

The most difficult word in the English language is 'no.'

Every parent knows that you don't reward bad behavior, or ... you will get more of it.

One of my operating principles is to feed what I want to grow and starve what I want to die. For example, at one time at a prior church I wound up with three different worship teams. They were independent minded and many on the teams had poor attitudes. So, I praised them when they focused on God in their music, but I said nothing if the songs drew attention to the worship leader or a particular talent. I starved their poor attitudes and fed the worship of God. In the end, two self-serving worship leaders quit, and we were able to build one team. It was led by a 15-year-old young man who had a heart to worship God.

We are looking at the large segments of Mark that belong together.

- In the first half, Jesus served people through miracles, deliverances, and preaching repentance. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29) is the turning point to the second half.
- In the second half, Jesus is the suffering savior who purchases our salvation with his life.

Last Sunday's and today's segment are one long segment; it is a day's worth of teaching in the Temple.

- Last Sunday there were three waves of attack by representatives of all the religious leaders of Israel. The five groups of religious leaders who should have recognized the Messiah did not. They were like the withered fig tree that Jesus cursed: good looking on the outside, but no spiritual life on the inside.
- Today, Jesus' public teaching in the Temple continues.

Teaching in the Temple  
Mark 12:28-44



Thankfully, God deals with us individually. For example ...

**1. Hope for a Scribe, 12:28-34.**

'One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important (Mk 12:28 NLT)?"'

This scribe was obviously impressed with Jesus' answers about the coin and resurrection.

At that time there was a debate about greater and lesser laws – there are 615 laws in the Torah.

'Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.<sup>30</sup> And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'<sup>31</sup> The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these (Mk 12:29-31 NLT).'"

The greatest commandment is to love God.<sup>1</sup>

- Why? Because 'the whole man is claimed by God for himself.'<sup>2</sup> We are to love God because 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps 24:1 NIV).'
- For example, when David blessed the materials for the Temple he prayed, 'Who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us ... even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name comes from you! It all belongs to you (1Ch 29:14, 16 NLT)!'
- Love for God is a matter of our will and action. We must choose to love from the heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love is a verb; it is seen in our actions.

The second commandment is inseparable from the first commandment.

- How can you love God and not love what God loves?
- We love others because we pattern our lives after our creator, who 'so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16 NIV).' Because he loves them, we do too. Again, it starts with our will and is seen in our actions.
- Jesus does away with Jewish tribalism. He intentionally misquotes from **Leviticus**: 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge ~~against anyone among your people~~, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord (Lev 19:18 NLT).' Jesus intentionally broadens who we

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Mark includes the introduction to the Shema for his Gentile audience in Rome: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.' While Matthew excludes it for his Jewish audience.

<sup>2</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 432.

should love, not just our own tribe or people, but everyone. Remember the parable of the good Samaritan.

These two commandments together summarize of all 615 laws of the Torah.

'The teacher of religious law replied, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. <sup>33</sup> And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law." <sup>34</sup> Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions (Mk 12:28-34 NLT).'

There is hope for this scribe because he recognizes that love is better than sacrifice; it is better than being a rule follower without love.

- Jesus does not group him in with the other teachers of religious law; God sees us as individuals.
- But he 'still falls short of that inner commitment to God.'<sup>3</sup>
- Jesus' comment encourages him to think, 'where am I wrong? What am I missing?' 'Not far from the Kingdom' is not the same thing as saying, 'you're right.'
- Faith is sometimes found in surprising places.
- Feed what you want to grow and starve what you want to die. Here Jesus is feeding the faith in this scribe.

All day Jesus has responded to the religious leaders. Finally, because he silenced the critics, he talks about something he wants to.

## **2. The Unseen Kingdom, 12:35-40.**

- To understand this important point, we must remember that the people expected the Messiah to restore David's kingdom.
- Just three days prior, the people waved palm branches and shouted, 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David (Mk 11:10 NIV)!'

'Later, as Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple, he asked, "Why do the teachers of religious law claim that the Messiah is the son of David? <sup>36</sup> For David himself, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.' <sup>37</sup> Since

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<sup>3</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 434.

David himself called the Messiah 'my Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with great delight (Mk 12.:35-37 NLT).'

The prophets were clear: the Messiah was to be a descendant of David. Jesus did not question that, but raised the issue of 'what does that mean?' This is a Haggadah-question.

Haggadah question – two seemingly contradictory passages.

- Isaiah 11:1-9 – Messiah will be a descendant of David.
- Ps 110:1 –Messiah sits above David.

Solution: both true, but different realms. One is seen and the other is unseen.

Jesus' Haggadah question is designed to provoke thought.

- The scribes could not resolve this question.
- Jesus' point is that the earthly descendant of David has a glorified and unseen kingdom. It anticipates Jesus' resurrection.
- David understood that the son was not only his descendant, but also his LORD.
- The prophet Nathan prophesied, 'He (Messiah) is the one who will ... establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2Sa 7:13 NIV).'
- The Messiah will not restore an earthly kingdom but will rule in a wholly other type of kingdom.

This political- nationalistic concept of the Messiah was deeply ingrained and was ignorant of spiritual realities.

Jesus' point required serious reflection, but he perceived a lack of faith among them:

'Jesus also taught: "Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. <sup>39</sup> And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. <sup>40</sup> Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished (Mk 12:38-40 NLT).'"

Like the withered fig tree, they appeared to have faith / life, but they were faithless / dead.

These teachers of the Law, who should have been zealous for God, pursued the applause of men instead.

- They wore white robes with a long mantle that flowed to their feet.
- Their words possessed authority.

- People would rise as they passed by. Only a tradesman at his work was exempt from standing.
- They sat a place of honor in the synagogues, with their back to the chest containing the Torah.
- You were blessed to have one at a party, like an ornament.
- They knew how to impress others with their prayers.
- They belonged to the poorest class; however, the wealthy extended gifts to them as an act of piety. Many wealthy 'placed their financial resources at their disposal.'<sup>4</sup>

They were able to abuse and cheat the vulnerable. They will be punished.

- Again, this is why everyone needs guardrails. TV preachers, famous Podcasters, and every pastor needs to have someone looking over their shoulder to have integrity in financial and ethical matters.
- They were unable to control their desire for money and praise.
- In your spiritual life, feed what you want to grow and starve what you want to die.

Jesus' day at the Temple ends on a high note, he finds great faith in an unlikely place. This last segment was probably taught to just the disciples.

### **3. Generosity Before God, 12:41-44.**

'Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. <sup>42</sup>Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins (12:41-42 NLT).'

- According to the Mishnah, there were thirteen trumpet shaped receptacles for offerings in the Court of the Women.<sup>5</sup>
- The two small coins were the smallest copper coins circulated. They were so small that there was no stamping on them, equal to about 1/8 of a cent.

'Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. <sup>44</sup>For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on (Mk 12:43-44 NLT).'"

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<sup>4</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 441.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 442.

They failed to see her total commitment to God. She gave all she had; it is as if she offered her very life. She had nothing more on which to live.

There is a qualitative difference between God's perspective and man's.

- Samuel heard, 'The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (1Sa 16:7 NIV).'
- The disciples are reminded that 'the call to the gospel is a call for absolute surrender to God and total trust in him.'<sup>6</sup>

It is ironic that Jesus spends all day teaching in the Temple - the heart of Jewish faith - and comes up with only one person who is 'not far from the kingdom of God,' until he sees this poor woman.

She alone, of all the religious leaders, wealthy, merchants, and even disciples, really trusts God with her life.

- Jesus taught: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup>What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? <sup>37</sup>Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul (Mk 8:34-37 NIV)?'
- It is not about the value of her gift, but the intention of her heart.
- Love and sacrifice are actions.
- We don't talk a lot about finance, but each one should do their part. Not equal giving, but equal sacrifice.
- As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'On the first day of each week, you should each put aside a portion of the money you have earned (1Co 16:2 NLT).'

## Conclusion.

Let's look again at Mark's verse: 'For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45 NLT).'

- There is something mysterious about this ransom.
- It is a spiritual battle. It is not political: against Rome, Washington, or any earthly power, but against the demonic powers of the unseen world.
- Jesus exchanged his life for you and me to be set free from the consequences of sin.

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<sup>6</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 443.

- Jesus once said, will the son of man 'find faith on earth (Lk 18:8 NIV)?' Will he find it in your heart, your affections, and your actions?

This week, I fed my hydrangeas with some fertilizer because I want them to do well. The week before I put down some preemergent because I don't want crabgrass – it starves the crabgrass of life.

Perhaps today's message fed faith in your heart, like fertilizer. Or, perhaps, there are things in your life that you want to die. You need to decide to starve those desires.

Prayer.