

Mark 12:28-34 (Matt22:34-40)

SS: Jesus teaches a scribe that there are two greatest commandments

Aim: Cause the audience to learn that the love of God and others should be a reflection of our relationship with Jesus

Division 1 Mark 12:28-31

In response to a question Jesus teaches the two greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor.

We pick up this week with further questioning in the Temple courts in Jerusalem. A teacher of the law or scribe becomes our central character. Matthew calls him a teacher of the Law but Mark calls him a scribe. The brief background is this. A scribe was a person whose job is was to copy the Hebrew Scriptures. Also by in Jewish history they had also taken on a role of teaching the law despite the fact that God had commanded that this was the job of the Levites. So while they could not be priests they were experts in the Law and Jewish life and thus they also had the title of Lawyer. This scribe had heard the debate the Sadducees and Pharisees had been having with Jesus and decides he will join in or perhaps was the spokesman for the group. Scripture tells us that the scribe had

noticed that Jesus had given good answers during His debate with the Sadducees and Pharisees. I personally find this humorous or perhaps ironic. The scribe, who is responsible for copying and teaching the Law finds Jesus' answers "good". Jesus created the Law, perfectly lived the Law and fulfilled the Law and the scribe finds His answers good. If you don't smile to yourself when you read God's word and you find lines like this you are reading too fast.

The scribe asks, " which commandment is the most important of all? The question is really based from the fact that at this time the Jewish religious leaders, the rabbis, taught that there are some 613 commands within the law. 248 of them were expressed in the positive, meaning they were commands. 365 of them were expressed in the negative or they were prohibitive. The rabbis also classified them in to two groups, one as heavy commands and the other as light commands. The rabbis are teaching a works based theology. If you obey all 613 commands you are good with God. If you don't somehow manage to keep all 613 commands then they taught you should be sure you obey the heavy ones. This is a kind of points based system to get into heaven. If you have enough points then you might get into heaven. This theology has a high view of man. We can please God with our actions if we have enough of them

or at least enough of them to counter our bad actions. We are really the ones in control of our salvation based on this theology. Nothing is farther from the truth. We can never earn enough points to enter the kingdom of God. Consistently in scripture it is our heart, our inner being is what concerns God and Jesus. In this works based theology there is no grace or mercy because the self-righteous man does not need it. He has earned his place in the kingdom. The self-righteous man is his own master and commander. For me personally this is a terrifying theology. Imagine putting your life's work up for God to evaluate at the time of your death, not knowing if you had done enough good to counter your bad as the bases for your eternal life. How much fear of death would you have? I would be terrified! Praise God that our eternal destiny is not in our hands but he hands of Jesus and He has already paid the price for our entrance into the eternal presence with God. The spiritual reality is that the self-righteous is far from the truth and it is only the honest, self-reflective person who will find and understand the truth about God and man's relationship to God. It is this person who can recognize and understand that we need God's grace and mercy because we sin we miss the mark that God has set for us.

In verse 29 Jesus responds to the question; quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4. This is referred to as the Shema. This word is in the imperative form and it means to hear and obey. For

the devout Jew this was their confession of faith. They would have read this or quoted it two times per day as part of their worship of God. To this day this passage in Deuteronomy is read in every Synagogue service. By using this verse Jesus is not only calling Jewish leaders to attention but telling them to listen to His words. Additionally these words are reminding them of the uniqueness of God and their responsibility to obey them. The teaching that follows is foundational to their relationship with God as well as ours today and Jesus is going to confront the hypocrisy and legalism of the rabbinical teachings.

After Jesus gets their undivided attention He answers the question. In verses 30 and 31 Jesus will use several repeating words and phrases. The first repeating word is Love. It is used two times in these verses and is used in the verb form. It is a command, it is a volitional commitment, it is personal, comprehensive and whole hearted. Three words make up the repeating phrase “with all your” and it means “from the source of”. The word for with denotes the origin or point from which action proceeds. The next word in the phrase is all. From the Greek word here with get our word holistic. It means “whole, entire or complete”. The final word in this repeating phase is “your” and means or is relating to the human personality. So it is out of your whole being that you are to listen and obey God. There can be no holding back or incompleteness in our devotion and commitment to God. We need to be all in!

Jesus links the four phases with “and” to four descriptive words. Each of the descriptive words relate to our personalities or our human nature. The word for “heart” to the Jewish listeners indicates that this love was to be coming from their very center of control, their inner being. Their lives should be controlled by their love for God. The next descriptive word is “soul”. This has to do with the physical life and self-concept. This means to be willing to give one’s life to God and to devote it to Him. The third description is “mind”. The Jewish listeners were not to have their lives controlled by anything other than God and His word. The last descriptive word is “strength” and directs us toward our bodily powers. Our abilities, talents and gifts need to be surrendered to God. This last description clearly directs us to the truth that a relationship with God is not just for our own personal edification but calls us to action. We are to use our very lives in obedience to Him to serve others.

31. The scribe had only asked for the one most important commandment. Jesus gives him two. The wholehearted love of God has a natural expression and it is to love others. Jesus is challenging us to a commitment to God and His second command is a similar command and commitment and it is to our neighbors. These two commands are the Sum and Substance of the law and the teaching of the prophets. When we are characterized by these commands the other 611 rules are not needed.

This Law assumes a fundamental love of self. Most of us tend to our own needs in many ways, food, clothes, and shelter just to name a few. The command here is to treat others as we treat ourselves. There is a basic responsibility regarding the law and it is our duty as believers to love God and man.

But who is our neighbor? For the Jewish audience it was only fellow Jews or those converted to Judaism. The literal meaning of the word here is “one who is near by”. Jesus expands the thinking here with the idea of neighbor and does so in other scriptures. Our neighbor is not just someone who is like us, but the idea is expanded by Christ to anyone near or far, just like us or very different. Just read the passage of the Good Samaritan. Because we are all made in the image of God our neighbor is really anyone we can express the love of God to as an expression of our love for God.

Application: To what extent are you characterized as someone who loves God and others?

Ex: Mark and McDonalds card, Tronstad boys.

Division 2 Mark 12:32-33?

Title: The scribe agrees with Jesus and recognizes the commandments as more important than the acts of worship.

Q: To what extent do your attitudes and actions align with scriptures?

Only Mark records the Scribes answer and by his response he believes Jesus has given the right answer. He agrees God is one and there is no other god beside Him. He agrees with the uniqueness of God. The scribe also demonstrates his love and respect by not using Gods personal name but uses pronouns. He also agrees that the love of God involves the whole of our human nature. Additionally he agrees that love of neighbor is more important than all the rituals the Jewish religious leaders have created. Understand what a bold statement this is, what a bold position he is taking by declaring the love of God and neighbor is more important than offerings and sacrifices. Most likely he is standing alone, standing against the Jewish leaders and teachers who can and do sit in judgement over him.

But what about us today? We have two commands given, the love of God and the Love of Neighbor that represent the fullness of the scriptures. Our culture and or world, perhaps more now than at any other time in history has fallen into a

“me first” existence. The goal for many is the empty world of self-actualization, of self-fulfillment. Today’s philosophy puts man at the center of his own eternal destiny not God. People effectively are seeking to be their own god. Even believers get caught up in this me first philosophy. We can use scripture to validate and justify our personal and selfish agendas. While scripture provides insight into and can provide comfort during life’s difficulties it never does so at the expense of our moral responsibilities to God and our neighbor. One writer I read put it this way, “God’s word is designed to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. God’s word should stimulate us to seek to fulfil both of the commands. The command to love they neighbor should be a response and an expression of our love for God. To fulfill the second command means we must be obedient to the first. It is through the overflow of our vertical relationship that we can have a spirit lead horizontal relationship. It is through the strength in our relationship with God that we can exercise grace and forgiveness to others. We must be able to grasp our value as a child of God, we have been forgiven and have received the grace of God in our own life. With this as the basis in our life we are free to love others unconditionally as God has loved us. Without this understanding our acts of spiritual service can be empty and even self-serving.

Application: To what extent do our actions reflect the relationship you have with Jesus?

Division 3 Mark 12:34

Title: Jesus recognizes the Scribes honesty and encourages it

- In our final verse Jesus responds to scribes' honest handling of the truth of scripture. This scribe gets perhaps one of the greatest compliments in scripture. Jesus believes the scribe has answered wisely. This scribe has recognized that it is the relationship with God, the relationship with others that is truth of scripture not the following of some set of rules set up by man. Jesus encourages this continued approach to scripture with the statement that he is "not far from the kingdom of God". In studying for this morning two thoughts were mentioned and the one that seems to make the most sense, in the context of this exchange, is that Jesus is encouraging the continued honest, open and truthful approach to the study of scripture. This man has not allowed the errant teaching of the leaders to distract his study and application of God's word. He has not allowed the 613 commands to misguide his studies and he following of the truth of scripture. With the predominant view of his pier group per being a works based relationship with God this man knows it is a relationship, a relationship built on love. This man's heart, mind, soul and strength is set in the right direction. A direction is toward God and not man. With this approach

to scripture Jesus is encouraging him that he is close to a full understanding of God's love and plan. He is close to an eternal life with God. He is able to shrug off the bias against Jesus the others have. He is able to evaluate the words, teaching and works of Jesus without the prejudices of the others. Scripture does not tell us if he was able to recognize Jesus as God's fulfillment of the scriptures despite the events that are about to unfold. If you are here today and are being honest about yourself and honest with scripture then the kingdom of God is near to you.

Q: Jesus is near to us today, are you near to Him?