

The Magnificent Answer of Our Lord

Mark 12:28-34

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Introduction:

I suppose that with preaching, we preachers are always over our heads.

- How can a mortal man adequately declare the truth of the living God to His people?
- Of this very thing, the Apostle Paul said, “Who is sufficient for these things?”
- There is always that awareness of insufficiency, but sometimes that awareness is greater than others.
 - And I must say that this is one of those times because of the passage that we come to today as I continue to preach to you through Mark’s gospel.

If you have been following this sermon series, you will recall how in Mark chapter 12,

- our Lord has had different members of the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Old Testament church, come to test Him with hard questions.
 - They have come with malicious intent to try to entrap Him in His words.
 - We have seen how His answers are so excellent that in every case He is exalted instead of dishonoured.
- It has been a pleasure to present to you His wonderful answers that you might see His glory, and love Him more.
 - It is a pleasure to do so this week as well—but this week His answer is so magnificent that even the scribe who presented the question openly praises Him.
 - It is my task today to present to you His answer that summarises our whole relationship with God and man. Truly, I am out of my depth.

Listen carefully as I read this to you.

- It is Mark 12:28-34.
- If you listen with understanding, you too will be impressed.

Mark 12:28-34: Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?”²⁹ Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.³¹ And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no

other commandment greater than these.”³² So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.³³ And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”³⁴ Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” But after that no one dared question Him.

May the Lord add His blessing.

- May He give us understanding that will lead to the praise that He so fully deserves.

When we compare this passage with Matthew's account we see that Matthew tells us that the scribe seems to have been an associate of a group of Pharisees who were impressed with the way Jesus had answered the Sadducees about the resurrection.

- You will recall that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection while the Sadducees had challenged Jesus about this doctrine and had been silenced by Jesus' answer...
 - He had told them that when God told Moses that He was the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, it showed that these men were still alive because God is not the God of the dead but of the living.
 - So now the Pharisees want to bring a question to test Him—one that they often discussed with each other—they wanted to see if He could handle it.
 - He always answered so confidently—perhaps some of them hoped that they could at least get Him to express uncertainty.
- Matthew tells us that this scribe was one the lawyers of the Pharisees (an expert in God's law).
 - This is a detail that Mark does not tell us.
 - But Mark who loves to evaluate people's responses includes information that Matthew leaves out about how this scribe responded to Jesus answer.
 - This adds an even greater wealth to Mark's account for us to consider today.
 - But first, let's begin by looking at the question and our Lord's answer to it.

I. Jesus gives a marvellous answer to the scribe's question.

A. The question was one that was never so well answered as it is here answered by Jesus.

1. You see the question: "What is the first commandment of all?"
 - The intent was not *first in order* or *first to be given*, but "first in weight" or "first in importance."
 - Obviously, some commandments are more important than others.
 - The scribes had identified 613 commandments in the Old Testament, 365 that were negative and 248 that were positive.
 - They typically measured them according to which of them would bring the greatest merit (or demerit) to a person.
 - The punishment for adultery was greater than the punishment for stealing, so adultery was a greater commandment than stealing.
2. They had, for the most part, reached a consensus about the least commandment but not about the greatest one.
 - a. Most of them agreed that the least was the one in Deuteronomy 22:6 & 7:

- **If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; ⁷ you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.**
- b. There were many different opinions about the greatest commandment.
 - Some of the godly rabbis had come much closer to our Lord's answer than others, but none had given so full or conclusive an answer as our Lord did.
 - If they had, the matter would have been settled long before.
- c. Jesus' answer was so satisfying, that it has been a foundational teaching for Christians ever since.
 - His answer transforms the question that had been looked at in legal terms of merit and demerit to a question that has to do with the beautiful relationship that we are meant to have with God and with each other.

B. Let's consider His excellent answer.

- It is given to us in verses 29-31:
 - **Mark 12:29-31: Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. ³⁰ 'And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."**
 - We are so familiar with this answer that we can fail to appreciate how magnificent it truly is!
- 1. He shows us here that the mainspring of life is meant to be love for God.
 - A mainspring is the spring (like a water spring or fountain) out from which all other springs arise.
 - In your house, you have a pipe that brings water in (the water main) and then you have all the other outlets in your sinks and toilets and tubs that come from that one main spring.
 - If this main spring is polluted, so is every other fountain.
 - Love truly is a spring out of which actions arise...
 - Think how this is illustrated even with God's actions.
 - We are told that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...
 - Giving His Son was a loving action to be sure, but the giving was also an action that sprang from love... from God's loving regard for the world.
 - He loved the world so much that He gave... love was the spring out of which God acted.
 - God's will for us as His highest creation on earth, as those made in His image, is that our thoughts, words, and actions all spring forth from love for Him.

- That every action and every thought and word that wells up from us emerge from our love to Him as our Creator.
 - If love for God is not present at the root of us, then all that we do is defiled and impure—nothing good is done, nothing is done aright, nothing is acceptable, nothing that seems to be good is done for long.
2. The first commandment being to love God tells us that life is to orbit around God.
- Our lives are to be driven not merely by fear or by a sense of duty,
 - but by a delight in Him that makes us want to live for Him and to do everything for Him...
 - Not a guilt thing, but a constraining love—
 - It is so hard to describe because we know so little of it.
 - In one way—though a very poor illustration—it is like an addict is toward his addiction, but without out the bondage and the blindness.
 - It is where your soul simply delights in Him and wants to please Him because He is so excellent and so worthy and you see that.
 - You just want to pour yourself out for Him.
 - He is worthy of nothing less and the only reason we don't have this delight is because there is something terribly wrong with us.
 - It's like a person that doesn't like bacon—something is wrong with their taste buds.
 - Something is corrupted, something is not working right—we are not seeing God the way that we should or appreciating Him as we should.
 - It is a regard that makes you want to keep on learning of Him—discovering more of Him—
 - You see His beautiful majesty and His glorious works and you want to see more and more—like Moses you cry out, “Show me your glory!”
 - You see His justice and love and power and wisdom and goodness and judgement and holiness—you see it revealed in Christ...in the cross...
 - And it is draws you to Him with love and makes you want to imitate Him as His child, as His disciple, as His servant, as one who is made in His image.
 - And it is not just a love for Him in Himself, but also a love because of what He can do for you—what He has done—and what He can and will do!
 - Yes—love that is *only* that can be ugly—like a selfish man who loves a woman that he might have her sexually, but has no regard for her as a person—like Amnon with Tamar.
 - But this love for God is like the love that the man has for what she can do for him—but it is not just that—that is only one aspect of it.
 - Indeed we are thrilled with how happy God can make us and what He can do for us when we truly love Him...it adds to the ways that we find Him to be so excellent... He is desirable to us.

- He has made us, He gives us all that we have, He redeems us, He reveals Himself and He gives us relationship.
 - It is so impossible to do justice to this subject because I know so little of it—who is sufficient to preach of this?
3. This love for God is to fill every part of us to the fullest extent possible.
- We are to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with our mind, and with all our strength.
 - Different words are used sometimes because the emphasis is not on the specific parts but that the love is be with all that we are.
 - He is our God, and He is only one God—Jesus includes that part.
 - There is no divided loyalty here because He is the only true God.
 - And it is all that is within us—our heart where everything arises—as Jesus said, out of the heart everything comes; and it is to be out of our soul—our very life; and with all our mind—all our understanding and meditation as we strive to learn of Him and to know Him better; and we are to love Him with all our strength—our faculties, our abilities, our energy...
 - The measure of this love is to be all of us.
- But look at what else Jesus does here.
- C. He also links our love to God with our love to our neighbour.
1. The whole basis of our love to our neighbour is that like us, our neighbour is also made in God’s image.
- Even in the most corrupt and sinful person, we still see the image of God
 - We see some kind of wisdom, some kind of love, some kind of power, and some kind of knowledge.
 - These are greatly marred, and we certainly don’t delight in that, but the image of the one in whom is our delight it seen in them—even in our worst enemies—and we yearn for their salvation that the beauty of God that is in them might emerge through the sanctification of the Spirit...
 - that they might return to their Creator and shine for Him.
2. We are to love them as we love ourselves...
- With that commitment that makes us disappointed when we do not do well, and with that commitment that makes us glad when we prosper and flourish and do good.
 - You have that commitment to yourself—you would be very glad if you could truly be all that you could be—and could have all the prosperity and happiness that you could have...
 - You want that for yourself—everyone does.
 - But do you want it for others? for all of your neighbours?

- That is where we fail and come short of the love that we have for ourselves.

TRANS> How beautiful the world would be—how beautiful our relationships would all be, if only we had this love to which Jesus calls us...

- If only this were the mainspring of our lives.
- J.A. Alexander summarises the beauty of our Lord's answer like this:
 - Of all our Saviour's wise and happy answers to insidious or puzzling questions, this is the most exquisitely beautiful, because so unambiguous, so simple, so exactly corresponding to the form of the question, so evasive of its trifling and unprofitable element, so exhaustive and demonstrative of what was really important in it, and therefore so unchangeably instructive and so practically useful to the end of time.
- Truly, Jesus' answer is a wonderful answer to the scribe's question.

II. And now I want to turn to look at the scribe's response.

- It is certain that he has never heard such a rich and full answer to his question.

A. See how he commends our Lord.

1. He begins with the words "Well said, teacher!"

- At first, this may seem a little arrogant, as if he sees himself as Jesus' superior who is telling Him that He has done well in His lessons.
- But I think the man is overcome with delight in Jesus' answer!
 - He is actually saying something like, "Beautifully said!"
 - He is full of delight with and admiration for an answer that is superior to any he has ever heard.
 - It is not just right—it is beautiful!
 - It nails the question.
 - It leaves nothing to be desired.

2. The scribe goes on to say more about this answer.

- After saying, "Beautifully said, teacher," he says: "**You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love ones neighbour as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.**"
- With this, he recognises that sacrifices and offerings are not our duty—they were added because of transgressions.
 - They point to our sin and our need for forgiveness in a Saviour, but we do not gain merit by them as so many of his contemporaries supposed.
 - We do not feed God with sacrifices as though He were hungry.
 - People will speak of going to church and of saying their prayers as if this is their duty to God.

- No, your duty is to love God in all of life—with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - Love is what He wants from us—
 - It is because of our lack of love that we need sacrifices and pardon for our sins... but the goal is not to make us offerers of sacrifices, but lovers of God.
 - The scribe is seeing the picture.
- B. It seems that the scribe has had a change of heart about Jesus.
1. He came to Him as a critic—to ask Him a hard question and to see Him stammer to answer.
 - But when he heard his answer, he was greatly moved with the deepest admiration for Jesus.
 2. J. A. Alexander describes how natural it is for a man like this to change in his attitude after hearing Jesus' answer:
 - One of the finest strokes in this fine picture, which the sceptical critics do their best to neutralize, if not efface, is the effect produced upon the scribe himself, a change of feeling altogether natural and easy in a well-disposed and highly cultivated mind, on finding unexpectedly such deep and clear views of the meaning of the law, where he had only looked for abstruse subtlety or shallow commonplace.”
 - Think of it.
 - This man had heard many answers given to this question, but never had he heard anyone speak as our Lord spoke.
 - Calvin says that he was softened—that he was not hardened like those whose obstinacy is incurable.
- C. We are right to have a high estimation of this scribe because Jesus does.
- In verse 34, it says: **Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”**
1. That the scribe answered wisely literally means that he answered as one who has a mind—that is literally what the word in the original means—
 - One may say he answered *mind-havingly*—
 - Matthew Henry says: as one that had a mind; as a rational intelligent man, as one that had his wits about him; as one whose reason was not blinded, whose judgment was not biased, and whose forethought was not fettered, by the prejudices which other scribes were so much under the power of. He answered as one that allowed himself liberty and leisure to consider, as one that had considered.
 - He had amazing clarity—His understanding about how love is superior to sacrifices was rare at that time.

2. Ironically, this scribe had come to judge Jesus, but it turns out that Jesus is the one who judges him—
 - The scribe could evaluate what Jesus said about the law, but Jesus evaluates where this scribe stands in relation to God’s kingdom.
 - And Jesus’ conclusion is that he is not far from the kingdom of God.
3. This is an encouragement to him—to keep moving in the right direction.
 - This was meant to stimulate him to further reflection. He was near, but not there yet.
 - As one who was beginning to see his duty, he is in a position to see his need of Christ and His salvation.
 - He will enter the kingdom when he comes to Jesus for salvation—for cleansing from his sin by Jesus’ blood, for new life by Jesus’ gift of the Holy Spirit, for righteousness by Jesus’ merit.
 - We can surely hope that he did come to Jesus and was not one who came near but who never entered.

III. And now having seen the effect that Jesus had on this scribe, let’s consider the affect that He had on others.

- A. We are told that after this answer, no one asked Him any more questions.
1. They dared not!
 - His enemies saw that the more they tried to stump Him and make Him look bad, the more they made Him look good!
 - This scribe was the worst of all—he had come off praising and admiring Him.
 - That was the last thing Jesus’ enemies hoped to accomplish.
 2. Isn’t that the way it truly is?
 - The more the enemies of Christ try to refute Him or deny Him the more foolish they look—even the most intelligent of them.
 - They turn to rationalism to deny Him and they become irrational.
 - They turn to science to deny Him and they end up with something as ludicrous as evolution by which creatures are thought to be able to add complex new organs by natural selection—even though they have nothing in them to select from.
 - A dog has the ability to produce bring forth offspring with long hair or short hair and natural selection will make the decision, but a dog has nothing within it to select horns or wings.
 - And how did it all get started anyway?
 - Trying to account for complex life or any life apart from God by science makes one wildly unscientific and blind.
 - If they do not see it now, it will all be exposed when they encounter Jesus at the last day, the Day of Judgment!

3. Those like the scribe who let themselves admire Him were the ones who were wise and how had presence of mind.
- B. How do you respond to Jesus and to what we have heard of Him today?
1. Will you come away admiring Him?
 - Marvelling at His wisdom and at the beautiful answer He gave to this scribe?
 - Will you look at Him and see that no man ever spoke like He spoke?
 - Will you hear Him and see that here is wisdom from above?
 2. And what of His instruction about love? What will you do with that?
 - Will you accept His clear teaching that love is what the Father wants?
 - That our ultimate duty is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves?
 - Will you see that this is the whole of man?
 - For all that comes forth from our life to come forth from love to God and to our neighbour?
 - Will you acknowledge the beauty of these commandments—or rather of a life that keeps these commandments?
 - Will you acknowledge that we are all dismal failures when it comes to being what God wants us to be? to love Him as we should and to love our neighbour as we should?
 3. And will you then come to Him as Saviour?
 - Will you?
 - Will you come to Him for grace that you might live the way God wants and that you might be pardoned for not living the way God wants?
 - That's the whole reason Jesus came—to save us from our sins so that we might be restored to a right relationship with God.
 - He went to the cross to be punished for our sin—to receive the punishment that we deserve.
 - You can't possibly do that—you could never finish bearing the punishment for all your sin... you have sinned against God and dishonoured the most high.
 - Forgiveness can only be found in Jesus.
 - And Jesus also promises to give us life by His grace if we will come to Him as Saviour.
 - He will give us grace so that we might love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves.
 - You can't make that happen. You can't save yourself so that you will start doing that.
 - No, it is not in you because you are a sinner.

- But Jesus came to save us and give us new life where we do, once His work is finished, love as God wants.
- If you have come to Him, give thanks for His pardon and look to Him to give you this beautiful love that God wants.
 - Surely you want to love like God wants, don't you?
- If you have not come to Him to save you, then delay no longer.
 - Surely you don't want to go on as you are when there is a glorious God who calls you to come to His Son and be saved?