

Two Of Life's Most Important Questions.

Text: Mark 12:28-37

1) Concerning our conduct and life

Suggested Hymns:

2) Concerning our faith

501, 321, 344, 293, 380

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 12:28-37, ²⁸ *Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He [Jesus] 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.*

³⁵ *Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"* ³⁶ *"For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" "* ³⁷ *"Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?" And the common people heard Him gladly. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What a great and glorious privilege it must have been to live in the days of Jesus, to live near Him who could heal any and every physical defect and disability, who could relieve every human want and distress, and who knew the answer to every question that disturbed the minds of men!

It is a privilege that with all our afflictions, with all the disturbing factors in our lives, that we can also turn to Jesus. We should gladly go wherever He might be, just to bring the burden of our problems to His attention and pray to Him, *“Jesus, my son is in great danger. Keep him safe from harm.”* Or: *“My wife is very ill, O Lord. Restore her to our family.”* Or: *“I am in great difficulty, Lord. My troubles are more than I can bear. Help me.”*

And then also what a great privilege to hear His answer, ***“Go your way; your faith has made you well.”***¹ ***Let it be to you as you desire.”***²

We need not envy the people of Christ’s day, for we have the same privilege which they had. In a sense we are even more fortunate than they were, because wherever you are, or wherever you may go, Jesus has promised to be with you. He has promised His presence among us especially here in His house, assuring us that ***“where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”***³

Here in our Congregation Jesus comes to us through His Word to teach us the way of life, to lift from us the heavy burdens of fearful anxiety and needless care, and to answer the many vexing questions which rob us of all happiness and peace.

Those words with which we opened our Service today, ***“God Himself is present, Let us now adore Him”***⁴ are much more than just a pious thought. They express a blessed, glorious, undeniable truth.

Today Jesus is here to help us find the right answers to two of life’s most important questions. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A Question Concerning Our Conduct and Life

Our text introduces us to a man who, having listened to the wisdom of Christ in His dispute with the unbelieving Sadducees, believed that Jesus could help him with his problem. This man was a scribe, a man of intelligence and culture who was thoroughly versed in all the law of Judaism.

But he wasn't altogether certain regarding the relative importance of these many laws. "*Which is the first [or greatest] commandment of all?*" he asks Jesus.

What is the greatest Commandment? Let us listen carefully to the Lord's answer, so that there may be no confusion among us also concerning this matter.

God's holy Law, laid down in the Ten Commandments, is our rule for correct living. In the light of our behaviour and conduct, however, it would appear that we do not regard these God-given rules of equal importance or equally binding upon us.

The rules of honesty and purity are sacred with us. Superficially, at least, we try to abide by them. "*You shall not kill*" is another command for which we have a great respect. But this same Law also says, "*You shall not curse.*" "*You shall not despise God's Word and the preaching of it.*" "*You shall not slander or defame your neighbour.*" Yes, these are sins that we shrug off as minor infractions. We, too, therefore, might well ask the Lord Jesus, "*Which is the first commandment of all?*"

In the words of our text we have His answer. *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.*" Thus Jesus makes it very clear to us that it is just as serious an offence to indulge in gossip as it is to steal a man's purse. It is just as much a sin to curse as it is to kill. It is just as reprehensible to neglect the preaching of God's Word and to convert Sunday into funday as it is to commit adultery.

Nothing would bring about such a radical change in the life of people as would such love for God as Jesus describes and demands here. If for a man's worship of material things, his love for temporal treasures, his trust in military arms, a man were to substitute the worship of God, the love of the Eternal, trust in the Almighty God, then his sense of values would be greatly changed.

His whole outlook on life would be transformed, and the direction of his life would be reversed. Is it any wonder that Jesus subordinates all the other rules to

this? Without this fear of, and love for God, we fail miserably in everything that God has prescribed for us.

And side by side with this commandment Jesus places the other commandment, *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* You shall be considerate of your neighbour as you would have him be considerate of you. You shall minister to his needs as you would have him minister to your needs. In other words we are to be motivated by love for our neighbours.

If people would make just a feeble attempt to live by the divine rules which Christ here tell us, most of our social evils would be eliminated. If both management and the workers would adopt this rule for their guide, strikes would soon become obsolete.

If this were the guiding principle of our international relations, the fear of war would be quickly banished. This second commandment is indeed like the first as we read in 1 John 4:20-21, ²⁰ *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?* ²¹ *And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*

2. A Question Concerning Our Faith

If we are to be judged by our fulfilment of these rules, we would not fare very well at all. Our eternal fate, however, is not decided by this answer of Jesus to our question, but rather by our answer to the question which Christ addresses to us, *"How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"* or as Matthew reports the question, *"What do you think about the Christ?"*⁵ Do you share the opinion of the scribes that I am a son of David, a descendant of that illustrious family, and no more? How, then, could David in his 110th Psalm refer to Me as His Lord?

When Jesus faced the scribes with this question, the dark clouds of God's anger were hanging very low. Still these leaders in Israel might have averted the flood of sorrow which engulfed them and their nation a few decades later. But they would not.

And so Jesus left them. They refused God's infinite mercy and so became the victims of God's fearful judgment. Pray to God that He will never turn away from us and that we will never turn away from Him.

What is our answer? Today Jesus still stands in the midst of us, gracing our Service with His presence. Do you think He is only a man, the Son of David? Does your conduct imply that such is your belief? Then you have no Saviour, nobody to shield you from the sure and certain destruction that will sweep over a Christ-rejecting world.

In answer to this question of Jesus may we say with Peter as we read in John 6:69, ***"We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."***

Jesus Himself has testified to His deity again and again. For example, when He said ***"I and My Father are one"***⁶ and ***"He who has seen Me has seen the Father."***⁷ He has assured us of His eternal existence when He said, ***"Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."***⁸

Furthermore Jesus ascribes to Himself divine power and authority. ***"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."***⁹ According to His own testimony, Jesus has the power to forgive sins, the power to answer prayer, the power to raise the dead, and the power to sit in judgment on the Last Day.

Therefore you must either regard Him as the world's greatest deceiver, or you must humbly fall upon your knees before Him and say with Thomas, ***"My Lord and my God!"***¹⁰

Which shall it be? Much depends upon your answer, the answer which you give not only with your lips, but in your lives. Your happiness here and now, salvation and heaven hereafter, are in the balance. Jesus stands waiting for your answer. Tell Him now that you believe, that you want Him to guide your life and to keep it.

Let us join with God's children the world over in this beautiful and blessed confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ - true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord.

At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

All this He has done that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.” Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 10:52

² Matthew 15:28

³ Matthew 18:20

⁴ Hymn 501

⁵ Matthew 22:42

⁶ John 10:30

⁷ John 14:9

⁸ John 8:58

⁹ Matthew 28:18

¹⁰ John 20:28