

Meet Jesus: As he's asked

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Date: 12 November 2008

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[0 : 00] Amen. So if you'd like to open your Bibles, we're in Mark chapter 12. Mark chapter 12, it's on page 848. And we're in the temple in Jerusalem with Jesus.

So Mark chapter 12 from 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 this, 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 neighbour 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 neighbour as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

[1 : 19] 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.

Let's start with a question. What's the most important thing to be doing as a human being here on planet earth? I hope you've asked yourself that sort of question.

Let me suggest something. And that is if you've never asked yourself such a question, life will be fragile. It'll be like building a house on sand, says Jesus in Matthew chapter 7.

Companies have mission statements, don't they? Starbucks' mission statement is this, To inspire and nurture the human spirit. That sounds quite religious, doesn't it?

One person, one cup, one neighbourhood at a time. And in our passage here before us, someone comes up to Jesus and they ask him, What is the mission statement of humanity?

[2 : 27] It's a big question, isn't it? When I was at Bible college, I used to sit down quietly and wait for people to ask the question that I was dying to ask, but I dared not ask.

And here, you know, someone asks Jesus, don't they? The big one. What do we live for on planet earth? And we've got three points.

Firstly, a bold approach to Jesus. You look at verse 28. Mark tells us about this gentleman. He's one of the scribes, says Mark.

And Mark's hoping that his readers will think back and remember how the scribes kept popping off in Mark's Gospel like snipers.

You see? Chapter 2, verse 6. They're accusing Jesus of blasphemy, of pretending to be God.

Chapter 3, verse 22. They say he's possessed by Beelzebub. Chapter 8.

[3 : 23] And Jesus says that the scribes will be killing him. You know, just go back a page. Chapter 11, verse 18. We looked at this last week. And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to, can you see?

Destroy him. So that was the scribes in Mark's Gospel. And we come now to chapter 12. Let's set the scene. They're in the temple, aren't they?

And all the religious leaders have been verbally attacking Jesus. It's like he's strayed onto their territory, you know. They're like a pack of dogs attacking him. So who have we got?

We've got the chief priests, haven't we? The Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the elders. And now this scribe, verse 28. He joins the phrase, doesn't he?

Perhaps he's heard the commotion, you know. And he's on the centre. We're expecting a Rottweiler, aren't we? With white, sparkling teeth. But actually, this scribe, well, he's more like a Labrador wagging his tail.

[4 : 30] You know, it's not what we expected. And Mark's quarter's off balance. Just look with me at verse 32. Can you see just the beginning of verse 32? The scribe actually is approving Jesus' teaching.

The scribe said to him, You're right, teacher. So think about this. The friends of this scribe, they're all plotting Jesus' death, aren't they?

And here, this scribe here, he's enjoying Jesus' teaching. It's like he's broken away from the rabble. You know, we'd say he's his own man, wouldn't we?

It's not easy, is it, friends, to break ranks? Is he like someone here? You know, as you read Mark's Gospel, has Mark got you penciled in? It's lunchtime.

Have you left something behind to come and listen to Jesus? It's a rendezvous, isn't it? With Jesus. So here we go. That was a bold approach to Jesus.

[5 : 30] This is our second point now. A clear understanding of Jesus. It's always sensible, isn't it? To follow the maker's instructions. I'm sure you've all got stories when you've not done that.

And this scribe, well, that's his speciality. He knows God's commands inside out. 613 laws.

248 affirmations. 365 prohibitions. You know, he could probably recite most of them. I'm sure he came down in the morning and had his breakfast in complete compliance to all the laws.

You know, all the minutiae of detail. That's our scribe. You know, if the population of Scotland lived like this scribe, well, the prisons wouldn't be bursting, it seems, with 8,000 inmates.

There'd be no prisons. And as he approaches Jesus, it's a bit like an explorer striking oil. You know, he realises that he's come across someone with a passion like his own.

[6 : 33] Someone he can learn from. Verse 28. Here it is. Look. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another. And look, seeing that he answered them well, asked him, asked Jesus, which commandment is the most important of all?

It's like he's asking Jesus, Jesus, tell me what my mission statement is. What should I be doing in life? Ever ask yourself that question? Is this Pharisee here asking for you?

Took them about a month, didn't it, to lay the foundations next door here. Thirteen million pound office block it's going to be. And what are the foundations, friend, of your life?

So, our scribe asked, didn't he? And it's like he's asking for us, you know. And he knows he's not going to get a superficial answer from Jesus, is he?

You know, it's not like an agony column, is it? You know, it's not like reading the metro on the way home on the train, is it? You know, shall I have a glass of red wine with my tea or not?

[7 : 40] It's not that sort of question, is it? Look with me at verse 29. Jesus answered, the most important is this. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

That is, he's not fragmented. Don't go worshipping things that aren't God. Don't go worshipping your golden calves, O Israel.

Don't go worshipping your hobby. Don't go worshipping your career or your success. And then verse 30. Look at this.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all, look at all these alls, all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. I don't want half-heartedness, says Jesus.

Take up your cross and follow me. Chapter 8. So what's Jesus asking us? He's asking us, isn't he, for the totality of our lives.

[8 : 42] You know, to love him with all that we are. For he gave us, friends, nothing less, did he?

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, says Jesus.

Love. Why are most songs about love? Why are most films about relationships? Why do we seek love as human beings?

Why do we do that? Because, friends, God has made us, hasn't he? In his image. In a relational image, do you see? And so the most important command, just run this through your thinking, it's not something external that we do.

It's us internally, isn't it? It's inside. It's who we are. It's our state. And all of ourselves, all of our souls, should be affixed on God, loving him, our creator, our owner.

Do you love God? Sinclair Ferguson says this in his commentary. It says, The very first law requires comprehensive, universal, undiluted love for God with every ounce of one's being.

[10 : 04] God is never satisfied with any less than the devotion of our whole life for the whole duration of our lives. You say, well, that's massive. It is, isn't it, friends?

But has he shortchanged you? Has he given you anything less than his whole life? Do you see? Mark chapter 1, God the Father says, doesn't he, This is my Son, whom I love. Mark chapter 15, God the Son says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Doesn't he? All his heart, all his soul, all his strength, all his mind.

For you, friend, for you. How much in percentage points do we love him in response? You know, when Jesus examines our life, what is his verdict?

And then, verse 31, it all overflows, doesn't it, into the world. The second is this, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

[11 : 16] October 2008, Gail Williams, she was working in Kabul, wasn't she, Afghanistan, ministering to disabled children, little disabled Afghan children.

And she was shot dead, wasn't she? Her sister said this, she says, I know Gail would forgive those responsible for the act, as she would tell us not to hold a grudge against them. We also forgive them as Gail would have done. Love your neighbour as yourself, says Jesus. No grudges, no bitterness.

You know, you want the best for them, don't you? You love them. God made your neighbour friend in his image, didn't he? You know, the work colleague, your friend, the person living next door, the lady you met at ASDA, the ticket collector on the train on the way home.

And here's a question, do you love your neighbour? So, our scribal is taken aback. Think about this, if we obey these two commands here, all the rest, they fall into place, don't they?

[12 : 31] And we can live harmonious lives. with God's purposes. And the scribe just sort of repeats Jesus. He's overwhelmed with it. Verses 32 and 33.

He just repeats Jesus parrot fashion. But then, this is interesting, he adds his own comment. Just look, friends, at verses 32 and 33 and look out for the comment the scribe makes.

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, with all the strength and to love one neighbour as oneself is, and here it is, is much more than all whole burnt offerings.

You see what he's adding? And sacrifices. Where are they? Jesus and this scribe, where are they? They're in the temple, aren't they? You could hear the bleating of the sheep in the background. You see, Passover was looming up and it's like the scribe is saying, do you see all this temple, Jesus? Do you see all this? Loving God and my neighbour is much more important than all of this, than all the sacrifices that we could give.

[13 : 45] You see what's happening there, friends? And as Jesus dies, the temple curtain is torn, isn't it? In two. And one sacrifice abolishes all others.

It's the end of the temple. And as we hold these scenes, friends, in our thinking, just turn back with me because Jeremiah is going to interpret what's happening.

Just turn back in your Bibles to Jeremiah and we'll have a look. Chapter 31. I'm not sure yet what page it is on. It's on page 660.

Chapter 31, verse 31. Page 660. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the government that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

[15 : 02] I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. Do you see what the scribes understood? And I will be their God and they shall be my people and no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother saying, Know the Lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquities and I will remember their sin no more. And it's like the scribe has got his finger on the pulse of God's purposes, hasn't he?

Here within the temple, you see. Yet our scribe, friends, is secretly digging his feet in. He wanted Jesus to say, Love the Lord your God with most of your heart and most of your mind and most of your strength and most of your soul.

That's what he was wanting and that's our final point. So we've had a bold approach to Jesus, a clear understanding of Jesus and finally a fleeting acquaintance with Jesus.

Verse 34. 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 ask him any more questions.

[16 : 26] You're within a hair's breadth, says Jesus to this scribe. And Mark doesn't tell us actually what happened with this scribe.

And I don't suppose he knows what happens with his readers. I've read four commentaries on this passage on this particular verse and they all miss something.

Friends, this guy here is a scribe. He's a scribe. They miss the sting in the tale, in the tale. He's an expert, isn't he?

In the Torah. His occupation is undistracted study of God's word. That's what he does for a living.

You know, he lectured inside the temple and Jesus says to him, You're not in God's kingdom.

Doesn't he? So he stands there in all his regalia. I guess he looked like the Archbishop of Canterbury or something. You know, standing there and his eyes are popping out.

[17 : 36] His jaws hit the floor. His heart missed a beat. He's standing there inside the temple and Jesus says, You're outside the kingdom. Not far from the kingdom.

He's outside. And Mark says, You could hear a pin drop. Verse 34, No one dared ask any more questions. And in the silence, Mark's saying to his reader, It's time to think through your own life.

Shall we pray? 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 neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Dear Heavenly Father, each one of us, we realise how far we fall short of loving you as we ought.

We can have compartments in our lives where we try to exclude you, where we go the world's way and presume upon your grace. So I ask, Father, that you would forgive our half-heartedness and help us to love you as we ought.

[19 : 00] help us to comprehend the love of your Son who was crucified instead of us, took our sin and so also the hell that would otherwise be ours.

Father, help us to understand the magnitude of this, this, your love, so that we thereby, Father, give all of our own lives that we take up our cross and follow you.

and we ask that you'd help us with the nitty-gritty of things, things like our time, our diaries, our wills, our leisure pursuits, our financial commitment, our family, the things our eyes dwell upon, our ambitions, our careers, how we respond to suffering, the love of our neighbours, the way we drive our cars, the commitment to prayer we ought to have and those things, Father, that are secret to us. All your heart, all your soul, all your strength, so we lift this prayer, Father, to you. It's for the renewing of our image, your image in our lives.

And we ask, Father, in Christ's name, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now, this day, and forevermore.

[20 : 24] Amen.