

Let me begin by asking what your morning routine looks like?
Do you lay in bed and think about the day ahead for a few minutes?
or Do you pop out of bed and hit the floor running?

Maybe you get dressed before you head for the kitchen or maybe you stay in your pajamas for a while. [too personal?]

Perhaps coffee and/or breakfast are part of your routine.

Perhaps some medications and vitamins.

Some of you may listen to or watch or read the news.

My wife reads a chapter of the bible every morning and shares her thoughts via text with our family.

Maybe you begin your day with prayer.

For devout Jews, both ancient and modern, they begin and end their day with a creed called the *Shema*. *Shema* in Hebrew means “**hear**” – it begins the creed in Deut. 6, which was our OT reading today. [Deut. 6:4-5]

As we are going to see, this introduction to the Shema lies at the heart of today’s passage in Mark 12. Today we’re going to look at **a good question, a great answer and a wise response**.

1. First.... a Good Question [look at Mark 12:28][read]

This man is a scribe –which means that he was a trained teacher, an expert in the OT Law. But unlike the previous encounters with Jesus in Jerusalem, this one is positive. This was a sincere interaction, not a trap. The scribe sees the Sadducees gathered around Jesus in the temple and goes over to check it out.

Apparently, he caught the exchange about the nature of marriage in heaven, life after death & resurrection. Mark tells us the scribe was impressed that Jesus *answered well*.

- Maybe he thought, that’s a good answer about life after

death I wonder what Jesus has to say about how to live now? What is the key commandment for living now and attaining eternal life?

- Secondly, it was not uncommon for Rabbis and Jewish teachers to try to distill the Jewish faith into its simplest form. What commandment captures the entire Law? What commandment is first and greatest of all?

2. This brings us to a Great Answer

More precisely, a Great Teacher --- the Ultimate Rabbi, the authoritative Son of God whose teaching Mark highlights as Jesus “schools” the religious leaders in Jerusalem....

Here Jesus’ answer is not meant to *silence* or *sting* the scribe, it’s meant to lead Him to *the kingdom of God* [which is God’s loving rule over His people that comes thru faith & repentance].

And as usual, His answer is brilliant! [vv. 29-31][read]

Does that first part of Jesus’ answer sound familiar? It’s the beginning of the *Shema* from Dt. 6! Jesus tells the scribe something the scribe had just recited that morning. The answer was right under his nose. *The greatest command is to love the Lord your God with everything you have.... with all your heart [your affections and desires]..with all your soul [your inner being] with all your mind – I think of what the Apostle Paul says in Php. 4 “set your mind on things above.” ...and then with all your strength – with all your determination and vitality.*

So the **Shema**, and more importantly Jesus, calls for a comprehensive/consistent/consuming love for the **One True/Personal God**. The LORD our God/Yahweh, who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. You are to burn bright in your love for Him...

The creator. The sustainer. The sovereign over history. The One who freed the Jews out of slavery in Egypt and led them thru the Red Sea. The One who covered their sins w/ the blood of the Passover Lamb. **That God!**

And that God handed down His law so that people could live under His blessing and know how to love Him [including His perfect character]. He is high and holy. He is loving, gentle and just. He is faithful in word and deed. He is a giver not a taker. He is truthful. He is unselfish. He delights in the delight of others. **That God!**

That's the God we are to love comprehensively, personally, emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually, & obediently.

To say that we love God and then disobey Him is proof positive that we don't really love Him. Like the teenager who defiantly says, "no" to his parents or the adult child who is stealing his elderly father blind behind his back – **is that love?** No

Love and obedience and respect for authority go hand in hand.

That's why the Shema says, *[Deut 6:5] "Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [but here is v. 6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*

What words? The words from **Dt. 5** which contain the **10 Commandments**

Do you want to love God? Obey the 10 Commandments and you will be showing genuine love for the Lord....

In the 2nd commandment about idols it says this:

Deuteronomy 5:9-10 You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth

generation of those who hate me, ¹⁰ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

See that? Love & obedience go together. Love & obedience cannot be separated when it comes to God.

To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to obey Him.

I'm reminded of **General Waverly** in the movie White Christmas -the soldiers sing.....

**We'll follow the old man wherever he wants to go
Long as he wants to go... opposite to the foe**

**We'll stay with the old man wherever he wants to stay
Long as he stays away from the battle's fray**

Because we love him, we love him

Why did they follow his commands? Because they loved him knowing that He loved them. They also respected and revered his rank as a Brigadier General. Likewise, God deserves both love and reverent obedience because He is the one and only Lord – Ruler/Creator/Lover of our souls. In fact, the bible says that we love because God first loved us.....

But before we move on briefly consider the 10 Commandments:

They are composed of **4 Vertical Commandments** –

You shall have no other gods before me

You shall not make idols to bow down to and serve

You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain

Keep the Sabbath holy

These are followed by **6 Horizontal Commandments** –

Honor your father and mother

You shall not murder

You shall not commit adultery

You shall not steal

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or possessions
Basically, love God, love your neighbor [Cross]
And by the way, you can easily teach these to your kids at the dinner table – make it fun and do some hand signals.
But coming back to Mk. 12 notice that Jesus puts loving God and loving neighbor together..... **[vv. 29-31] [read]**

Jesus takes the *Shema* and puts it together with Lev. 19:18 “**love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.**” And in so doing this He captures the **vertical & horizontal** aspects of the 10 Commandments –Love God, Love others/Jesus even refers to both as one commandment in v.31

So Jesus is the master teacher –He take the law of Moses which had 613 laws and boils it down to 1 plus 1 [which is inseparable]
Love God, Love your neighbor. [that's what a disciple is to do as he/she awaits the glories of heaven and the resurrection]
Don't put anything above God –money, sex, hobbies, jobs, friends
Rather love Him comprehensively – the word here is *agape* – unconditional/sacrificial love.

And then *agape love* your neighbor as yourself.... we all have self-love. It's powerful so Jesus says, “love others w/ that focus and intensity.” Love them tangibly//sacrificially/prayerfully...

This is tied to loving God - **1 John 4:10-11** ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:19-21 ¹⁹ We love because he [God] **first** loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

But in order to love others to God's standard, you must first love God. The first commandment Jesus cites in Mk. 12 is to love God. Love Him *first & foremost* and loving others will follow.
A great lover of people is first a great lover of God! We can see

the opposite of this a few verses after today's passage when Jesus' speaks of the scribes in general terms - **[Mk 12:38-40][read]**

Why were they prideful & greedy, taking advantage of widows?

Because they didn't love God first & foremost and therefore they didn't love people.

On the positive side take the wee little man Zacchaeus, the greedy tax collector in the Gospel of Luke. But when Jesus comes to his house he is transformed by God's love & God's Son & God's forgiveness. In that moment he comes to love God and others. Zacchaeus says,

“Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I'll restore it fourfold.”

He became generous to the poor [He loved them]. At the same time he demonstrated his love for God, being willing to repay twice the amount prescribed in God's law for defrauding others. He obeyed God because he now loved God. And I think this was the foundation of his love for people.

It had to be – **what changed?**

He came to know the God who loved him and sent His Son.

Alright, with our remaining time let's see **the wise response**

[Look again at vv. 32-34][read]

So the scribe agrees with Jesus that there is one true God and the commandment to love God and love neighbor is the most important. He even concedes that this is more important than the burnt offerings and sacrifices that take place at the temple.

Hosea 6:6 says For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

You see, you can go thru the perfunctory motions of religious rituals and not really know and love God.

You can be a church attender, a communion taker, an offering giver, a hymn singer and still be outside the kingdom of God.

We often hear the saying: you may be surprised by who you meet in heaven. But a more likely scenario in my opinion is that you may be surprised by who is not in heaven.

Well, Jesus affirms the scribes answer even thinking it wise in v. 34. But then He says this... **You are not far from the kingdom of God.**

That's pretty remarkable. The scribe agrees that loving God and loving others is at the heart of the commandments. He may even agree that he is going to live his life by Jesus' new creed.

So why is he close, but not in the kingdom of God?

Well, in **Mark 1** Jesus says, ***"The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the gospel."*** --which includes the forgiveness of sins. So the kingdom is near/here in the coming of Jesus. And the scribe is close. He believes Jesus is a truthful teacher, but he still needs to see that He is the Lord, the King, the Messiah who can save him from his sin, and so he needs to follow Jesus.

In the very next passage Jesus makes the point that He is David's Lord. So I think Jesus is challenging the scribe to come into the kingdom of God by following Him – follow His teaching, follow Him to the cross where He's going to die for his sins, follow Him after He's raised.... live out the gospel, live out the kingdom ethics of loving God and loving others as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And realize one more thing, only One has kept the greatest commandment to love God and love others with everything he has – that's Jesus.

The scribe was not far from the kingdom of God, but he needed to realize that he hadn't loved God w/ all his heart, soul, mind

and strength all the time He needed the forgiveness that only King Jesus could give to him. He needed to experience the cleansing love of God and then love God and others in a brand new way.

How about you? Are you near the kingdom of God or are you in the kingdom of God thru faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of your sins? Do you know God and love Him because He first loved you? Are you obeying God by living out the summation of His law – loving Him/loving others?

How tragic to be near the kingdom, but not in it.

It's a reality that led to John Wesley's conversion at age 40 at Aldersgate. He was raised in a religious home, his dad a rector, he studied Greek, was ordained a priest in the church of England joined a holiness club at Oxford, prayed an hour a day, took communion each week, fasted twice a week, visited prisons, served as a missionary here in America, but he didn't yet know the Lord. Then God used Mark 12:34 on the morning of May 24th, 1738 – “**you are not far from the kingdom of God.**”

That night he came to trust in Christ to take away his sins as his group listened to Luther's preface to the book of Romans – his heart was “strangely warmed” by the message of salvation and knew that Christ had taken away his sins. Wesley would then go on to love God and love others as few have.

He came into the kingdom.....

May that be true for each of us.

May that be true of the scribe who conversed w/ Jesus... I hope that he came to believe Jesus was his Lord and Savior.

I'd love to meet him someday. Let's pray.