



The Gospel of Mark | Mark 12:28-34
April 19th, 2020

Well, thank you for joining us this morning, singing in your living rooms. I want to invite you now to take a seat. That's something I get to say every Sunday in our church. Take a seat and ah, if you're standing, take a seat. I want to read to you this morning from the Gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 12 versus 28-34. Mark 12:28-34, and as you're turning there let me just tell you, in our church we are a church that just goes verse by verse through books of the Bible. We think God's word is powerful and that every book of the Bible, every word of the Bible is God's word to us. And so, we like to go verse by verse through books and learn what God is saying to us. Now before all of this pandemic began to take place and left us in this setting that we're in today, we had been going through the Gospel of Mark and we're going to pick back up in the Gospel of Mark today. And so, I hope that you if you're a guest who's been joining us online for weeks now and this is not your normal church, I hope you'll just pick right up with us in the Gospel of Mark.

And so if you have your Bible, look with me at Mark chapter 12 beginning 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 besides 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 Jesus when he saw that he answered wisely, said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions."

Let's pray together. Father, we pray that you would be gracious to us this morning as we study your word together. That Lord, your word would make tremendous sense to us in the midst of our current circumstances, in the midst of our lives in general, Lord, that we would hear from you, that it would be profound, and that it would change us. Exalt Christ now, in these moments, we pray in his name. Amen.

Now this is a story that is, uh since we're coming back to this after some weeks away from it, let me remind you, when you look at the text, this is the fifth story that takes place in a series of six controversy stories in the Gospel of Mark. And in Mark, Chapter 12, if you were to look at verses 13 through 34, Jesus is challenged by three different groups. In verses 13 through 17 the Pharisees and the Herodians come and they challenge him on a political question about paying taxes. And then in verses 18 through 27 the text we would have looked at last, it's a theological question that's posed to him by the Sadducees about the resurrection. The Sadducees were a group in Israel at the time that didn't believe in the resurrection. And now, it's a scribe who comes to Jesus, and he comes to Jesus and he asks him a religious question. It's a question about commandments. Which commandment is the most important? And there's a theme that runs throughout this whole section of Mark's Gospel. And the theme is the superior wisdom of Jesus and his superior understanding above everyone else who's ever lived. He's the wisest person who's ever lived. And if you look at this, this question at the end of this text, it says in verse 34, the last sentence, it says after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. It's as if Jesus has proven his point, and everybody says, you know what, no use asking him any more questions. We understand that we can't enter into a legitimate debate with him because his wisdom is superior to ours. And so here we come to this scribe who asked a question. And it appears this time that he's maybe asking a genuine question. It doesn't seem like he's attempting to trap Jesus the way that others were attempting to trap him. His question is about the commandment, which is the greatest commandment. And as you saw, he said, it's to love God and to love your neighbor.

Now it's interesting that this issue of loving your neighbor is an issue that has come up a lot in recent weeks during this pandemic. Because the question is, how do I best care for the people in my life, be it my neighbors, be it the grocery store worker, be it the people who I work with, my co-workers; how do I demonstrate to them that I care for them? And this is what social distancing ultimately comes back to, is the fact that I'm to care for other people. And so, as we come to this, it's a very relevant question, and so you're gonna notice in the text that the scribe asks a question, Jesus answers him, and then the scribe responds to that. And so that's kind of the flow of the text. So let's look first at the question. Look at Verse 28, it says: One of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another. Now 'them' would be Jesus and the Sadducees. This is what's happened right before this in verses 18 through 27. He's having a confrontation with the Sadducees. So, this scribe hears this confrontation and then when he sees that Jesus answered the Sadducees well, he thinks his response is right, then he decides to come and ask him a question. And so, he comes and the questions he asks, is this: which

commandment is the most important of all? Now what is a scribe? Now when we hear scribe, we think of somebody who just sits and jots things down. I'm going to dictate something to you, and you write it down. But a scribe was not a person who was a secretary, a scribe was someone who actually was a religious expert in the law.

And so, if you look at the parallel text, which is in Matthew chapter 22 where the same story is told, listen to the way that it's described there in verses 34 and 35: when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, so this scribe we're told is a Pharisee, which is why he aligns with Jesus and being against the Sadducees, one of them who is a lawyer, see how this scribe is here called a lawyer. A lawyer asked him a question to test him. Now, if you think about this scribe, it would be best to think of this as being a man like Alan Dershowitz. Alan Dershowitz is a household name for anybody that paid attention to the impeachment hearings recently, because he was one of the people that gave expert testimony because he's both a lawyer and he is a legal scholar on American constitutional law. So, it's not just that he practices the law, but he's an expert. And so, if someone wants to know about the Constitution of the United States, he's an expert in constitutional law. Now that's what this scribe would have been like. He would have understood Israel's law to the degree that Alan Dershowitz would understand American constitutional law, so he would be able to look at the law and say, this is what it means. And so, he was a master at interpreting the law. And so, the Pharisees at this point who have been trying to test Jesus and to trap him, probably thought this guy is a worthy opponent of Jesus. Because if there's anybody who's a worthy opponent, it's going to be someone who is an expert in Israel's law who can come and debate with Jesus Israel's law. And so, he comes and he poses a question, now notice the question: which commandment is the most important of all? Now, when he says commandment, he's referring to Israel's law. This is contained in the first 5 books of the Bible that we call the Pentateuch or the Torah. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. And there are 613 commandments according to rabbinic tradition. Now we just think of the 10 Commandments. And just to be clear, these are not 10 suggestions. These are 10 Commandments, the way that Israel understood God's law is it was commandments from God, so they were obligated to obey them. Now there were 365 prohibitions that would be the 'Thou shalt not's' in the law. But then there were 248 positive commands in the law. Those would be the 'Thou shalt's' in the law. These are the things that you must do. And so, when they looked at this law, they differentiated between what they termed heavy commandments and light commandments.

Now, light commandments would have been less demanding upon your will or your possessions. And so, it would have been something that wouldn't have been that significant in the sense of if you broke it, there wasn't a death penalty attached to it. And then you had what was called heavy commandments. Now these were more demanding of your possessions, more demanding of your will. These were serious offenses, so not exactly, but it might be helpful to think of those as like misdemeanors and felonies. And so, they had a differentiation between how those existed. Now, when this man comes and he asks about these commandments, notice his specific question. Which commandment is most important of all? I'm reading from the ESV, but the New American Standard translates this as which commandment is foremost of all, in other words, which of these commands comes before everything else. What's first. If there's one at the first position, one in the front of the line, this is the commandment that above everything else, you better deal with this one first, which one is it? And because it was the first and foremost commandment, they would have understood it as not just being binding upon Israel, who had the law, but binding upon everyone in general throughout the world. Everyone was bound by this law. Now look at Jesus, his answer in verse number 29. Jesus answers and says, the most important, or the foremost of all the commandments, if you want to count up 613 Commandments, that's fine, but here's the most important, the foremost one, and he quotes to them from Deuteronomy chapter 6:4-5. Here's the quote, he says: Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Now this is what we refer to as the Shema, S-H-E-M-A. And that's because Shema is a Hebrew word that means to hear. And so the first words in this commandment are Hear, O Israel. And so, Israel understood this to be the creed of the Jewish faith. It was called the Shema, and every devout Israelite would have repeated this, they would have recited this command twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. They would have said these words: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God. This was what they said every day. So, this command, this Shema, was as important to an Israelite as, let's say, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed are to Christians. It was something that every Christian knows or knew, and it's something that every Israelite knew.

And so here, when you see this, he's saying this is what's important, this Shema. And then he gives in the Shema, here's the explanation, there's this declaration that begins. The Lord is one. That's the first thing that Israel is to know. The Lord is one, and that speaks of God's uniqueness. He's the only one. In fact, Israelite was known because of its monotheism. Now monotheism means one god. If you think about the surrounding pagan nations, the surrounding pagan

nations, so the Roman Empire during the time of the New Testament, they were polytheists, Poly, meaning lots of gods, and then mono meaning one, theism meaning God. So monotheism means there was one god. So Israel's god was the only god, there were no other gods. And this was Israel's significant belief that, that separated them from all the other nations. There was one God and he had made a covenant with Israel, and Israel was belonging to him as his special people. Now this means that if he's the only God, then it means that he's the Lord of all. It means that he has a rightful claim on every individual person. And it means that he has a rightful claim, not on just every individual person, but on the totality of every individual person. So it's not just that he can say, you belong to me, you belong to me, you belong to me, but this God can say to every person that he points to, all that you have belongs to me, all that you are belongs to me. And the reason for that is, is because you belong to him, because number one, he created you. And so, if God creates every person then every person belongs to God. But it goes beyond that. It's not just that God had created the people of the world. He also to this day continues to sustain the people of the world. So, because he created you and because he sustained you, that means that your life is totally, totally dependent upon him. In fact, we could look at it and say, you know, apart from him you wouldn't exist. But likewise, apart from him, you would cease to exist. If there were no God, there would be no you. If there were no you, then you would know nothing of this God because you wouldn't exist. And so, you would be a non-existent being. So, for God to not exist, you would not exist.

The declaration is the basis for his command, because God is one, then here's the command: you shall love the Lord. Notice the word love. This is a volitional commitment. It actually comes in what we call an imperative future. An imperative is a command, and it's something that's going to take place not just now, but forever. You shall love the Lord. This is your future. Your whole life is to be captured by this and notice that this loving the Lord, it's going to be seen here in a moment as being a commitment and not just an emotion. We think of love often as an emotion. I feel love for someone. But in Scripture, love is always a commitment. It requires action. And he says that we're to love the Lord look, with, see that word 'with,' with all your heart. This is a Greek proposition that means 'from,' and that's important because it means 'from the source of' rather than 'by means of.' So, the command is to love God not simply with our heart, but to love God from our heart. From who I am, I'm to love him. Now look at what he says about the way that they're to love this God, they're to love him with all, meaning the whole of who they are. And it's repeated four times, and this emphasizes their total response to God. They're to love him with all your heart. The heart was the core of who you were. This is the control center of your life. We think of heart, oftentimes as like love, an emotional thing. We

think of the heart as tied to emotions. But love and scripture is always a commitment, never a feeling. And likewise, in Scripture the heart is never the emotional center of your life. But it is the innermost being of who you are. This is the control center of your life. And so, when you function one way, it's because your heart is that way. And so, he says you're to love the Lord your God with all of your heart. This is the place of greatest commitment. And then he says, you're to love him with all of your soul. This is the source of your life. When you were created, God breathed life into you. And he did this with the very first person, he created Adam, when he formed him from the dust of the earth and breathed in to him the breath of life. It's the soul that is the source of who we are, our power. And then with all of our mind, this means with your intellect, your comprehension, your ability to think. We're to love God, look, with *all* of our mind, not just the parts of our mind that are the easiest for us to use because this is low hanging fruit when it comes to me thinking about God. I can understand this, but this is too complicated and too complex, and so I'm not going to devote my best attention and thoughtfulness to that because it's too hard for me to understand. Thinking primarily of it's easy to understand when God says I love you and you should love your neighbor. But if you talk about the Trinity, well, that's too hard to grasp. And so, I don't want to apply mental exercising of my mind to that. But no, rather with all that you are, apply it to loving God. And then he says, with all of your strength. This is with all of your physical power, and for us that would even include the material possessions that we have, because that is our power today. Most of us recognize that our power is wrapped up in our ability to possess things, to buy things that sustain our life. We don't have to for the most part, go out and hunt our own food. But we do have to earn money and so that money becomes our power. So, love him with all of your strength, all your possessions. So, notice we're commanded to love God from the entirety of our heart, from the entirety of our soul, from the entirety of our mind, from the entirety of our strength.

And then he says this. The second is this, now notice the scribe, he had only asked about one thing. He asked about the first commandment. But Jesus is going to give him a second commandment. And here's what he says: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now this comes from Leviticus 19:18. When he tells him this and he says there is no other commandment greater than these, he is linking these two things together, making them inseparable and you have to understand that this was revolutionary. In fact, when Jesus offers this second commandment there's something here that is taking place, that is revolutionary, Jesus is saying, in essence this, you cannot do one without doing the other. You cannot say I'm going to obey the great commandment. The first, the most foremost commitment to love God, if you don't love your neighbor. If you don't love your neighbor, you can't obey that one. And likewise, you can't

love your neighbor and say, well, I was kind of hit or miss on the first, but I got the second right all the time. No, no, no. If you missed on the second one, it's because you missed on the first one. If you missed on the first one, it's because you missed on the second one. He's saying something that is radical. He's saying, you cannot genuinely love God unless you genuinely love your neighbor. And furthermore, you cannot genuinely love your neighbor until you genuinely love God. And to take it a step beyond that, we have to recognize that you cannot genuinely love God until you have been born of God.

And so, I want to show you something. I want you to turn with me to 1 John chapter 4 towards the back of your Bible, and I want to show you a very significant text that links all of this together and is very, very important to us in terms of understanding what it means to genuinely love God, genuinely love our neighbor, and to know that all of that comes from our having been born of God. So, looking at 1 John chapter 4, look at what it says in verse number 7: Beloved, let us love one another. Now there's the command. Love one another, love one another. Jesus says the second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. Now here's the command from John. John was an apostle of Jesus. He spent time with him, he knew Jesus. In fact, John stood in the empty tomb of Jesus on the morning of the Resurrection. He knows what Jesus is saying and he says, let us love one another because, here's the reason, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God. Notice that statement, has been born, circle the word 'born,' of God and knows God. This is an intimate knowledge of him. You know who he is because you have a personal relationship with him. So look, Jesus said in John chapter 3, this is the same John who's writing this letter called 1 John. He's the one that wrote John, the Gospel of John, John chapter 3:16, we all know: For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son that whosoever shall believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life. Right before those words in verse number 3, guess what he said. He said unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Now that's Jesus, speaking to a religious person, just like this scribe was a religious person and came to Jesus and said, hey, what's the greatest commandment? He said, you gotta love God and you gotta love your neighbor. Well, there was a religious person back in John chapter 3 whose name was Nicodemus. He came to Jesus and he came to Jesus and said, Teacher, we know you must be from God. Nobody can do what you do unless they're from God. And Jesus says to Nicodemus, 'Nicodemus, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' It's not even to say he can't enter the kingdom. You can't even see the kingdom to know how to enter the kingdom. So you have to be born of God. So I want you to hold on to this statement for later. Unless one is born of God, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Look at what happens in verse number 9 in 1 John: In this the love of God was made manifest, er actually, I'm sorry, skip to verse 8, go back to verse 8, verse 8 is really important: Anyone who does not love does not know God. Notice that, that's a very strong statement. "Anyone who does not love does not know God." Now remember I told you earlier love is not an emotional feeling. Love is an action. It's a commitment to the good of someone else. And he's saying this, if you love, it's because you've been born of God. But if you don't love, you have to come to understand you don't know God, you don't know him, and you don't know him in a personal way. You don't know him in an intimate way. You know nothing of him. And the reason is this, because God is love. If you knew him and you had been loved by him, born into the kingdom because of his love, you would be like him. You would love him. Now watch what happens in verse 9: In this the love of God was made manifest among us, this is how it became real. We were left to say I wonder what God's love looks like. And then something happened that manifest it to us. It suddenly became real. We were suddenly able to look at it and say, whoa, now I know what this looks like. It looks like this, which is going to be very important for us as we think about what it means for us to love our neighbor because it says anybody that doesn't love their neighbor doesn't love God. Well, why's that so important? Because, listen, it means you don't get to define what love will look like. When it comes to loving your neighbor, you don't get to set the definition of love. Well, I love him in this sort of way. Nope, this is the way. Here's the way. In this, we know. Here's what it looks like: In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world. Notice that love, as I said, requires action. The action is this, God sent, notice that, that's a verb, God did something. Now no one could make God do this. God is in heaven. He doesn't have to answer to any of us. No one twisted his arm and said, hey God, why don't you send Jesus for us? Doesn't happen that way. So God of his own will, his own volitional will of love for us, says I'm going to send to you Jesus. No one picked up the phone and called and said, you know, we're gonna blackmail you if you don't send us \$1,000 this is what's gonna happen. Rather, God picked up the phone and called you out of the blue and said, hey, I got news for you, I'm sending you 1,000 bucks. You said, why? It's because I want to, because I love you. See, this is, this is the way you have to understand God's sending Christ into the world. He sent him, and here's the reason why verse 9, so that we might live through him. His reason for sending the son is that we might have life. Why? Because we're in our sin and in our sin we're under the judgment of God, and under the judgment of God the only thing that waits us is death. The wages of sin are death.

But God sends Jesus that we might have life and look at what it says, verse 10: In this, here's that statement again 'in this,' you want to know what love looks

like. Look at this. This is what it looks like: In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent, there it is again, he sent his son. But now we're going to get the reason for the son coming. And it is this, to be the propitiation for our sins. Now that word propitiation is a big word. And if you're not familiar with theological language, you're probably saying what in the world does propitiation mean? I didn't even know how to pronounce it until you read it. Well, let me tell you what propitiation means. Propitiation means to appease the wrath of God. And so, here's what this means. Jesus comes into the world because you and I, and every person who has ever lived, are sinners. And because of our sin we stand condemned under the judgment of God. The only thing God owes us is his judgment of our sin, and therefore we rightfully are deserving of his wrath and his judgment against our sin. Just the same as if someone committed a crime against you and you took them to court. You would take them to court because you have a sense of justice inside of you, you would say this is wrong. They should be held accountable. Well, all of us have cosmically, we've committed cosmic treason, against God. We have rebelled against him, and so in our sin we are owed judgment. And so therefore the wrath of God hangs above each and every one of us.

Christ comes into the world for us. Now why does he come into the world? Because God, in his love for us, sees us in our sin and says, I'm not gonna leave you in your sin. I'm gonna send Christ into the world to redeem, to save you, to pull you out from under my judgment. But I can't just let you go because then I would be unjust. And I'm not unjust. I'm holy. I'm God. And so, what's gonna happen is, is that I'm going to take care of the judgment of your sin myself. And I'm gonna do it because I love you. And so he sends Christ into the world and Christ comes, in tremendous love for us, goes to the cross and on the cross, all of our sins placed upon Christ and God the Father judges Christ and the wrath of God falls upon Christ rather than falling upon me for my sin, rather than falling upon you for your sin. This is the Gospel. Christ takes my sin and he takes God's wrath in my place. And because of that, that means that when I look at this, I have to say the love of God isn't just seen in the life of Jesus, meaning that God sent Jesus into the world so that he could show me what it looks like to love someone in the way that he treats people. So, he's not just my moral example. I need more than that. I need someone to die for me. And so, the love of God isn't that he took action on my behalf, though he didn't have to do it. He went to the cross for me. And so, in light of that verse 11 says this: Beloved, if God so loved us, and that doesn't mean I so love you. It means if God loved us in this way, if God loved us in this way, that he sent Christ to die for the sins of his people even though he had committed no sins of his own, which means he takes complete responsibility for my actions even though he didn't do anything wrong. That's love. When you take responsibility for someone else's actions,

when they've done wrong and you've done no wrong, and you say that's ok, I'll take responsibility. He comes and look at what it says: Beloved, if God so loved us, we also just like that ought to love one another. So, what does it mean when I say that Jesus tells me the great commandment is, is that I'm to love my neighbor as myself, it means that I am to love my neighbor, as Christ has loved me. And how has Christ loved me? Well not with a sentimental, mushy, emotional sort of feeling love, but with a love that was costly. It was action oriented. It required something and that required love is now my responsibility towards others. I am required to demonstrate action for the good of others, even if it comes in moments in which I can say, you know, that's not my responsibility. No, no, no, no. The cross means that your love for everyone else is always your responsibility. There's no getting around it.

And so, he says this in verse 12: No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. Now, drop down to verse number 19 and look at what it says: we love because he first loved us. None of us just happened to just love this way. In fact, we're incapable of living this way, which means that when Jesus says the great commandment is love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself, it means we're destined to fail, and we're destined to fail because none of us are going to obey this commandment because our lives are going to be lived for ourselves. But, because he loved us in this way, his love transforms us. Not only are we free because of the gospel from the power of sin, I mean the penalty of sin, but we're also free from the power of sin so that suddenly those chains that bind me to my own selfishness are broken off of me and I'm free to leave behind my selfishness for a life of faithful love and commitment to others. Because verse 20: if anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment, this great commandment that we've been talking about - love God, love your neighbor, we have from him. That's from Jesus. Whoever loves God also must love his brother.

Notice now then, that this great commandment is tied directly to both the incarnation and the crucifixion. And that's important because it means we can't say this great commandment - love God and love your neighbor - is tied only to the incarnation. That would mean that Jesus, in his incarnation, his coming to live among us in flesh, comes just to demonstrate for us, oh, now I see what it looks like, it looks like this, but rather it's more than that. It's tied to his crucifixion, meaning that if Jesus only came and showed me in his actions towards others what it looks like, that I would still be left not only to fail in that commandment, but I would fail even worse in that commandment because I will have seen it lived out perfectly in someone else, giving me no excuse. And

so, I need the crucifixion. So, this is what it looks like to love your neighbor as yourself. And this is why, to be quite honest, if I could just be very, very pointed for a moment is to just say this. This is the reason why Christians among all people should be the least grumbly and complaining during this quarantine and social distancing time, when we are recognizing that even though maybe some of us may not be those who fit that high risk category for really getting sick and having complications from COVID-19. And we said, well I don't understand, it's just those people that really get it, why does that affect my life? You see, no, Christians of all people should say love for my neighbor means that if I need to inconvenience myself to keep you safe, I'll do it. And the reason I'll do it is because I learned in the cross that Jesus inconvenienced himself even though he was not at risk for the wrath of God hanging over him in his perfected holiness in heaven. He comes anyway, and he takes responsibility for someone else, as if it was his own problems. See, that's why Christians should stand out in the midst of this, because we should be the first to say, oh, no, I've seen this before in the crucifixion. This is now just the way I'm to be.

So now look at the scribes response, the scribe says to him in verse 32: You're right, teacher. Truly, you have said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, with all the strength, and to love ones neighbor as oneself, that's much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. Notice that he agrees with Jesus' answer. And then he goes on to add his own expert opinion. He says, hey, to love your neighbor and to love God, that's much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. There were two types of sacrifice. There were partial sacrifices, and that means that you made the sacrifice and then you didn't burn all of it upon the altar, but some of it you took away and you ate as part of the sacrificial ritual. But then there were whole burnt offerings, which means that the entire offering was burned upon the altar, completely consumed on the altar, you didn't get any of it, which means it was totally devoted to God. It was the most sacred. And what he says is this, hey, this love for God and love for neighbor, it's more important than all of the most sacred of sacrifices. In other words, even the most sacred duties in the religious life mean nothing apart from obedience to the commands to love God and to love one's neighbor. And that's important because you and I can think that maybe we're doing pretty well because we're pretty religious. But it means nothing if our religiosity is not matched with our love for God and love for neighbor, which gives meaning to whatever religion we profess. 1 Samuel says this in chapter 15:22: Samuel said, has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of ram's. Proverbs 21:3 says: to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. Hosea 6:6 says: For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,

the knowledge of God, intimacy with God, rather than burnt offerings. Verse 34 tells us back in Mark, it says, and when Jesus saw that this scribe had 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. In the big picture that we've been looking at in Mark's Gospel, Jesus at this point has defeated every challenger who's come to him, and they're not gonna challenge anymore. In fact, now he's gonna turn the table, and he's gonna start asking his own questions. But first, when we look at this notice the irony here. The scribe came to Jesus to judge him, and what happens is Jesus winds up judging the scribe. He's the one who pronounces the judgment. He says, hi, you've answered wisely. He's the one who turns the tables. The scribe, he can judge matters of the law, but he can't judge matters of the heart. Only Jesus can judge matters of the heart and notice what Jesus' judgment of this man's heart is: You are not far from the kingdom of God, verse 34 says, the kingdom of God. This requires entrance. You're not born into the kingdom. You have to be born again to enter into the kingdom. John 3:3, what did we see earlier? And no one can see the kingdom of God unless what, they're born again. Which means that you're not born into the world part of the kingdom. You're born into the world and you're part of a different kingdom. The kingdom ruled by sin and Satan and death. To enter into the kingdom of God, you must be born again. To be in the kingdom then, this scribe who is near, he's close, he's almost, he gets it, he's almost there. But he's got to be born again. To be born again means that he must not only approve of what Jesus has just said, but he must acknowledge Jesus as Israel's messiah. And that means that he must give his allegiance to Jesus as his king. And he must follow him in obedience as his disciple. That would require something for this man to do.

And so, I want to leave you with a few thoughts here, in conclusion to all of this. I want to leave you with, with five important things I want you to think about alright?

Number one is this. Being religious is not enough to enter the kingdom. Religious duties, moral obligations, that's not enough to enter the kingdom of God. And yet this is the most common answer that people give. When asked a question, hey, you know if you were to die and stand before God tonight and he were to say to you, hey, why should I let you into heaven? You know that the average person says this: well, because I've lived a good life, I've lived a good life. I've tried my best. I was a good citizen. Uh, you know, I was faithful to my wife, faithful to my husband, I was a good parent, I paid my taxes. You know, we give all of these things, I donated money to charity, and most people don't think that they're bad. They think they're good. And it's that idea that I'm good that is actually what's keeping me from entering into the kingdom because the

kingdom requires that I admit that I'm not good, in order to enter the kingdom. I have to say that when it comes to the law of God, I haven't kept it. In fact, if I were to ask most people hey you know, if being religious, if being moral, if being good is defined by you keeping the commandments well, we could just talk about the 10 Commandments, like what are they? Most people who say they're good don't even know what the 10 Commandments are. What if I then said hey, but did you know? The rabbi said there were 613 Commandments, well now you're really in trouble. 613 of them, you haven't done any of that. And so why should you then say, you know, well, I should be let into the kingdom. I was religious. Well, what kind of religion did you have? You don't even know the commandments. How could you obey them? You obviously weren't that religious. And so being religious isn't enough to enter the kingdom or else this scribe would have been entering into the kingdom. Jesus would have said to him hey, you got it. Come on in buddy, you know the command. Keep it. You've kept it. Good job. Come in. Just like the religious young ruler. He said, what must I do to enter the kingdom? What did Jesus say to him? He said, well you gotta keep the commandments. Jesus tells him this. The guy looks at him, says great news. I kept all of them. I kept them all since the time I was little. And Jesus says good, sell everything you have, give it to the poor, you come in. And the guy goes away sad. Why? Because to sell everything you had and gave it to the poor meant this: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength, would have required him to recognize that he was loving something more than God. He was loving his possessions and to give them away would have been to love God with all of his strength. But he wasn't gonna do that. Religion is not enough.

Second thing is this: being an expert in Scripture is not enough to enter the kingdom of God. Isn't it interesting? You know, this guy comes and he's an expert in the law. I mean, no one could tangle with him in a debate over Scripture. He knew all of it. And so, this guy knows more scripture then you probably will ever dream of knowing in your life. So, in other words, let's put it this way. You could memorize the whole entire Bible and it wouldn't be enough to enter the kingdom of God. Why? Because Bible memorization, knowledge of the Bible, isn't enough when it comes to the fact that you are not going to be able to obey all of the things that the Bible you've memorized and become an expert in has told you to do. And so, you're still gonna have an issue, and the issue is still gonna be your sin and you're still gonna need the Savior. It doesn't say that God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son into the world for every person who wasn't an expert in the Bible, it says, he sent him into the world, and the world was filled with both people who didn't know the Bible and people who did know the Bible. Knowing the Bible is not enough.

The third thing is this: being close to the kingdom is not enough to enter the kingdom. You can be close and not enter in. You know this is ah, we have to understand this means you can go to church, but it's still not enough, right? You can go to church and think I'm around the things of God, but it's not enough. It's like telling your kids, hey kids we're going this summer to Disney World for vacation, and by that you simply meant we're going to the parking lot, and when we get to the parking lot, we're just gonna park. We're not going in. Now, no one's gonna come home and say, hey, this summer, my parents took me to Disney World. They're going to say this summer, my parents, they just took me to the parking lot of Disney World, and it was worse because I was so close I could see it, but I didn't get to go. I could see everybody else entering, but I didn't get to enter. I could see everybody else coming out with Mickey Mouse ears, but I didn't have any. We just sat right there in the parking lot because the parking lot ticket cost less than the park admission ticket. Well listen, to enter the kingdom requires a lot more than this admission fee that you want to pay. You can't pay the fee. Jesus had to pay the fee for you.

You see, the fourth thing is this: agreeing with Jesus is not enough to enter the kingdom. Notice this man agrees with Jesus and there's a lot of people, there's a lot of you, that you agree with Jesus's teaching. You think he said some wonderful things. In fact, you're really happy with Jesus the teacher. You don't like Jesus being the one who tells you that you're condemned apart from putting your trust in him. But notice the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21, he says this: Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Isn't it fascinating? These people that Jesus is describing in Matthew chapter 7, these are religious people who know the scriptures and are close to the kingdom and agree with Jesus and yet they don't get in. Why don't they get in? Because they didn't know him as Savior. They knew him as a good moral example. They knew him as the one who was the founder of their religion. But they knew him not as Savior.

And so, the fifth thing and the final thing that I'll say is this: to enter the kingdom then, you must be born again. Just as Jesus said in John chapter 3, you must be born again. The great commandment, love God and love your neighbor, in the way this text teaches us this commandment, in fact shows us how absolutely incapable we are of living up to the standard of this commandment. There's never gonna be a single one of us who's going to say in every moment of my life, I loved God with all my heart, soul, mind, and

strength, with every moment of my life, I loved my neighbor as myself. In fact, I loved my neighbor in the same way Jesus loved me when he gave up everything for me. None of us are ever going to say that. So, this commandment condemns us in a sense. And therefore, it shows us how desperately in need we are of the Gospel. Because here's what the Gospel tells us. Jesus loved God in this way. He lived every moment of his life in this way, loving God with all of his heart, his soul, his mind, and his strength. And as a result of that, he lived a life of perfect righteousness. Now that's the life you were supposed to live, but you didn't. But he did. And then, Jesus loved you in this way. In fact, in going to the cross, he takes responsibility for you, dies for your sins, and in doing that he receives the judgment that you should have received. And because of that, now watch, he can now give you his righteousness. So the righteousness of his life is given to you when you were born again into the kingdom. And the judgment of God was given to him 2,000 years ago in the cross, in your place. And that's why we need the Gospel. This text teaches us, yes, our duty in all of life is twofold; I'm to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. And I am to love my neighbor as myself. But I don't know what any of that looks like unless I look at the incarnation of Jesus, and when I look at the incarnation of Jesus, I see that Jesus has come and he has not only modeled this for me, but he has also died for me in my failure to do what this command calls me to do.

And so, this morning what I would say to you is this. One, you must obey this command. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. There's no getting out of it. Two, I would tell you this, apart from Christ you're gonna fail at this command every moment of your life, and so three, this is why Scripture tells us the righteous must live by faith. You must live by faith that what Christ has done for you in demonstrating this love and made it manifest, made it come alive and become real for you, you must now then turn to him in sole trust. Turn away from your sin. Repent of your sin. Turn to Jesus, cling to him by faith, and know that what he has done in his obedience for this, to this commandment, is what has made life possible for you. And that has freed you from sins penalty. And not only that, but it has freed you from sins power, which means that Jesus, in his obedience to this command, has broken the shackles that keep you chained to your own self-centeredness that would make you love you more than you love God and more than you love your neighbor. And so now, because of the Gospel, I could do that which this command calls me to do.

This is the beauty of the Gospel folks. This is what we're called to, to be. This is who we're called to be. This is how we're called to love, and in this moment that we find ourselves in with this pandemic, there's never been a moment in

which Christians in our generation have in some way that is more profound than I could even express, been called to demonstrate this in the way that we're responding to this crisis. And so, let's respond to this crisis in the way that Jesus would because of the way that Jesus did. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, I want to thank you for your grace. I want to thank you for your kindness. I want to thank you for your mercy. I want to thank you for your love. Empower us to love you as Christ loved you, as Christ loves us. And Lord, may our lives be a reflection of the Christ whose spirit lives in us, empowering us to love you with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.