

Mark 12:28-34

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 12 will begin in verse 28. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, Which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered, The most important is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, You are right, teacher.

You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other beside him. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions. This is God's word to us.

[1 : 04] It was written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Let's pray together. Father, we would ask for your namesake that you would bless the preaching of your word.

Lord, we all need you in this time. I need you to help me speak with clarity, with a compassion, and a conviction for the truth. And we all need you to rightly apply these words to our hearts.

Change us from one degree of glory to another. Father, to the praise of Jesus. We pray this in his name. Amen. When we continue, if you're a guest with us, we've been working through the Gospel of Mark, verse by verse, and we've come now here to Mark 12.

This is during the historical event of Passion Week. Jesus has come into Jerusalem on Monday. You can read about that at the beginning of chapter 11.

On Monday, on Tuesday, he comes and he cleanses the temple. He goes in and he runs out the money changers, the people who were doing business in the temple court, the court of the Gentiles.

[2 : 18] He had, in fact, done so three years prior to this. We can read about this in the second chapter of John, that at the very beginning of his ministry, he went and did this very same thing, disrupted the temple practice of the day, the apostate worship that was going on, and he's now back.

And he's in this final week, and we've come to Wednesday of this week. Jesus will be crucified on Friday. But here we find him having kind of dominated, having set up camp and taken over in the temple, having driven out those who were exchanging money and extorting the people, who were leading them astray, and he is set up, presumably, teaching.

And as we see at the end of chapter 11 and then into the beginning of chapter 12, we see a number of confrontations. 12.12, we see that as he indicts these apostate religious leaders, the text says, And they were seeking to arrest him, but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them.

So they left him and went away. So he's disrupting this temple worship that's going on and the power of these men. He's becoming more popular than them.

And he's delivering indictments to them that's going to disrupt this place of power and influence and money that they're in. And so they're seeking to destroy him. This is absolutely what they're bent upon.

[3 : 50] But their concern is that the people have his... Or he has the people's ear. That he's found favor with the people. And so they're trying now to find ways to discredit him.

And so we see in chapter 12, leading up to our text, they send a faction of Pharisees along with some Herodians, which was a political group, trying to trap him theologically and politically. They try to put him in a tough spot. And under inspiration from the Father, he makes fools of them. They then send to him a faction of Sadducees, another group of religious elite individuals with a theological trap.

And once again, he makes fools of them. So rather than him being discredited, they are discredited. And in our text today, they send a scribe.

Now, when we look at Mark 12, 28, the record is, and one of the scribes came up. And the scribes were kind of the religious scholars of the day.

[4 : 57] They were the learned, those who really poured over and really studied the Scriptures. In fact, you'll see them in places referred to as lawyers, not in that they defended it judicially, but that they were experts on the law.

In the parallel text in Matthew 22, verse 34 and 35, it says, but when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

So there's this meeting of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, these groups that very rarely agreed on much of anything at all, but they gather together. And then verse 35 says, and one of them, a lawyer or scribe, asked him a question to test him.

So we get a little bit more as we look at the parallel text about why it was that this particular man came. So he heard them disputing, and he saw that he answered them well, and he said, but I've got a question.

I've got a question for him that will stump him, that will discredit him. At the outset of this interaction, the scribe is not on Jesus' team, although it seems to shift as we go through our text today.

[6 : 09] Now, as I said, the Pharisees and the Sadducees didn't agree about much, but they did both esteem the law very highly. Both held a high degree of respect for the law.

And there was a common debate amongst them about which law was the greatest law. This very question that the scribe is going to come and ask to Jesus. There was much debate about this. These men had little else to do than to sit around, collect people's money, and debate theology together. Shame on them and shame on us when we do the same. Rabbinical tradition holds that they considered there to be 613 separate commandments in the Old Testament, many of which were hedge laws or those traditional things added to the law to help the Jews from breaking any of the laws, hedge laws, but 613 separate commandments.

And you may ask, how exactly did they arrive at this even as they were adding their tradition to it? And the foolish thing is that they arrived at 613 because there are 613 letters in the Hebrew of the Ten Commandments.

Isn't that ridiculous? So they took the Ten Commandments, they counted up the number of letters, there are 613, and then they came up with 613 laws that they said the Scriptures taught.

[7 : 30] Some were, of course, some were not. 248 affirmatives, things that should be done, and 365 negatives, one for every day of the year.

It was rather ridiculous and foolish the way they had gathered these laws together. And so as I said, they debated often about the greatest law because they knew they couldn't keep the whole thing, right?

Not all 613. They knew they were capable of doing this, of amassing enough good work to credit them before God. They knew their own frailty, but if they could just keep a couple of them, right?

If we could reduce it to just a couple that are the most important, then maybe we can tip the scale in our favor. Maybe we can set off against all the other laws that we break.

If we can get the couple that we think are most important right and set those on the good side of our scale, we'll find favor before God. This effort exists today in great degree, does it not?

[8 : 33] People running around trying to weigh out what is most important to live in society. And you'll hear people say things like, well, yeah, I think I'm a good person because, and I'll list off some major things, and they neglect other parts of God's standard.

These people recognized that God had a standard, but they wanted to redefine the standard in a way that they could keep. But all of us, every single one of us, the great metanarrative of humanity is that we have failed to keep God's standard.

In fact, we are incapable of our own power to do so. You know this to be true of yourself. If you are honest with yourself, you know that you cannot be a good person.

You know how much bad you do. Even in the things that the world thinks are good, you know the motivation behind it is so often bad. If you're honest with yourself, if you're not, I suggest that you get honest with yourself.

If you can't do that, if your conscience doesn't bear witness against you, your wife or your husband know how bad you are, how much you fail at holding to the standard of God.

[9 : 51] Your kids know. Young people, your parents, ask them, am I a good person? They will tell you the truth. Your roommate, your employer.

We are all very aware of this reality. We are deluded and deceiving ourselves and others if we think that we're not. We think that we're good enough.

And this is what they were about doing as they debated this and they had this conversation, this question. Jesus delivers an indictment to them in Mark 7, verses 6-8.

Mark records, and he said to them, Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites? As it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the traditions of men.

[10 : 52] So these people had elevated their own idea of what it meant to follow God. They were worshiping the right God, but they were worshiping him wrongly. And this is a serious matter.

This is a serious issue. It would seem that they were so close. They were Jews. They were descendants of Abraham. And yet, they had totally become apostate.

They had totally wandered away from the faith of Abraham, that saving faith. And so this was a trap, this question was.

Because the Sadducees and the Pharisees elevated, believed in, esteemed the law, although it was a very distorted misunderstanding of it. And they held a particular person in very high regard.

They agreed that Moses was to be held in high esteem. There was no one greater than Moses.

Moses, the one who was given the Ten Commandments on the mountain, who met with God face to face, whose face shone with the glory of God.

[11 : 58] You remember these stories, right? Moses had a close encounter with God. They esteemed him very highly. And so, when the scribe comes to ask Jesus this question, he's setting him up to have authority over Moses and therefore discredit himself.

Therefore, have the people not follow him any longer. Now, of course, our Lord perfectly articulates a response.

And he does so by quoting from the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy and from Leviticus. This scribe was sent on behalf of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Sadducees relegated. They didn't care too much about the prophets. They cared primarily about the first five books of the Bible. So he quotes from there.

He gives them an answer that they would have been very, very familiar with. From Deuteronomy 6, 4 and 5, which reads, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[13 : 06] This is a restatement of the law. Just as the people are about to go and take the land that God had promised to them. This is a restatement here. Verse 5, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And then Leviticus 19, 18 says, But you shall love your neighbor as yourself. And these sum up the rest of the law.

We'll look at that a bit in just a minute. But these are the great commandment that Jesus speaks of here. And we could spend months unpacking and trying to understand all the implications of this command.

In fact, we will spend our lives endeavoring to do so. To see what it means to love God and to love people in this way is the great endeavor of the Christian life.

I hope we'll get enough of it this morning to set us on the right trajectory. That we'll have in mind what this looks like so that we can continue to do this in our life.

[14 : 09] And we'll continue on next week in Mark. The greatest commandment is a commandment to love. Verse 31b.

A commandment. Jesus says there is no other commandment. Singular. It's singular in the original. There is no other commandment greater than these.

So the great commandment is a commandment to love. To love vertically God and to have that spill over into a horizontal love for others. Vertical and horizontal love.

Because you see, beloved, what we love directs how we act. The affections of your heart deem how you'll respond in any given circumstance.

For example, if you love Georgia football, you're going to tend to do certain things. Are you not? I think we all either are or know Georgia football fans.

[15:14] You'll probably wear something red and black. I know that you're going to put things on Facebook regarding the game. Why do you live tweet and Facebook post a game?

If somebody cares about it, they're watching it. I don't need to know the play-by-play. I know what you're going to be doing on the times when Georgia's playing, unless somebody plans a wedding. How dare you? During Georgia football season. It's going to dictate certain things. It's what you're going to talk about. People are very aware of those who love Georgia football.

The same thing is true of our children, isn't it? I've got friends that vented about how moms always put stuff on Facebook about their children. I can't believe clogging up my feed with all these pictures of your babies and now they do it.

It's just so wonderful. It's so ironic and apropos that they're now doing it as well and it's because they love their kids and they want to share their kids with the world. I don't fault them or the Georgia football fans for doing so.

[16:20] What we love directs how we act, how we respond. If we love God properly, we will love people properly and we will keep the commandments.

we read beyond Jesus' quote in Deuteronomy. So he quotes from Deuteronomy 6, 4 and 5.

Deuteronomy 6, 6 says, and these words that I command you today shall be on your heart and it can also be very readily translated, shall be in your heart, planted in your heart.

speaks of a change in our hearts themselves. Not merely some mental cognition to the law of God, but that the law of God is within us and therefore we respond as we should.

It's an internal issue, not merely an external issue, it's an internal issue. Jesus says it this way, stated in the negative, Mark 7, 20-23, and he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. From within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[17:41] He covers all the things that would transgress the law. All these evil things come from within and they defile a person. It's the matter of somebody's heart that makes them wrong before God, that makes them not able to stand in God's presence, that costs them, that gives to them eternal destruction.

And so therefore it has to be in the positive that the other is true, that it comes from our heart, the good things that God requires of us. Because Jesus is stating it here in the positive.

Elsewhere in the scriptures, John 14, verse 21, Jesus says, whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to them. 1 John 2.15, John writes again, do not love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. And so the adverse is true. If the love of the Father is in you, then you will not love the world.

[18:49] And this is at the very center of all of our experience and how it is we're trying to work out Christian living. It is a matter of our affection. What do we love?

Those of us who have been redeemed, who have been set free from the bondage of sin, the great travesty of our sin is that we've been freed from it. We no longer have to. We've been freed to love God, but when we sin, it proves that in that moment we love the sin more than we love God.

It's a tragedy. We do it all the time. We spit back in the face of the Father and praise God because of His goodness to us in Christ. He's forbearing and His love is never-ending.

Now, the commandment in Deuteronomy 6.5 says that we're to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our might.

And so it's worth us talking about this. Jesus adds to that with our minds. So in brief, your heart is the core of who you are.

[19:58] From it emanates all of your thoughts, your words, your actions. It is the very core of your identity. Proverbs 4.23 says, keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life.

It is the very essence of who you are. Your soul is the seat of your emotions. Matthew 26.38 Jesus says to them, my soul is very sorrowful even to death.

And then He asks them to remain with Him in the garden to pray. My soul is the place from which emanates our emotions. Our mind, again, Jesus' addition here to the commandment in Deuteronomy, our intellect, our power of reason, our intention, our purpose.

1 Kings 4:29 records that God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore.

He made him able to understand, able to comprehend, able to hold out cognition and logic and to be wise in his judgment over Israel.

[21 : 17] And then our strength which speaks to our physical energy. In Deuteronomy it's translated our might. That physical energy that we have, the way in which we get up and the way that we act, the way that we carry out.

It's every bit of us. These are all the components that make up a human being. Our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength. And before each one of these in the original language, we see the little phrase all of your, all of your heart and all of your soul and all of your mind and all of your strength. And the original doesn't say with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. It puts the emphasis and puts it before the phrase before each one of these nouns to say every single bit.

All of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, all of your strength. We're not to be divided in any way, but we're to be completely devoted in our affection to the Lord. John MacArthur said it this way, so the intellectual, emotional, volitional, and physical elements of personhood all combine to love the one true God.

It is an intelligent love. It is an emotional love. It is a willing love. And it is an active love. It is an all-consuming love.

[22 : 37] This is the way we are to love the Father. Part of the greatest commandment. How do we do that? How is this possible?

Those of us who were once enemies of God have now been made His friends by the power of the gospel. Our hearts have been made new. He is redeeming our emotions and our mind.

We are now capable of being set free from sin to live to Him, to live to righteousness by our strength. The natural response of the redeemed soul is to love the one that redeemed Him.

So we love God because of the gospel. Verse 31, the second is this. That was the vertical element of this love, affection set on God.

The second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. It shall flow out for your love for God to other people as well.

[23 : 43] And your neighbor is anybody that you encounter. So don't think we're just merely talking about the person who shares a property line or a wall in your dorm or apartment. This is anybody that you encounter. It's those people that you work with.

It's those people that ring you up at the places that you buy your groceries. It's the server, server that serves you, that you tip so poorly. Love these people. Love these people.

Romans 13, 8 and 10, Paul writes, O no one anything except to love each other. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Isn't that interesting? Paul understood the greatest command. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are summed up in this word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The last four of the ten commandments he says are summed up by this and any other commandment, any other commandment that is about us relating to one another are summed up in the word.

[24 : 50] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Verse 10, love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Paul wrote again in Galatians 5:14, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

And then James writes in chapter 2 verse 8, the book of James, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing well.

How do we love our neighbor? We love our neighbors sacrificially, in practical ways. We empty ourselves of our self determination, our own self glorification.

If we properly love God, if we are humble before Him, we recognize that this is not a proper thing for the one who worships God to do, and we serve our neighbor sacrificially.

We find ways in which we can serve them that no one else would do. We lay down our lives for the sake of their lives. And we do this so that we can preach the gospel to them.

[26 : 03] So that we can give them the great solution to their major problem. Remember meta-narrative problem. We come and we fix the little problems. We're there as a shoulder to cry on, but then we need to give them Jesus.

So the greatest way that you can love anybody, fill their belly, and then fill their soul. Matthew 22, 40, Jesus says, on these two commandments, this is the parallel text, depend all the law and the prophets.

It's fulfilled in all of this, this vertical access of affection towards God and the horizontal access of it as well. And then verse 32 of chapter 12 of Mark.

The scribe seems to be a bit open-minded as he comes to him, to test him, is very pleased with his answer because he repeats it back. The scribe said to him, you are right, teacher, you have truly said that he is one.

We know we're worshipping the right God together, this God that is one. There is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart, with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices, he understands that this commandment is greater than all of the temple worship that was going on in this day, all of the religious practice that was happening.

[27 : 28] And then Jesus' response, when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. And then Mark records for us that they stop asking questions, and Jesus spends the rest of Wednesday teaching, telling them rather than being on the defense, he's now on the offense in the rest of this chapter and a bit beyond that.

But he says to this scribe, you are not far from the kingdom of God. And this gives me some encouragement for this scribe's soul.

We don't get a record of what happens to him. He's nameless in our text, and he is in all the parallel texts as well. I hope that he got it. I hope that he witnessed the crucifixion, that he heard of the resurrection, and he placed believing faith in Jesus Christ, but we don't know.

But we can say this from our text, that not far is not good enough. Not far from the kingdom is not in the kingdom. It wasn't good enough at this point in our text.

My dad, all of my life growing up, would say, close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades. It's a familiar phrase to some of you, I can tell. Close only counts in horseshoes, hand grenades.

[28 : 45] It doesn't count in the kingdom of God. There's not a measure. We don't vary in degree. We're good enough to get into the kingdom of God. You either are in the kingdom of God or you are not in the kingdom of God.

You either are under God's rule over your life because of what Christ has done on your behalf. God has worked a faith in you that you would believe in him and he has changed you. He's made you a new creation.

You are now a citizen of his kingdom, no longer his enemy, but his friend, adopted as a son, redeemed, you've been bought with a price. That's either true of you or it's not. And at this point, this is the case for this man.

He had the wisdom to give a wise answer, but that wasn't enough. It wasn't enough for him just to know the truth and give some assent to it in his mind.

He had to give all of himself, pick up his cross, and follow Jesus Christ. I hope he did. And I hope that all of us in this room today are doing the same.

[29 : 50] We must enter the kingdom of God by faith in the completed work of Christ on our behalf. This man recognizes that it's an internal issue.

That's to his credit. He gets that it's an internal issue with his mind. He's yet to be changed internally. We have much to praise God for if this is true of us.

Of all the men of Israel, these scribes should have most understood, most gotten the scriptures. They were much smarter than any of us in this room.

But yet, the truth of God had not been revealed to them. Praise God that he's revealed his truth to simple minds like mine. That he has rent my heart.

He has changed it. From an old heart. A stony heart. A heart that was bent against him and set it in his direction. We have much to praise him for.

[30 : 51] If you are not found in Christ, if you find yourself relating to these Pharisees and Sadducees, to these scribes, trying to figure out what are the weightier matters, what things must I make sure I'm doing well to earn favor with God, then I would ask that you recognize that nothing,

nothing earns you favor with God except the completed work of Christ on your behalf. He took your place on the cross. The song Mercy that Wes sang was about that. He hung on your tree, on your behalf, took the wrath of God for your sin. Those things you've done, those things you're doing even now, and those things you will do, this completed work, it is finished. If you would just believe in Him. Let's pray together.