

## Zeroing In

Jesus Focuses on What's Most Important

### The Greatest Opportunity Series – Part 28

Mark 12:13-44

October 5-6, 2024

#### Introduction

- What's the essence of Christianity? – what's the most important thing? Jesus did a ton of stuff, so what are the core principles that He was operating off of? WHEN He did things, WHY did He do them? What was His motivation and what was His filter?
- What's the most important thing that we do here on earth? – A similar question is what's the most important thing that we, as humans, do here on Earth? Do we have a grand purpose? Do we have a greater calling? The irritatingly bottom line is actually simple: **We do what God wants us to do.** The helpful filter it creates is that our center is Him, our priority list is set by Him and His agenda becomes ours. **It helps us figure out where to put our heart. Our heart directs our eyes. Our eyes direct our steps.**
- What demonstrates Christ the best? – We are a bunch of Christians walking around through a world that doesn't fully understand God nor Jesus Christ. So, what should we do to demonstrate Him better? There are a lot of great things we CAN do, but at the end of the day...

#### LOVE Matters Most

- Godly love vs. worldly love – redefining our goal.
  - Order matters and filters our love – **it's love God first; love people second. Our secondary mandate must never violate our primary mandate.** In other words, we don't get to offend God in our attempt to love our neighbor. God is the center, not them.
  - Def: Godly love means
    - **Loving them in a way that is BEST for THEM according to God's design and plans for them.** It's not what you want, or what they want, it's helping them become what God wants and loving them toward that goal.
    - **Loving them when it costs us.** Godly love is sacrificial. If we measure whether or not loving someone costs us too much, we are leaving Godly Love territory.
    - **Loving them when they don't love us.** Christians are to live INTENTIONALLY, not REACTIVELY. We do what we do because it's who we are, and what is right to do, not because it blesses us or they loved us first.
  - Def: Worldly love means
    - Loving them in the way that merely makes them feel better – You would never call a parent good who catered to the desires of their children. Just giving them more candy instead of a meal would be deemed unloving by most. Yet it's what the child wants.

- Loving them dependent on the status of the relationship – this means withholding love once they stop performing for you and responding appropriately. Necessary boundaries don't stop love, they stop benefit.
- Last Week – **Pastor Rodney for Care & Compassion Weekend.**
- Prior Week – last time we were on series, we heard from **Pastor Jake Taylor!** He had a couple pieces I wanted to highlight for us before we move on. He taught on Jesus' clash with religious leaders, which is going to happen again in our stories for today. Yet, in doing so, **calling out their main challenges, I felt like he was preaching to all of us...like we were in danger of becoming like those bad leaders. Guess what? He was. Rightfully so.**
  - Jesus' interactions with the religious leaders of His day addressed 3 main issues:
    1. **Control** (desperately wanting systems to control people and their own salvation = rules)
    2. **Crowd** (they cared more about what people thought of them than what God thought of them).
    3. **Complacency** – content with how things are and don't want to change. Nothing to learn, nothing to change.
  - What Jesus wants in contrast, is:
    1. **Submission** – listening and adjusting to what King Jesus says. When God defines the rules of our lives.
    2. **Spiritual Fruit** – the Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) – letting the Holy Spirit bleed through more.

## Lesson

- The Image Test
  - Religious leaders try to trap Jesus with loyalty test
    - **Mark 12:13-17** – *“And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.”<sup>1</sup> <sup>14</sup> And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes<sup>2</sup> to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?”<sup>15</sup> But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.”<sup>16</sup> And they brought one. And he said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to him, “Caesar’s.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marveled<sup>3</sup> at him.”*

<sup>1</sup> “Gr. ἵνα αὐτὸν ἀγρεύσωσιν λόγῳ, “that they might catch him in (an unguarded) statement.” Ἀγρεύειν (“to catch”) occurs only here in the NT, and is used figuratively as in Prov. 5:22; 6:25 f. LXX.” NICNT

<sup>2</sup> “Gr. κῆνσον transliterates the Latin term census and reflects the impact made by the introduction of the Roman taxation into the Judean province in A.D. 6. In place of this term D Θ 124 565 1071 k sy<sup>p</sup> read ἐπικεφάλαιον (“polltax”), and this variant is preferred by C. H. Turner, “Marcan Usage,” JThS 29 (1928), pp.7 f.” NICNT

<sup>3</sup> “There is gentle irony in Mark’s closing comment that his adversaries marvelled greatly at Jesus. It is appropriate that men who had come to ensnare Jesus through unguarded statement should sense the devastating effect of the authority displayed in his word.” NICNT

- And they sent to him<sup>4</sup> – Jesus Christ who is in Jerusalem during His last Passover celebration and He is teaching and ministering in the city while the religious leaders are seeking a way to destroy Him.
- some of the Pharisees – these were a religious leader group that was highly influential. They were considered not only experts in the Mosaic Law but they were the ones who took it most seriously in real life. They were notorious for moral living (externally) and good deeds (externally). They were the legalistic religious ones who everyone assumed that they loved God and were God’s key people, but Jesus reveals that they weren’t.
- and some of the Herodians, - These are the leaders who were influential but less religious in nature. They were the crew that hung around King Herod (the most localized senior leader in the region). They were far more about political influence than anything religious but they were willing to do anything to retain power.
- to trap him in his talk – Jesus was a revolutionary teacher. He said things that were considered radical. Therefore, the easiest way to get Him in trouble was to trap Him in regard to His teachings. They would sit in the groups around Jesus listening in to find ways to bring up subjects that would be controversial and swing the crowd against Him or at least trap Him into saying something that would get Him in trouble with the leadership either Jewish or Roman.
- And they came and said to him, “Teacher, - this is a term of respect to say that you want to be a learner of them or that you respect their opinion enough to ask a question. Unfortunately, neither of these groups considered Jesus to be a legitimate authority or anyone they would want to follow. Therefore, it’s clear that they were using the term either as a false form of flattery or to win over the crowd sneakily as if they were truly followers.
- we know that you are true – this again is false flattery and a lie. They don’t think this. But ironically they couldn’t be more right.
- and do not care about anyone’s opinion. – this is a funny dig. They were subtly calling out that He has gone head to head with them and their team many times and don’t care about being popular or being respected by them. He was doing His own thing on His own agenda. But again, they were accurate. Jesus cared far more about what His Father thought and wanted than anything with mankind.
- For you are not swayed by appearances, - Jesus was not moved by the popular group nor opportunities to advance his popularity. He wasn’t flashy and didn’t care about money.
- but truly teach the way of God. – this is the set up to put Jesus on the spot. The large group that was around Jesus truly believed that He was

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<sup>4</sup> “The account is abruptly introduced without any statement of time or place, but it is appropriate to situate this encounter with certain Pharisees and Herodians in one of the porches of the Temple (cf. Chs. 11:27; 12:35). Presumably they had been sent by certain members of the Sanhedrin or by leaders in their respective groups.” NICNT

from God and taught the Truth. This group was falsely flattering Him to set up the trap. They were putting it out in the air that Jesus only teaches what He thinks God believes, so whatever He was about to say next they could hold Him accountable to and try to get Him either on blasphemy (misrepresenting God), or in political trouble with Rome.

- Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"<sup>5</sup> – To us this is a simple and boring question. We deal with governmental taxes all the time and it's an irritant financially but in their case it meant so much more. The context here is critical. Israel was an OCCUPIED nation by Rome. They hated Rome. They hated being oppressed, taken advantage of, having to pay taxes to them (which funded their oppression) and everything else about their occupation. Therefore this question is really about a loyalty to the Jewish people question while at the same time putting Jesus on the spot to insult Roman governance. The essence of the question was whether a Jewish person should be part of the system and fuel the occupation, or should they resist in defiance?
- But, knowing their hypocrisy, - Jesus knew they didn't care about the answer and weren't asking it for Truth purposes. They were hypocritical in the sense that they were faking and putting on masks to hide their true intentions. They didn't care about the answer being right, only that it was offensive to someone, and they could use it as fuel to their fire.
- he said to them, "Why put me to the test? – Jesus called them out publicly. Why are you putting me to a public test? What's wrong with you? What are you looking for? All of those things were clearly brought to the surface with one question by Jesus. The crowd would have, if they hadn't already, been clued in to the motive at work here.
- Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. – Jesus neither was afraid of their challenges (I LOVE His confidence), nor avoided anything. He hit it head on and publicly. He said, hand me a coin (He likely didn't carry the coinage of His team since Judas was in charge of that and it was something that servants did)...
  - What the coin meant<sup>6</sup> - the coin itself was offensive to the Jews for a couple of reasons beyond simply that Rome made them and it was

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<sup>5</sup> "It is important to appreciate the emotional trauma which pervaded the issue of the tribute money ever since it had first been imposed on the Roman province of Judea in A.D. 6. At that time Judas the Galilean had seen in the census which was the prelude to the taxation an introduction to slavery and an affront to the sovereignty of God (cf. Josephus, Antiquities XVIII. i. 1; Acts 5:37). The Zealots resolutely refused to pay the tax because it acknowledged Caesar's domination over them. The Pharisees resented the humiliation implied in the tax but justified its payment, while the Herodians supported it on principle. In asking if it was allowed by the Law of God to pay the tribute money it could be assumed that the Pharisees were concerned chiefly in the moral and religious implications of the question, and the Herodians with its political or nationalistic ramifications." NICNT

<sup>6</sup> "While the command to bring a denarius implies that neither Jesus nor his adversaries had one, there is little evidence that in the first century there was a general, deep-rooted objection to handling and gazing upon coins bearing a human effigy. The only coin that was accepted for payment of taxes in Judea, as throughout imperial territory, was the Roman denarius. This was a small silver coin that was worth normally about eighteen cents. The denarius of Tiberius portrayed the emperor as the semi-divine son of the god Augustus and the goddess Livia and bore the (abbreviated) inscription "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus" on the obverse and "Pontifex Maximus" on the reverse. Both the representations and the inscriptions were rooted in the imperial cult and constituted a claim to divine honors.<sup>28</sup> The unhesitating reply to Jesus' question in verse 16, that the image and inscription were Caesar's, indicates that the coin was well known to the delegation through common circulation and use." NICNT

Roman coinage. The whole design was based on the Imperial cult concept, that the emperor was in power because he was semi-divine and was due more than honor, but worship was more proper. It was a small silver coin worth about \$.18. Written on it was, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus" on the obverse and "Pontifex Maximus" on the reverse." Pontifex Maximus is a title of the highest and most important position of ancient Roman religion. That person was considered the chief priest of the College of Pontiffs.

- And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." – Jesus is a teacher through-and-through. He could have made a statement but He's using this as a teaching moment and loves to use props to help them put it all together and remember what He said (memorable activities). He holds up the coin that everyone knew well. He asks the question that He knows the answer to but is stoking a response from the group (especially the attacking group). Who's picture is on this? Who's image is on this? Who is this going to? Who is this coin about? What system is this coin operating in? Those are the types of suggestions that Jesus is subtly (or not so subtly) making. They answered, 'Caesar's' or in other words, 'Rome.'
- Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." – This is one of Jesus' most impressive comments. It's so witty and brilliant. He says, 'you are right, it's Caesar's image, his system, Rome's reality.' Give to Rome what's Rome's and give to God what's God's. What does God own? Us. He's our creator. What type of system is Jesus operating in? A war for hearts and minds. What reality is Jesus operating in? Spiritual. Therefore anything tangible, anything money-based, anything secular that works with Rome, you can go ahead and let them have it, it doesn't matter much in the Kingdom of God. But whatever is God's and that means our mind, will, heart, emotions (the total of mankind), THAT is God's alone. Give all of that to Him.
- And they marveled at him – what was so brilliant was that Jesus simultaneously honored Rome (and what mattered to them) and honored God while using this situation to reinforce what His purpose and Kingdom was all about. Extraordinary!

- Resurrection Reality

- Religious leaders test Jesus on resurrection issues

- *Mark 12:18-27 – "And Sadducees<sup>7</sup> came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying,<sup>19</sup> "Teacher, Moses*

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<sup>7</sup> "It is probable that the Sadducees began as a political faction which supported the legitimacy of the Hasmonean throne over the protest of the purists who insisted on a separation of the priestly and royal prerogatives or who looked for a revival of the Davidic kingdom. They also championed the sovereign's authority over the judiciary, in opposition to the concept of a separation of powers which would assign to a self-perpetuating establishment of ordained scribes absolute authority in questions of Jewish law. After the death of the last of the Hasmonean contenders, Mattathias Antigonus II, the Sadducees tended to assume a merely negative role, repudiating the authority of the Pharisaic scribes and rejecting their innovations both in the definition of the Law and in the details of halakhic regulation." NICNT

*wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.*

*<sup>20</sup> There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. <sup>21</sup> And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. <sup>22</sup> And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. <sup>23</sup> In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." <sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? <sup>25</sup> For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>26</sup> And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? <sup>27</sup> He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.""*

- And Sadducees came to him, - Sadducees were another influential group and were religious to some degree (only for influence) but were more political in nature (more like Herodians than Pharisees). They used religious matters to control people. They had some strange beliefs and that caused rifts between them and the Pharisees. One of those strange beliefs was not believing in the resurrection of the dead. How that works with religion at all is bizarre to me, but whatever, people are weird.
- who say that there is no resurrection. – this is Mark's dumbing down for his audience like us who wouldn't know exactly all their beliefs of the ones pertinent to this particular debate.
- And they asked him a question, - It's unclear whether or not the Sadducees were trying to trap Him like the prior group (it's tempting to think that), or if they really wanted to simply debate Him because it interested them.
- saying, "Teacher, - this is again a way of addressing someone that is considered a teacher by the group they are with, but it doesn't indicate that they particularly considered Him THEIR teacher in any way.
- Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. – Where does it say this in the Bible? Deuteronomy 25:5ff it's called Levirate Marriage. It's a code that simply says that if a guy dies without any offspring, the next brother is supposed to provide that for the widow, so she has lineage to care for her. It's a protection for the widow. It had to be a law because most men didn't want to take on the extra liability so they would leave her alone. God forced the issue through Moses and it was put on the books.
- There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman

also died<sup>8</sup> – The Sadducees used this law as a basis for arguing the resurrection. They believed that it was laws like this that became absurd if they were true. How can it be that there is an afterlife if we do a bunch of stuff in this life that would make that super complicated? They thought they were so smart.

- In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.” – The big question is, how are things handled in the afterlife IF it’s a real thing? They were poking the bear on this one. If she married all those guys which one gets to be her husband in the afterlife?
- Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? – Jesus was pretty rough on them which suggests that they didn’t have the best intentions in mind when they were asking the question. They may have been snooty or they may have had other motivations. Jesus blasts them publicly and embarrasses them. He said first: You are wrong. Period. Secondly, the reason you are wrong is that you don’t know the Scriptures/the Bible. You are ignorant and not studying the material that God gave you. Third, you are wrong because you are putting God ins a limited box saying that there are things He CAN’T do. That’s never going to be the answer. So, yes, you are wrong for multiple reasons.
- For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven<sup>9</sup> – Simply put, the afterlife doesn’t have the same rules, codes and reality structures that this life has. It’s different enough that many of the limitations and dynamics that limit us here don’t limit us there. When people rise from the dead, and that’s a fact, marriage is not a thing for eternal life. They enter into a new reality with new dynamics that are more similar to what the angels operate in since they are already in heavenly reality. The marriage covenant is nullified because there is something better, something deeper, something more meaningful that God has planned. Interestingly, Jesus doesn’t explain clearly what that new reality is and what the replacement structure is but we can guess. My guess is that there is a new reality that doesn’t need the safety of a marriage covenant to protect and limit it. Marriage is for protection from sinful people hurting each other. It’s a safety issue. But when you get rid of sin, there’s no need for a safety mechanism. Now you can have all the benefits but none of the dangers. In heaven, with no sin, you can have people interact in deep and pure ways without harm.
- And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, - After shutting them down in their

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<sup>8</sup> “The story may have been adapted from a popular version of the book of Tobit (for a woman married to seven husbands, all of whom died childless, cf. Tobit 3:8, 15; 6:13; 7:11; for levirate marriage, cf. Tobit 4:12; 6:9–12; 7:12 f). Their intention is to expose a belief in the resurrection to ridicule with their confident question, “In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?” NICNT

<sup>9</sup> “Jesus affirmed that the resurrection life is comparable to the life enjoyed by the angels. Its great purpose and center is communion with God.” NICNT

ignorance, Jesus continues to explain how ignorant they are of Scripture. He highlights the burning bush story in Exodus chapter 3.

- how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?<sup>27</sup> He is not God of the dead, but of the living<sup>10</sup> – in that story God spoke to Moses directly from the burning bush (a story that all Jews believed and took personally) and told Moses who He was. His definition of Himself, His nature, His name is that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But God is talking like He is CURRENTLY the God of those people, not just people of the past. God is saying that they are still alive. God is not a God of the dead, but the living, which means they are resurrected and alive when God was saying that and RIGHT NOW! Therefore it's clear in the Bible over and over that resurrection is a thing.
  - You are quite wrong. – To put a period on it, Jesus again states, 'wow, you are SO wrong. It's kind of embarrassing how wrong you are.' Ouch!
- The Great Commandment
    - A scribe asks about the greatest commandment
      - *Mark 12:28-34 – "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?"<sup>11</sup> <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> 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.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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." <sup>34</sup> 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."*
      - And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, - A scribe is usually associated with lawyers and Pharisees since they are supposed to be experts in the Mosaic Law. Usually, they are on the side of the Pharisees, but that wasn't always true. We find out that this one is a good guy and really wanting to know what's right (just like

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<sup>10</sup> "If God has assumed the task of protecting the patriarchs from misfortune during the course of their life, but fails to deliver them from that supreme misfortune which marks the definitive and absolute check upon their hopes, his protection is of little value. But it is inconceivable that God would provide for the patriarchs some partial tokens of deliverance and leave the final word to death, of which all the misfortunes and sufferings of human existence are only a foretaste. If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula "the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" is the symbol." NICNT

<sup>11</sup> "A distinction between lighter and weightier, smaller and greater commandments was an inevitable feature of Palestinian piety, since it was traditional to speak of the 613 individual statutes of the Law. The basis of distinguishing between small and great commandments was generally the nature of the demand (in the case of commandments) or of the propitiation demanded (in the case of prohibitions which had been infringed). Both the question and its presuppositions stem from a piety of human achievement, supported by scribal interpretation of the biblical mandates." NICNT

Nicodemus, a pharisee, followed Jesus). This guy seemed to come upon the public debate and not have arrived just to get in on the debate. Jesus was being very public in this setting.

- and seeing that he answered them well, - This guy picked up on the gist of what was going on and could tell immediately that Jesus was on a whole different level of education in spiritual matters. There was something about Him as if He was talking more clearly for God and His opinion was heavenly. He wanted to know more from this guy and so he dove into the most important question he could think of (why waste an opportunity like this). It's not clear if he knew about Jesus prior to this meeting or not.
- asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" – I love bottom-line people. They are cutting to the chase. There is so much noise, and so many issues that get us into the weeds, but some people want to get to the bottom of it all. This is one of those guys. He wants to know that at the end of the day what really matters in the spiritual life? He asks Jesus what the most important commandment in the Mosaic Law (the only clear code that God gave to man at this point). In other words what does God care about most? What would be a total fail to not do and what would be the essence if we could accomplish one thing. There were famously 613 individual statutes of the Law.
- Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. – Jesus didn't hesitate. He answered boldly (because He was there when the Father said it, likely through Him, as the triune God), the most important law, the most important code, the most important thing in this life is Deuteronomy 6:4 also known to the Jewish people as the Shema<sup>12</sup>, a prayer that they recite multiple times a day. It says, 'pay attention nation of Israel. Your master, your God, Yahweh, is ONE. There is only one God, one vision, one purpose, one essence, one reality, one Truth. The point is that God/Yahweh is not one of many, but the ONLY one, period. There is only one deity. He is over all things. He is central. He's what it's all about. He is your center. He is everything.
- And you shall love the Lord your God with all<sup>13</sup> your heart – the proper response to a God like that is the following verse, Deuteronomy 6:5 (heart, soul, might – not mentioning mind, in the main passage). Mankind, in light of who God is, are mandated, are built to, are expected to respond to that Creator with holistic love. The creation is to love the Lord God (master deity) with all of their heart.
- and with all your soul – to love God with all of their personality, their inner being, their soul which is truly the essence of who they are.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Leviticus 19:18

<sup>13</sup> "Because the whole man is the object of God's covenant love, the whole man is claimed by God for himself. To love God in the way defined by the great commandment is to seek God for his own sake, to have pleasure in him and to strive impulsively after him. Jesus demands a decision and readiness for God, and for God alone, in an unconditional manner. Clearly this cannot be the subject of legal enactment. It is a matter of the will and action. The love which determines the whole disposition of one's life and places one's whole personality in the service of God reflects a commitment to God which springs from divine sonship." NICNT

- and with all your mind – to love God with all of their intellectual capabilities, to put their mind on Him to dwell on Him, meditate on His words, think on Him continually since He is the source of their reality.
- and with all your strength.’ – to love God with all of their will strength. That internal fortitude and effort. They are to do the hard work of loving God intentionally no matter what the resistance is.
- The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor<sup>14</sup> as yourself.’<sup>15</sup> – And it’s not enough to only love God and treat other creation terribly. To love God means to love what He creates, which includes our fellow man. We are to love our neighbor, fellow man, but we are to love them with the same intentionality as we love ourselves. We care for ourselves every day. We provide for, consider, take seriously, react to, care for, ourselves continually.
- There is no other commandment greater than these.” – There is nothing more important than loving God and people. If we get anything wrong in Christianity is CAN’T be love. The entire structure is centered and held together by love for God and people. It’s what it’s all about.
  - The order matters - The order in which Jesus declares the commandments implies that love of God is prerequisite to loving one’s neighbor.
- And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. – Although the man is trying to honor Jesus in this response, to say, ‘I agree and think you are so smart,’ it sounds weird for a regular man to affirm that Jesus is right. He is God and is always right. But this guy doesn’t know all of that. He thinks that this man in front of him (Jesus Christ) is simply a really great teacher. He is affirming Him. This scribe who studies the law day and night came to the same conclusion.
- You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him<sup>16</sup> – He affirms the first statement that Jesus made which is that there is no other god besides Yahweh and that He is the center of everything.
- 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<sup>17</sup>” – He affirms and confirms

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<sup>14</sup> “In Lev. 19:18 the neighbor is defined by the prior reference to “the sons of your own people” in the first part of the verse, and this understanding was presupposed in the first century. Jesus freed the commandment from this restriction in reference, with his startling teaching concerning the neighbor in Lk. 10:25–37. This definition of the will of God and its fulfillment as the combined and inseparable love for God and love for men left an indelible impression on subsequent apostolic teaching (cf. Rom. 13:8–9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8).” NICNT

<sup>15</sup> “The attempt to summarize the whole Law in a single utterance was remembered in anecdotes concerning some of the early scribal teachers. When challenged by a Gentile, Hillel the Elder (ca. 40 B.C.-A.D. 10) replied: “What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.” For Jesus the whole Law is summarized in the will of God which calls for the love which is a whole-hearted response to God and to the neighbor.” NICNT

<sup>16</sup> “The qualifying phrase “and there is no other beside him” is drawn from Deut. 4:35 (cf. Ex. 8:10; Isa. 45:21).” NICNT

<sup>17</sup> “The surprising feature in the scribe’s response is the declaration that the double law of love is superior to sacrifice. The common scribal position is well summarized in the maxim of Simon the Just (ca. 200 B.C.): “The world rests on three things: the Law, the sacrificial worship, and expressions of love” (M. Aboth I. 2). But there are also statements in rabbinic literature which are attached explicitly or implicitly to OT texts like 1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Prov. 21:3 which affirm the superiority of the moral life, and especially of love, to cult and sacrifice. A careful reading of the texts indicates that “love” is understood as benevolence expressed in works of love which are set above sacrifice because of their atoning significance (cf. Aboth de Rabbi Nathan IV. 2). This concept falls short of expressing that inner commitment to God for his own sake which Jesus

that the best thing that mankind can do toward God is love Him with their everything. He mentions understanding and strength (thoughts and will) and goes even further by citing more Scripture to back up the premise. He mentions that it's more valuable to love God and people than to offer sacrifices to God and give Him gifts. God would rather us act right than try to pay Him off. Samuel the prophet mentioned this in 1 Sam 15:22 as well (mentioned later in Psalm 40:8; Prov 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-13; and by Jeremiah and Micah).

- And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, - Jesus was impressed by not only his affirmation of Christ's truth but that he was so convinced and studied that he added stuff to the conversation.
  - he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." – This is supposed to be an encouraging statement from Jesus to this guy but to me it's not at all. If you are not far from the kingdom of God, then you aren't IN at all yet. I think about being 'in the kingdom of God' as salvation but that's not likely what Jesus is specifically addressing here. He is more likely talking about being a part of the kingdom movement that Jesus was leading. This guy had the right heart and right posture to join the team but he's not on the team yet.
  - And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. – the people observing realized that Jesus was on a role and anything that people were going to try to trap Him, or test Him, were going to end up feeling stupid afterward, so people just kind of quieted down and just listened to His truth.
- Greater than David
    - Jesus expands the minds of the crowds
      - *Mark 12:35-37 – "And as Jesus taught in the temple,<sup>18</sup> he said,<sup>19</sup> "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?<sup>36</sup> David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared [in Ps 110], " 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." ' <sup>37</sup> David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?" And the great throng heard him gladly."*
      - And as Jesus taught in the temple, - It's important to note that although Mark may or may not be tracking on chronology (Jesus' last time in the

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had affirmed. The explicit statement that the scribe answered discreetly implies an unreserved acknowledgment of the demand expressed in the double commandment of love for God and men." NICNT

<sup>18</sup> "When Jesus posed his question within the Temple precincts he stood before his suffering and death (cf. Chs. 10:32–34; 11:18; 12:12). He knew himself to be in a situation of conflict for the salvation of the people of God. The battle would not be fought against Rome or any other earthly power, and it had no national-political goals. It was rather against the demonic powers of the spiritual world that he set himself. Victory demanded configuration with the suffering Servant in obedience to God, fully trusting in the vindication promised in Ps. 110:1. God's promise to David is fulfilled by the cross which, for Jesus, is the prelude to resurrection." NICNT

<sup>19</sup> "The question concerning the Davidic lineage of the Messiah finds its larger context in the general expectation of a restored kingdom. Popular hopes, heightened by the celebration of redemption in the festival season, found expression in the pilgrim chant, "Blessed be the kingdom of our father David which is coming" (Ch. 11:10). The conviction that national deliverance would be achieved under Davidic leadership was an integral element of both scribal and sectarian piety, and the matter of the fulfilment of the divine promise to David (2 Sam. 7:11–16) was in the air. The Davidic sonship of the Messiah was a scribal tenet firmly grounded in the old prophetic literature (Isa. 9:2–7; 11:1–9; Jer. 23:5 f.; 30:9; 33:15, 17, 22; Ezek. 34:23 f.; 37:24; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11). Although the precise terminology "son of David" is not attested until the middle of the first century B.C. (Ps. Sol. 17:23), the designation soon became common for the messianic deliverer among early Palestinian teachers." NICNT

Temple teaching) he does cite that Jesus taught in the temple. This is a big deal because although lots of rabbis taught on temple grounds, most of Jesus' ministry was up north and not down here in the south in the capital city. The bigger meaning to me is that the Messiah, the Son of God, was personally, tangibly teaching in Herod's Temple, one of the most significant places on the planet. It's beautiful and historic.

- he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? – Jesus decides to drop some knowledge (Hamilton anyone?) here. He brings up a common truth that the Mosaic Law experts (scribes) tended to say. They all said that the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, that Israel was waiting for, is the Son of David. They say that because there was a prophecy that the coming Messiah would be in the lineage of David (after David). There's nothing wrong with making this statement because in a sense it's true, but Jesus is about to put another layer on it. In Jewish culture there is a lot of honor to your ancestors, and they are considered more authoritative and more important than you since they came first. The implications of THAT sense are dangerous if we only take it as that sense. Why? Jesus will explain.<sup>20</sup>
- David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, - Jesus mentioned that David, prophetically (that's what it means when it says, 'in the Holy Spirit'), in Psalm 110, made a statement that is telling. It was the Holy Spirit saying something THROUGH David, which means it's absolutely true, not just David's opinion.
- "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." ' – David said a cryptic statement. He said, 'the Lord said to my Lord.' First this is clearly God talking to David and the Messiah, and David highlights that God calls the Messiah, David's lord, which means master, which means more important, an authority, before. Then God tells the Messiah to sit at the right hand of God until God finishes putting the Messiah's enemies under His feet.
- David himself calls him Lord. – In case the crowd missed it, Jesus reiterates the main point. David calls the Messiah his LORD, master.
- So how is he his son?" – So, how can the Messiah be the son of David if he was before him, more important than him, and more authoritative than him? Clearly there is more to the story, right?
- And the great throng heard him gladly – Everyone was blown away. They may not have fully understood what Jesus was saying (that the Messiah was going to be God Himself and both be before AND come after David), but they knew that He was saying things that no one else was

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<sup>20</sup> "Among the scribes this would be recognized as a Haggada-question, a question of exegesis concerned with the reconciliation of two seemingly contradictory points of view expressed in Scripture. The unity of different biblical passages was stressed by demonstrating their harmony, which depends upon bringing them into a correct relationship to each other. In a Haggada-question it is shown that two affirmations are true, but each is concerned with a different situation or a different epoch. Jesus, then, posed the question how the Davidic descent of the Messiah (which is attested by the Scriptures) is to be harmonized with the equally supported affirmation that the Messiah is David's Lord."

tracking on.<sup>21</sup> He was breaking down prophecy in a way that no one had. He was demonstrating insider information.

- Scribal Might vs. Widows Mite
  - Jesus contrasts arrogant selfishness with the humble generosity
    - *Mark 12:38-44 – “And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces<sup>39</sup> and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,<sup>40</sup> who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”<sup>41</sup> And he sat down opposite the treasury [in the Court of Women] and watched the people putting money into the offering box.<sup>22</sup> Many rich people put in large sums.<sup>42</sup> And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.<sup>43</sup> And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.<sup>44</sup> For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*
      - And in his teaching he said, - this is a possible way of Mark grabbing a teaching of Jesus that may or may not have been said at that same sitting. Sometimes Mark organizes by theme and it’s possible (although it doesn’t really matter and could be in context at the same sitting) that he knew the story he was about to tell regarding the poor widow and wanted to highlight why that was so powerful for the guys based upon a prior teaching.
      - “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes<sup>23</sup> – the first thing is to highlight Jesus’ disdain for the scribes that were doing everything for show but were empty inside. They wanted people to be impressed by them and they worked on their outsides but not their insides. They were doing the right things for the wrong reasons. Jesus will highlight 6 examples of behaviors that bad scribes did. The first one here is that they walked around in long robes for show. They wanted to dress the part. They wanted people to be impressed by their appearance for popularity.

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<sup>21</sup> “This interpretation strikes at the heart of the national-political understanding of the Davidic promise. To the question, “In what sense, then, is the Messiah David’s son?” no satisfactory answer could be given from a scribal viewpoint. Only from the perspective of the New Covenant is the answer provided: already in the exaltation of the Messiah to God’s right hand is the promise of everlasting dominion fulfilled (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; Ps. 110:1). In this way the Scriptures affirming Davidic sonship and the Messiah as David’s Lord were united.” NICNT

<sup>22</sup> “According to the Mishnah, Shekalim VI. 5, there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for this purpose which were placed against the wall of the Court of the Women.” NICNT

<sup>23</sup> “The scribe was distinguished by his linen robe, a long white mantle reaching to the feet and provided with a long fringe. White linen clothes were regarded as a mark of distinction, so that men of eminence (priests, Levites, scribes), or those who wished to parade their position, wore white and left bright colors to the common people. By the majority of the people the scribes were venerated with unbounded respect and awe. Their words were considered to possess sovereign authority.” NICNT

- and like greetings in the marketplaces<sup>24</sup> – the second example was that they would be out among the public simply for show and attention. They loved to be greeted by people in the marketplace to demonstrate how popular they were. Again, it's about show.
- and have the best seats in the synagogues<sup>25</sup> – The third example was that they always wanted to have the best seats in the religious groups (synagogues are the churches of the Jews). They wanted seats of honor so they looked important and they were always visible as pious and holy.
- and the places of honor at feasts<sup>26</sup> - the fourth example is wanting places of honors at public feasts so they were not only highlighted as famous and important but also it allowed them to be in contact with the wealthy and to be seen for their own wealth.
- who devour widows' houses<sup>27</sup> – The fifth example is that they would take advantage of the vulnerable. They would spend time preying upon the widows who didn't have anyone protecting them or providing for them. They would exact money from them.
- and for a pretense make long prayers<sup>28</sup> – The sixth and final example was the way that they would use their public prayer time to gain attention instead of focusing on God. They would make their prayers long and orate for show (pretense). The content and heart didn't matter to them as much as how it appeared to everyone listening.
- They will receive the greater condemnation." – Because they were so interested in their appearance, popularity, wealth, and were selfish, they were going to be held accountable for that by God in the end. They would 'receive a greater condemnation'. Than who? Than the regular people who sinned. What does this entail? A greater disappointment in the eyes of the God that they say they believe in and say they serve.
- And he sat down opposite the treasury – As if to highlight the opposite Jesus took His followers (disciples – could be a larger or different group than His 12 apostles) on a field trip to the treasury area of the temple. The treasury was, of course, the part of the building that kept the money to

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<sup>24</sup> "When a scribe passed by on the street or in the bazaar people rose respectfully. Only tradesmen at their work were exempted from this display of deference. The scribe was greeted with titles of deepest respect: "Rabbi," "Father," "Master,"<sup>75</sup> and there is evidence that in the first century A.D. the designation "Rabbi" was undergoing a transition from its former status as a general title of honor to one reserved exclusively for ordained scribes." NICNT

<sup>25</sup> "In the synagogues as well the seat of honor was reserved for him; he sat at the front with his back to the chest containing the Torah, in full view of the congregation. Jesus condemned the scribes for their desire for these tokens of status and for the self-satisfaction they perpetuated." NICNT

<sup>26</sup> "When the important men of Jerusalem gave a feast they considered it an ornament to the feast to have a distinguished scribe and his pupils there. The highest places were assigned to them, and the scribe was given precedence in honor over the aged, and even over parents." NICNT

<sup>27</sup> "The shift in emphasis from the desire for deference to the abuse of privilege suggests that it is better to read a full stop at verse 39 and to regard verse 40 as a separate, and independent, charge. In the first century A.D. the scribes lived primarily on subsidies, since it was forbidden that they should be paid for exercising their profession. While few scribes were reduced to begging, an abundance of evidence shows that the Jerusalem scribes belonged to the poorer classes. The extension of hospitality to them was strongly encouraged as an act of piety; it was considered particularly meritorious to relieve a scribe of concern for his livelihood. Many well-to-do persons placed their financial resources at the disposal of scribes, and it was inevitable that there should be abuses.<sup>80</sup> The charge that the scribes "devoured widows' houses" refers to the fact that they sponged on the hospitality of people of limited means." NICNT

<sup>28</sup> "The accusation that on the pretext of deep piety they made of public prayers an opportunity to win the esteem of men indicates the peril in the loss of perspective in the service of God. This displacement of the honor of God from the center of concern is what distinguished the scribes from Jesus and exposed them to the searching judgment of God." NICNT

keep the temple going. It was a MASSIVE operation to run that huge and ornate temple. There was a TON of money flowing through that place.

- and watched the people putting money into the offering box. – During Passover season all the pilgrims would make pilgrimage to the temple from other countries as well as all the Jews from the nation, and they would all pay the official and mandatory 'temple tax.' Additionally, this was the time when people would offer their financial offerings and sacrifices to God. It was a part of the year that a lot of money was given. Some people gave for the right reasons and some people gave for appearances.
- Many rich people put in large sums. – Whether for honorable reasons or not, there were a lot of rich people that would put in a lot of money. In general the Jewish code was to give a percentage of your money (tithe), so if you had a lot, your percentage would be higher.
- And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. – In contrast to the wealthy, Jesus pointed out a very poor widow. She put in two tiny coins that TOGETHER would make up something like a penny (smallest coinage possible). The point of her being a widow was that she didn't have means to make more money. She didn't have people caring for her in the same way as someone married, or someone with a family. She was fully dependent on help from others and didn't have disposable income.
- And he called his disciples to him – He pointed her out to the team that was around Him.
- and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, - He gets their attention by saying, 'listen up team, this is very important...'
- this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. – He highlights that she put in MORE than all of the rich people. No one initially knew what that meant because clearly it was only a penny. How could that be MORE than bags of money the rich put in? That was the way that Jesus kept their attention, by pointing out something that seemed impossible but was about to make a point that stunned everyone.
- For they all contributed out of their abundance, - He sets it up by saying, as much as they gave, and it was a lot, they actually gave because they had a lot to give. They gave out of their overage, their abundance. They were pouring out from a filled up money pouch.
- but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on. – But unlike them, she had nothing. There was no money sack. There was no back up. She gave while still being intensely poor. She put in everything she had. If we are talking about percentages, they may have given 10% but she gave 100%. Which is more difficult? Which is a sign of greater surrender and trust to God? Which is the more powerful gift, the one that is doable or the one that is impossible? She gave even from her ability to feed herself. She was in full trust of God.

- Why didn't Jesus stop her?<sup>29</sup> – As a pastor I feel like I would have run over there and stopped her and said, 'dear mother, keep what you have, we have plenty. Be blessed.' But Jesus didn't. Why? Why let her risk her life on giving too much? Especially when she didn't have any obligation to give (the law was clear that if you didn't have anything, you didn't need to give anything). I see 2 reasons at least: 1.) Jesus is God and knows how to give her more (Provider); 2.) He wanted her to give in her generosity and sacrifice so that her blessings could flow even more to her (which He was in charge of).

### Conclusion

- While some of us live with ourselves in mind, others live for God and other people.
- If there's one thing we must get right it's our priorities and our love.

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<sup>29</sup> "The rabbinic literature contains a similar account: a priest rejected the offering of a handful of meal from a poor woman. That night in a dream he was commanded: "Do not despise her. It is as if she had offered her life." This account, like the evangelical narrative, serves to stress the qualitative difference between God's perspective and man's: "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks upon the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). There is, however, an added dimension to the evangelical narrative which is provided by its context in the gospel. The woman sacrifices what is necessary, all she had. It was this that the disciples needed to understand, for the call to the gospel is a call for absolute surrender to God and total trust in him." NICNT