an additional quote from Leviticus 19:18. It reads,

*“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

Of the 613 laws which the rabbis had numbered in the Torah (“the Law”), these Jewish scholars were forever debating which was “major” and which were “minor.” Then, of the major ones, which would be ranked # 1. When Jesus gave His answer the scribe replied, “*Well said, Teacher! You have spoken the truth*!” In other words this scribe agreed with this Nazarene prophet and rabbi. The Lord then turned to him with a stunning statement that would have rocked this man’s world when he said, “*You are not far from the kingdom of God*.” Another way to say that is, “You are not in the kingdom at all, but you are getting closer than many of your religious colleagues.” I would have loved to see the look on this scribe’s face. That picture would be worth a thousand words.

When Jesus quoted the Shema by saying , “*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one*,” you would hear it in the Hebrew language as “*The Lord* (Yahweh) *our God* (Elohim), *the Lord* (Yahweh) *is one*.” Yahweh (Jehovah) is taken from the letters YHWH, or JHVH, with the vowels inserted for easier pronunciation. It is His covenant name given to His special people of Israel in which they were to address Him. When Moses asked Him His name, He replied, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exo. 3:13-14), implying He is the self-existent eternal one.

Elohim (God) is the name used in Genesis 1:1 where it says, “*In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth*.” It implies the power of the creator, and the one who sustains the world by His strength. Therefore when Israel offered each day their Shema they were declaring God as the eternal, holy, powerful one who rules the world and keeps His covenant promises. He was the one and only sovereign God you could trust. That is why He commanded, “*You shall have no other gods before Me*.”

Then, when Jesus told men that the greatest commandment was to LOVE God with ALL your heart, soul, mind and strength, He was telling the world two things:
1) Love God for Who He is.
2) Love God with all you are.

The four-fold repetition of “all” (heart, soul, mind, strength) is not so much intended as a breakdown of four areas of our personality (emotions, conscience, intelligence, will power), but is Christ’s way of saying, “love God with ALL you are!” To put it another way we can sing the sacred hymn:

 “All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give,

 I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.

 I surrender all, I surrender all, All to Thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all.”

When I played high school and college sports my coaches would tell us, “leave it all on the field.” What they meant was play the game as if everything (winning or losing) was going to be determined by what I did. I was to use all my talent and competitive drive to help determine the outcome of the game. One coach always told us, “Go hard, or go home!” If I lose, lose with no regrets, knowing I gave it 100%.

Jesus is telling me to give that same effort in my pursuit of pleasing God (read Heb. 11:6). The real difference between loving God and playing ballgames is that I cannot possibly lose with God, for nothing can separate me from His love (see Rom. 8:31-39).

The Jews quoted the Shema. Jesus is telling Christians to do the same. Let us daily tell God how much we love Him, then prove it in our wholehearted obedience.

We don’t have to write a letter and say to God “*je vous aime*” over a million times. But through our words and deeds we can prove to our heavenly Father how much we love Him. God promises us that won’t go into the circular files!

If you haven’t done so already, love God, and leave it all on the field. - Rick