

Text: Mark 12:28-34

Theme: Make God your Priority

Sermon delivered by Iyabo Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 18/02/2018 at 10.30am

Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is the last week before he is crucified. Many Jews want to kill him. However, they do not know how to do this. They ask clever questions to get Jesus into trouble but do not succeed. Now a teacher of the law who has been observing the situation approaches Jesus.

This teacher of the law is different from the Pharisees and Sadducees who had tried to trap Jesus by their questions earlier. He does not hate Jesus. He genuinely wants to know the answer to his question. Vs 28- **“he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”**. Jesus answer to him is clear- v.30 tells us, **“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: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”** We need to stop and ponder on the answer of Jesus. In these verses, we see that what God really wants from us is **love**.

We can obey God without loving Him, we can obey Him out of fear of the consequence, or to show off that we're holy, but if we sincerely love **Him**, our willing obedience will follow naturally. Rules are easy to keep. They require no commitment or love. *I can get up every morning, read my bible and pray just to satisfy myself that I've done what is expected of me, but what is the state of my heart? Do I sincerely love God; do I listen to His Holy Spirit and let Him guide me or do I simply live to please myself? What about those daily decisions that I need to make, where does Christ, His love and power figure in my lifestyle? Who is the greatest love of my life, God or myself?*

Tough isn't it; in today's world of selfies and all manner of social media platforms now available to draw attention to **me**. **There are two kinds of people. Some people want to get away from God's truth while other people want to know it. Some people push God's truth away and some people receive it. Which one are you?** This teacher of the law (Mark 12:28) wants to know God's truth! Other people have come to ask Jesus hard questions. But this man is different. He knows that Jesus can help him to find the truth. What happens when Jesus gives him a very hard answer?

Mark 12:32-33. The man does not say, 'It is too difficult'. He does not have excuses. He receives Jesus' answer. He knows that Jesus is right. The man knows that he needs God to work in him to keep His command. He sees that God really wants one thing - God wants our love - not lots of sacrifices. We can give all our money to God. We can go to church every day. We can pray all week. But these things are nothing without love.

What do you say when God's word is hard? 'I cannot do that!' 'But I am better than other people are!' 'God does not really mean it!' Don't judge me! God can't expect me to give up my food, pleasures in the name of Lent!

This man saw the truth - do you? God tells us to love him, and other people, with all our heart. But we cannot even begin to do it! We love ourselves too much. So we are in trouble with God. Mark 12:34. The man is 'not far from the kingdom of God'. This is because he sees an important truth. We must keep God's word in our hearts. Of course, he cannot do this by himself! Now he needs to believe in Jesus.

Vs 33

Those things we do to try and stand us in good stead with Christ; like works of charity, helpful as they are, are mere burnt sacrifices that cannot save our souls. **This is why we**

need Jesus. He came to forgive people who have failed to love God. He alone can put God's love in our hearts as God desires.

Vs 35-40

Now Jesus asks his own question in vs 35 – He asks how can the Messiah be both the **Son of David and the Lord of David?**

David is the composer of Psalm 110, and describes God talking to someone whom David calls 'my Lord'. The question then arises, 'Who is David's Lord?' Who could be so great that David, the greatest king of Israel, could refer to Him as 'my Lord' - a title with implications of deity? Clearly this Son of David, this future Messiah, is greater than David, has divine attributes, and is invited by God to sit at His right hand until all His enemies are subdued.

If we come to the realization that Jesus Christ is Lord over all, God's risen, ascended, glorified King who will crush His enemies and bring in His everlasting kingdom, then suddenly all our other more minor questions dissolve, and Christ becomes our all in all. Since Jesus is the Christ, He spoke of Himself here. His questions did not seek to trap the religious leaders. Instead He pointed them to the truth about Himself so that they could be saved.

Vs 38-40

In this day and age, there are so many teachers out there who claim to teach God's Word. Jesus warns us against fake teachers of His Word: those teachers, who want things for themselves, who want prominence, deference but are wolves in sheep's clothing.

A teacher may tell good stories. He may make us laugh. He may have come from a big church. But how can we tell if he is a fake teacher? Note:

1. He does not teach the truth as it is in the Bible. This means you must be a regular reader of the bible yourself. The teachers of the law did not want to accept what the Scriptures said! They manipulated the Scriptures to say the things that they wanted to say. Reject teachers who do not want to follow God's word. **We must be willing for the Bible to change us not for us to twist the words of the Bible.**
2. A bad teacher only cares about himself. The teachers of the law looked very good. They prayed a lot in public. They were at all the important meetings and wanted everyone to know how good they were. However, it was all a personal show they put on. They were greedy and wanted power. They wanted money and did not care about people in need, like widows and manipulated those who trusted them.

Unfortunately, some Christian leaders are like this. Be very careful! We all like to listen to a famous teacher. But does he want money? Does he want everyone to think how good he is or looks or dresses? Vs 40 tells us the end of such people is great punishment. Let us beware that we do not fall into any traps.

Illustration: *God had saved many people in a particular church. Everyone wanted to hear the preacher. Someone asked him, "why do you have so much success? The preacher said 'Look over there and you will see.' ' An old woman went slowly past, into the church. 'She comes every day to pray.' That woman was like the widow in Mark 12 who gave all her money. This woman gave all her time to God in prayer. She did not want anyone to notice her. She loved God. So she loved to give. **Jesus knows who really loves him. Other people notice the great preachers. But Jesus sees the person who loves to give from the heart.***

Vs 41-44

The widow in the last section of our bible passage is a powerful example of someone who loved God with all that she had. But note! She wasn't paying for her seat in heaven. Jesus

notices the person who gave genuinely! Jesus teaches here about a giving heart, a loving heart. This widow had two small copper coins, she could have put one in the offering and kept the other but she gave it all to God. What a sacrifice!

Sitting near to where all the rich were clanging in their golden coins, Jesus' focus is not on the powerful but he draws special attention to this poor widow. She would probably have been hurrying out of the Temple sanctuary before anyone noticed her seemingly puny offering. But Christ was delighting in her heart towards God, so much so that He makes a point about her to His disciples. The rich put in so much more than her but it cost them so much less.

'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others' (v.43). Clearly God is less interested in the amount that we give, than in how much it cost us. What does that mean?

- Jesus' here shows us that before God, the *spirit* of giving determines the value of the gift more than the amount. God doesn't want grudgingly given money or guilt money. God loves the cheerful giver.
- Remember King David bargaining over the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite so that he could build an altar (2 Sam. 24:24). Araunah was going to offer him the site for free, but David insisted, 'I will not sacrifice to the LORD ... offerings that cost me nothing'. What a great motto for a disciple of Christ.
- God does not *need* our money. If God needed our money, then *how much* we give would be more important than our *heart* in giving. Instead, it is *our* privilege to give to Him, and we need to give generously because of all He has done for us. To spread the gospel, the church needs money but it should not be coerced. If we stopped to contemplate all God has done for us, giving generously wouldn't be a struggle for us.
- The widow challenged the mindset that says, "I'll give when I have more." The widow had virtually nothing, yet was a giver. This means that we can all please God with our giving just as much as the richest man can please God with his giving. Whatever we give sacrificially to God, He sees it and is pleased.

Mark contrasts the humble, discreet widow with the ostentation of the teachers of the law who 'like to walk around in flowing robes ... and have the most important seats in the synagogues' (vv.38,39). Jesus hates religious showmanship, but delights in those who live for God, and give without showing off. The highest seats in glory will be reserved for the most humble, most faithful followers of Jesus.

Notice again how the person of Christ divides people. The Sanhedrin want to take His life; while the widow is giving her whole life. She symbolizes the costly discipleship at the heart of Mark's Gospel. **There are only really two responses to Christ - you want rid of Him, or you want to give your all to Him. There is no middle ground.**

Are you trying to create a middle ground in your commitment to Christ? Are you living for God as your only audience?