

The Greatest Commandments

Mark 12:28-34

I imagine at some point here in your life you've received a form of communication whether that was through a letter, an email, even a text message maybe, something of that nature that was a little long, and you weren't too thrilled because you didn't want to sit there and read that much. I felt the laziness on my part definitely, and you know, whenever it's sent to other people besides just me, it's really tempting to think maybe I'll just ask them what it said and not quite read this for myself. You know, that's the temptation for high school students in English classes when they're told to read a book, and when they have summaries of those books online, they think, umm, maybe I'll read the summary, and I'll get away with an okay grade on this test or essay or this novel of some sort. But summaries are helpful. Summaries are helpful. Especially when we are encountering long and daunting things or masses of information, a summary is nice to get to the point - how to bring it all together and what was the thrust of whatever was stated, whatever the argument might have been.

In the same way, we have the Scriptures. We have the Bible, and this is no lightweight book. It's massive. It's not something you take on a vacation for a week, and you just kind of thumb your way through like it was a novel, and you're done. And you thought, ah, that was a good read. Alright? This is something that is meaty in content and in length that you delve into and you try to continue to digest and continue to go over and examine. And more often than not, there's probably several of you here that have engaged in some type of reading plan. Alright? Where you have some strategy of how you're going to tackle reading the Bible. You're not just going to wake up one day and say I'm going to read the Bible today, the whole thing cover to cover, but think, let me piece it out over time here, until you kind of work your way through it. Or, you try to, and maybe you try to do it in a year. You try to do it in two years. You try a different tactic, maybe just the New Testament, maybe the Old Testament, but if you have done one of those reading plans, and you've been one of those people which in times of true confession, you've dropped out. You petered out. You didn't get through your reading plan or you didn't do it in the time you wanted. It's very possible, the odds are high, that it could've been somewhere in the Old Testament. Right? It's very possible that it could've even been maybe after

Genesis, maybe after Exodus, then the end of Exodus, and then Leviticus. And you start to get into some tough reading and tough slogging as people might say where you're thinking, wow, this is tedious. Alright? This is tough. This is a lot, and I'm not the nation of Israel. And so, I'm kind of reading this from 2017 vantage point and having a hard time here. And it's at that moment you're thinking, is there a summary? Could I just get the summary real quick? Let me look this up. Let me get some Cliff notes going or Spark notes here. Let me figure this out. What's the summary of this?

And that's really what we get from Jesus this morning. Rest assured we get a nice summary here of this Old Testament that we continue to delve into for our encouragement and instruction undoubtedly. Yet we have a privileged passage before us where Jesus Himself gives that summary, a very simple summary of the Law of God's Word as revealed in the Old Testament. So, let's look at our text for this morning. Mark 12:28-34: "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, '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 neighbor 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 neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' 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."

As that last verse states, we're reminded of where we are in this time in Christ's life where He is at a moment of just busyness, a moment of popularity where there are people all around, a moment here in the final week of His life of Passover, this wonderful celebration, this holiday this festival that the Jewish people came and streamed into Jerusalem and packed this small city. They packed it out, and they were there surrounding the temple, excited for what was to come in that week, and yet in this time, we saw Jesus come and kind of draw some attention to Himself in the way that He entered the city, how He had this royal welcome, how people were

chanting and shouting who He was as the Messiah. And not just that, but then the next day, Jesus going into the temple, attacking the temple (right?), saying that it is not to be functioning in the way that it was. It was to be a house of prayer for the nations rather than what it'd become for these people. The religious leadership that had corrupted it at that point, of course, were paying attention. Right? They were not happy with this. They were not happy with Jesus' entrance, not happy with Jesus just waltzing into the temple and acting like He owns the place.

And so, thus began what we've been seeing, this collision, a collision between the religious leaders there in Jerusalem and Jesus. And they're going after Him, head to head, time and time again, and it has not gone well for them. They've come up to Him, and they've charged Him with not having the authority to do what He's doing. And He has turned the tables on them and made them realize how they really don't have much authority themselves because they can't even decide what to do with John the Baptist. Jesus even took it the next step further and predicted His own death by identifying that even though He is the rightful heir, even though He is the cornerstone of this building which God is doing, He will be rejected by these religious leaders, these evil tenants as He describes them, and then, being confronted by the Pharisees and Herodians about taxes, He answers well about subjecting oneself and honoring the government. And then, as we saw last time, being confronted by the Sadducees, Jesus calls them out and makes them look foolish for their view of Scripture; that is, they didn't believe the Scriptures nor the power of God. And so, Jesus responds well in all these encounters.

That leads us to what we have today, which isn't as antagonistic. It's not as much of a controversy. It's got a little more respect in this encounter. Let's work through it here in verse 28 to begin with - the scribe's appeal. We now focus in on one person, a scribe, a scribe rather than a whole group here. We focus in on this scribe that comes up. Verse 28 reads, "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?" This is one of the scribes, and just to remind ourselves of what a scribe was, we had them mentioned back in 11:27 when the chief priests and the scribes and the elders noticed Jesus' following there and disrupting of the temple in Jerusalem and how they came and begin to confront Him. A scribe was not someone who was mindlessly copying

scripture. A scribe was someone who was actually a lawyer, an expert in the Scriptures. Right? They knew this well, and they led the people that way. They were the go-to people for these answers regarding what Scripture in fact said and taught. This is what we have. We have one of these lawyers, one of these experts here, this scribe that comes.

And we don't really know where he came from because even though his group of people were mentioned back in chapter 11, he may not have been there because our text says he comes upon what's taking place here. He comes up and he encounters this dispute taking place. He comes up and he sees all these people gathered around and recognizes that this is some type of debate that has erupted, and that this has happened, and he's caught the tail-end of some of what Jesus has done here as Jesus has responded well about taxes to the Pharisees and the Herodians and how Jesus has completely made the Sadducees look like fools in discussion about the resurrection. He comes upon all this, and it's perhaps that he's discovering this scene right now. And as he comes up, it doesn't just say that he hears the disputes and the debates taking place, we get this interesting phrase, "...seeing that he answered them well..." So, in watching all this, he's not like the rest of them. He's not like the rest of the religious leaders, necessarily, thinking, aw, bummer, another one, another missed opportunity. Instead, he's looking and thinking this guy knows what he's talking about. Jesus has done well. These are great responses. He's hitting it out of the park. He knows his stuff. He has respect for Jesus. He sees that Jesus has answered them well, and this is what thrusts him to then ask his question.

However, in the midst of his intrigue with Jesus, we recognize from a parallel passage from Matthew that he was still not approaching this with all possible optimism as Matthew says, "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer [the scribe that we have in our text], asked him a question to test him." So, he's still coming at Jesus, though intrigued with who Jesus is and what he said and how he's responded. So intrigued as our text makes mention, he's still coming with an end here, a goal to test, to test Jesus to see if He really knows His stuff. How much does Jesus really know? How far along is Jesus really in His understanding? And this is the question he gives, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" ... "Which commandment is the most important of all?" To be clear, let's make sure we know what he's not asking. It might come across like he's asking just for

one single commandment that is the only one he needs to be concerned about, the only one he needs to follow, and he can just forget the rest of them. He's not looking for that. He's not looking, and he's not even phrasing the question in that way that he wants just one commandment so that he can ignore the rest of God's Law. That's not how he's coming to this.

In fact, it's probably better to understand his question here - instead of which commandment is the most important of all, it's probably better to understand it as what sort of commandment is first of all. And you think how does that help? Because he's asking for something bigger here? He's not just asking for - give us one commandment that we need to think about and forget the rest of them, Jesus. No, he's asking what is the fundamental premise? What is the principle of classification for the Law of Moses? We're familiar with it. We're familiar with the Old Testament. It's daunting. There's so much there; how do we even begin to categorize it? How do we even begin to go through all these, law after law, tedious commands, and how do we begin to assign weight to some of them? Which ones are more important? Which ones are less important, and why? Alright? He's coming to Jesus with this big question, how do you summarize the Law? What is the heart of the Law, Jesus? What is it? Give us your take. If you could summarize it right now, what is it? What is the heart of the Law? What is the summary? This would be important, no doubt, for these religious leaders because it's something they talked about.

As one commentator helps us out with the daunting task that this was, "The rabbis would later count six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Torah [that's the Old Testament there], two hundred and forty-eight of them positive in form and three hundred and sixty-five negative in form. They also debated about the distinction between heavy and light commandments. The first or most important commandment was a common topic in Jewish circles, and it is reasonable to assume that a teacher like Jesus would be asked for his response." This is what these Pharisees, this is what these even Sadducees, this is what these scribes and expert lawyers had spent their time doing. If you actually knew something, you would have to engage in this. Sure, it's one thing to have it memorized. It's one thing to be able to parrot it off and to repeat it back to someone what it says, but it's another thing to then start to see themes emerge and start to see patterns and start to put it together and get a category for it. How do you even do this? How do you begin to summarize? And, surely, they had their different theories out there

of how they would summarize the Law and what's the easiest way to boil it down and how to categorize all the different laws you have into some summary fashion. What is the heart of the Law?

So, it figures here that this scribe is throwing at Jesus a meaty question, a big question. What do you say about this, Jesus? Have you even thought about this? Do you even have a conclusion for this one? How do you even begin to summarize the Law of Moses, that daunting task? What is it. Jesus gives a perfect answer in verses 29-31 where we see His answer, the Savior's answer - the Savior's answer in verse 29; "Jesus answered, 'The most important is, '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 neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.' " If you look at this as we kind of work through it here, He basically gives three distinct parts to His answer. There's kind of three distinct parts that emerge as He's working through this here. First, He begins by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:4, saying, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." ... "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." This is a notable and significant part of the Law of Moses. It became so significant, they actually had a name for it. They called it the Shama`, and so when someone said, oh, the Shama`, everyone knew it was referring to this specific portion. Why the Shama`? Because Shama` is the Hebrew word for which we have listen, listen up Israel, hear, listen to this. Shama` would be the word. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

This was very significant, that even the pious and religious Jews in their worship, both morning and evening, would recite this Shama`. It became like their creedal confession. It became something that they would state and make sure it was a daily and regular thing. Not just that they made it such, but also, you just think about the significance of the nation of Israel and who they were in relationship to all the other nations. All the other nations at the time, what did they have? Several gods - you name an element in nature, they had a god for it. That was what they were. All these nations were polytheistic. They had several gods that they worshipped, but Israel? Not so. This monotheistic religion, this monotheistic nation and how they worshipped one God - that's it; "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God [Yahweh

is our God and He] is one.” He is not chopped up into pieces, and He is not many, over all the different elements of nature, just one, one God.

Jesus goes on. That’s the first part of His answer, and He continues quoting from the Shama` in Deuteronomy 6:4-5; “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.” And as you look at this in Deuteronomy, you might think it’s a little different than what we have in Mark. Alright? It’s close. Jesus almost got it right. He added something in though. Right? You might think we have an issue here with what you find in Mark 12. To compare them, in Mark 12 what we have is Jesus saying, “...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.” So, why does he add in mind? It’s a pretty simple thing actually. Is there a lot of significance to this or not? And the simple way to understand it is just recognizing the background of how the Hebrew culture understood what is composed of mankind and how that changed over time, especially as the Greeks came in, and the Greeks started to influence things. So, in Hebrew culture and in the Old Testament, when they talked about the heart of man or the heart of God even or the heart of someone that included their mind, their thoughts, their rational faculties. But when you get to the New Testament, you now have Greek thought and Greek language influencing and infiltrating the whole entire world. And so, now you have the emphasis on the mind, and this Greek word for it as well. So, Jesus is adding this in there, saying, okay, not just the heart but also the mind because everyone understanding Greek language and talking and speaking in this way would recognize that as a legitimate component as well.

Some people go way too far with this, and they start to think, well, this is great. What we have here, what Jesus said, is a way to psychologically divide up mankind and see who mankind is. And we see that man is made up of four different parts all working together, and they try to use a text like this or something of that nature to prove this. The problem with that is you get variations over the entire Bible. Alright? We just look at it and pair it next to Deuteronomy, and you got three instead of four. And you go to other places in the New Testament and you get two. Right? You just kind of get the body and spirit concept or the body and soul. And you go other places, and you get three again. And you think, well, who do we go with, Paul, or do we go with what Jesus says here? Or, do we go with what someone says over

there? Is it two? Is it three? Is it four? What is it? And what it is is that we're thinking of the wrong thing when we're asking that question. Is the point here to find out how man is divided up into how many pieces? No, that's not the point at all. It's just simply perfect and better to understand that the divisions, that are here listed, as they're just an emphatic statement of the wholeness and completeness of love for God. That's all it is. It's emphasis because God could've said you must love Me, and He could've left it at that. But if He really wanted to be emphatic, if He really wanted to make it a big deal, how might He say it?

Well, maybe like this - maybe to help you recognize just how you are to approach your relationship with God and how are you to in fact love God. And how important is this love for God? It's really important because look at how God says it. It's with everything you have, "...with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." It's everything. There's emphasis here. That's the point. One commentator speaking to this says, "Love to God must possess the whole heart, the seat of personality, the whole soul, the self-conscious life, the whole mind, the rational faculties, and the whole strength, the entire active powers of man. This command in its various Scriptural occurrences shows interesting variations in form. These variations make it clear that there is no intention to give a psychological analysis of human personality. The accumulation of terms underlines the comprehensiveness of the duty of love. If God is worthy of man's love, He must be loved with all of man's being." That's it. That's the point. "If God is [in fact] worthy of man's love..." then man must be giving God all of himself. And that's why you have a statement like this in Deuteronomy and again repeated here and often other times in the New Testament. Everything - God wants everything. To focus on the psychological, to try and break it up and make this the point of the discussion, is to really miss the entire point completely. The entire point is simple; man's whole being must be committed to loving God. Man cannot compartmentalize his love for God. He can't do that.

Sometimes there's this kind of way of thinking, and people just have this in life, and they talk about priorities, and then they even go so far to talk about their priorities in terms of a list, and so they list off their priorities. And so, if they're a Christian, then they tend to go, well, on my priority list, number one is, you guessed it, God. Right? And then I go down the list, and I say number two is my spouse, number three is my kids and family, and number

four would be my service in the church or my job or something like that. And they kind of go down and they list off all these priorities. That is to say, if I'm going to have a day, I'm going to make sure I'm giving time to all those things, but in a certain order. So, maybe I'll start with God and give Him some of my time or maybe I'll give Him a little bit more of my time sprinkled in throughout the day while I then give some of my time and efforts to some of these other priorities in my life. Well, that's all well and good, and it sounds nice because you're putting God at the top of this list, but the reality is God doesn't want that. He doesn't want a sliver of your day. He doesn't want you carving out ten minutes for Him. He doesn't want you giving Him just a little dose here a little there, a thought here, a song there, a prayer here. That's not what God wants. What does God want? Well, He couldn't be any more clear. He wants all of you. A priority list where He's at the top and you give Him a sliver, some portion of your day, that's not it. That doesn't cut it. That's a wrong way to think about it. That's the wrong way to look at it.

Yes, you have responsibilities in life. I'm not trying to promote some idea where you stay in your house and read your Bible all day. Alright? And you never talk to anyone else because it's only God - I can't speak to another person. That's not obviously the way to approach it. Of course, you have other responsibilities. Of course, you have other things you must do. So, where does God fit into that, and how are you to view it? It's not that you have a check list, and all of a sudden you got the God time taken care of or the God thoughts taken care of. That's not how it works. It's better to see God central to all those things. Yeah, you have a family. You have a spouse. You have kids. Yeah, you have a job. You have where you're serving in the church. You have opportunities for sharing the gospel and relationships and an extended family and friends, and you have all these things, but at the center, it has to be God. God needs to be driving all those things. Your love for Him must be seen in every single thing you do, in that day, in every single interaction, every single category that you're kind of running to as you interact in a week or in a given day. Your love for God has to drive all that.

So, it's no longer this idea of justifying yourself and thinking, well, yeah, God's at the top of my list, and I took care of that today. And we all fall victim to this. We think that, hey, we kind of checked that off, and now, I'm ready to do what I need to do for today. And right there, we've lost it. We've

spent time with God, and we somehow walked away thinking, now what do I have to do today? And we've lost it completely because, is that what God wants? Absolutely not! He demands all of you, a wholeness, a completeness of love that you're giving to Him. So, then you walk away from a wonderful time of intimate, relational spending with God and His Word in prayer, and then you move towards people. You move toward tasks where you are doing all of them because you love God. And so, the love of God starts to inform your communication with people, where you are God-like in how you communicate. You're patient, and you're kind, and you are God-like in the way that you are diligent and working heartily unto the Lord for His glory. And your job and the different tasks that you have, you're loving God in everything you do. It must be at the center. It's not at the top of the list that you check off. It's the center and driving all those things.

God couldn't be more clear. We have it revealed in the Old Testament, and we have it affirmed here in a summary fashion. This is how you are to love God, with everything you've got. He doesn't want anything less so don't give Him anything less than that. This carries over, obviously, not just in terms of how you're going about in every activity in your relationship to God in a vertical fashion, but then also in how you specifically interact with other people. This is the third part of Jesus' answer. When you look back at our text here, He says, "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." So, now He jumps over to Leviticus 19 to quote from there. Leviticus 19:18; "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." It's a simple concept. What Jesus is getting at here in summary fashion, if you have in fact committed to, and if this is true of you, that you are loving God with your whole being, with everything you have, there's a natural overflow that's going to take place. You are going to love people. Love for God must (not might be), but must be displayed in a love for people. And this is what the authors of the New Testament would go on to make very clear. Just the book of 1 John 4:21 hits this so hard; "...this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." There's no breakdown. Instead, it's a movement. You love God. And this movement of loving God impacts and informs and permeates every relationship you have and how you love others.

So, what kind of love are you demonstrating towards you neighbor? As we have here, it's a love that is stated as a love that you would have even for

yourself. And some people run away with this, and they say, look, we caught it here on record; Jesus said you need to love yourself. And that's not what He's saying at all. He's acknowledging the obvious. You already do love yourself. Everyone does this. Everyone wakes up in the morning and they don't think let me see, how can I not think about myself at all today and how can I not care for myself at all today? How can I starve myself and not take care of my body? How could I make life miserable for myself today? No one thinks that. No one does that. People wake up, and you naturally have an instinct of caring for your body, looking after yourself in some way, and that is so instinctual. It's so natural. No one has to remind you of it. If you're loving God, so too will your love be for others. You won't even have to think. It's an instinct. It's a natural kind of reaction that you have. You just go about your day, and you are moving towards people and loving them; it's a love that promotes the good of someone else not just the good of self. And who? Towards your neighbor of course. In the Old Testament times they could read this and think or hear this and think, okay, that's just my fellow Israelite here. But when you get into the teachings of Jesus and what He says, He blows that out of the water, and He says your neighbor's anybody, anybody you come into contact with.

It's a big deal to think of these things, loving God, wholly, completely, such that it will show itself and display itself in how you love others. So much so, that Jesus then affirms this. Not only does He get the question, how do you summarize the Law, Jesus? He then answers with these commandments. And then He says as we find in Matthew 22:40, "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." ... "...all the Law and the Prophets." There it is. Jesus' Spark note, Cliff note version of the Law of the Old Testament. You want to boil it down? You want the summary? Alright, you want the driving impetus behind all of it? Right here, loving God with everything you have and loving your neighbor as self. As a result of that - in fact, it's not that hard to think about because people could think about this and say, well, you know, in the Old Testament there's different aspects and different parts of it that are emphasized, but one of them definitely is the Ten Commandments. You have to admit that, but even the Ten Commandments, what do those boil down to? Loving God and loving others. Still, you look at the first half of them and they're about your love, your whole and complete love toward God; and the second half is about your love towards your neighbor, towards others.

Love is this fulfillment of the Law as the New Testament writers would go on to say. Paul in Galatians 5:14, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And James 2:8 as well, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." This is the summary that Jesus gives, and it becomes accepted by the church and thus preached throughout the New Testament. This is the summary, and rather than ending it here like Matthew's passage does, we get more information on this one. Rather than leaving it here and saying the controversy is over, we get a little more interaction between Jesus and this scribe. And that's where we come to verses 32-34 and see the surprise agreement - the surprise agreement coming to verse 32; "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 neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' 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." The scribe is impressed with Jesus' answers. Not only has he seen this, as he kind of came on the scene and saw Jesus debating and thought, wow, this guy knows what he's talking about. Well, let's see how he handles this one though because I've done my study. I'm a lawyer. I'm an expert. What's his summary of all this? And of course, Jesus blows him away, and he actually has to respond and says you're right. In fact, "You are right, Teacher." You've spoken truthfully on these matters. It is true. And he repeats and affirms everything that Jesus has just said.

But perhaps what is most interesting is the phrase he adds on at the end. He not only reaffirms and repeats what Jesus had just taught, but then he says, "...is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." It's shocking here. He recognizes (and I think you all can understand this when you read through the Old Testament), how you encounter these portions that describe and talk about how it was that Israel was to relate to their God in the religious ceremony of temple worship, and you read through these commandments and just all the prescriptions that are outlined for the priests and how the priest had to cleanse themselves and what they had to go through. And then, the worshipper, the people of Israel, as they came and made their way to the tabernacle (and then the temple later on) and how that whole operation worked, and what they were to bring, what kind of animals

for what kind of sacrifices, and where they were to be offered, and how it was to take place. And it's tedious, and it's a lot, and it's a big portion of the Old Testament. And yet, this scribe, in hearing Jesus talk about love, he could say, well, what do you do with that though? What do you do with the sacrifices? What about that, Jesus? Instead, he says you're right. It's actually even more important even than the sacrificial system and what the sacrificial system stands for. One commentator states his response in this way, "The word translated 'burnt offerings' refers to those offering totally consumed on the altar. The other word translated 'sacrifices' refers to offerings in general, only a small portion of which was burned, and the remainder was given to the priests or returned to the worshipper to eat as a sacred meal. The two terms summarize and represent the entire sacrificial system."

This scribe gives a wonderful insight. He says you're right, Jesus. In fact, loving you with everything we have and loving neighbor as self is what even drives the sacrificial system. It's more important than those offerings that we bring. And just to understand this, he's totally bringing up and teaching something that's already been seen multiple times in the Old Testament itself. That is, how does God respond when people bring sacrifices to Him, when they don't actually love Him? Is God fooled by it? Does He think, wow, well done. Hey, you got the sacrifice here on time so kudos to you. No, God sees right through it. There's several passages like this where God sees their heart, and He's sick of their sacrifices. Look at 1 Samuel 15:22; "And Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.' " Or in the prophets, Hosea 6:6; "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." God has to communicate this to His people over and over again to the point where He has to say just shut the system down. Just stop it. It's annoying Me. It's a stench. I don't like this, what you're doing, because you don't mean it. What have you done? You've mastered the compartmentalization of worship. You've compartmentalized Me. You come and you show up to My temple. You bring your animal. You bring your offering, and you walk away, and you go and live for yourself and engage in your idolatry. You think I don't see that?

God has to declare and tell these people, away with your sacrifices. I don't want them. But it's commanded in the Bible. I don't want them. You don't mean it. You have no love for Me. And yet, in the same way, we can even

jump to our current day and think how many people sacrifice (right?), chisel out their little time for God, have their little God activity, and it justifies them for that day or for that week or for that month. And they think God should be pleased; look what I did for Him. Almost acting like God doesn't see the rest of their life, the rest of that day, the rest of their thoughts, the rest of their words and actions. It's the same thing. This compartmentalization that people try to do, it's like trying to fool God. And just like it did not fool Him when Israel did it, it still doesn't fool Him. Who are we kidding? Show up to God and think we've done something right because we've walked into this building or we've cracked open the Bible, and then walk away and then think I think we're good. I think He's good for a little while. I'll come revisit when, you know, it seems like it's been too long. That's not how it works. He wants all of you. He doesn't want a part of you. He doesn't want you to try and fool Him in some way. And so, the scribe even gets that. The scribe gets that. This is where the Old Testament sacrificial system even is subservient to the idea of loving God completely and wholly.

And we see this response from Jesus, "...when Jesus saw that he answered wisely..." Jesus recognizes that this scribe actually gets it. He understands not just what Jesus has just said, but how that even starts to interact with other things and other teachings in Scripture. Jesus realizes that this is a bold and good insight from this scribe. He knows his stuff. He actually knows what he's talking about. And we go on to read, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." ... "You are not far from the kingdom of God." How was he close? Well, he was close in the obvious fact that he showed up and saw Jesus debating and had a respect, had a lot of respect, for who Jesus was and what he was saying and how he was handling himself and what Jesus was teaching. He was thinking this is great. This is fantastic. This man knows what he's talking about. He was receptive to the person and the teaching of Jesus. But Jesus doesn't say you're in the kingdom. Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." You think, how does this strike this man? How does it strike the audience that's there watching this? Because it's one of those moments again where if they were to put their money on the people that were for sure guaranteed in the kingdom at that time, they'd probably put some money on this scribe. They'd probably think this guy has got it made. He knows what he's talking about. He's demonstrated this time and time again. He's our expert. We go to him. He knows these things. He's interacted well. But Jesus doesn't tell him you're in the kingdom. He says, "You are not far..."

How do you think people responded to that? Wait, are you trying to say he's not in? He's still not there after all this? After this display that he has, he's still not in the kingdom? What else needs to be done? Perhaps it's the simple teaching that Jesus has tried to drill into His disciples time and time again; if you want to come after Me, you need to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me daily. Perhaps it's the fact that this scribe could easily understand and even rattle off these teachings, and he knew the summary of the Law, but he wasn't in fact carrying it out. Of course he could quote that you need to love God with everything you have. The question was, is that what this scribe was doing though? Was he actually loving God with everything he had? Because if he was, then it doesn't make sense for Jesus to say, "You are not far..." Why isn't he just in? Why isn't he a disciple? Why isn't he following along with them? Perhaps this very concept of repentance - it's one thing to know something about Jesus, it's another thing to actually act on it and be transformed as so many people even in our day.

So, many people know tons of information. It's the age we live in. We have it all. It's accessible, and you can engage with many people on the topic of religion and Christianity and the Bible and Jesus. And you'd be surprised; people know their stuff. People can come back and say a lot of things and actually rattle off the basic teachings of Scripture and what it actually takes to be a Christian. And they could actually say all these things, but does that actually mean they actually love God? Does that mean that they're actually in the kingdom? Of course not. Of course not, but when it comes to actually bowing to and submitting to Jesus as authority, as ruler of your own life, now that's another story. And that's probably where the scribe hit a hang-up. He knew his stuff, but would he take the obvious next step of bowing down to Jesus as authority? Probably not. That's why Jesus says you're close. You're not there though.

It's even more telling when you have how this passage ends in verse 34, the silent attackers that we find, the silence that comes upon the scene ... the silence that comes upon the scene. If this was just a nice, pleasurable scene, a nice scene of respect mutually going back and forth between this man, this scribe, and Jesus, then you would think that there wouldn't be such an abrupt ending. But after Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," people must've been shocked that he wasn't actually in the kingdom of God. And what do you read? "And after that no one dared to ask him any more

questions.” People are silenced. They were silenced after this, and absolutely this includes everything that has just unfolded - how Jesus has responded in the span of this day to every group that’s come to Him. Every challenge that has come His way, He has more than handled. He has defended truth time and time again, and He has upheld God’s Word absolutely. But it’s not just His general conducting of Himself that people finally got the point and said, you know, when you go to Jesus and challenge Him it doesn’t go well. Maybe we’ll stop that. But it’s also how this very interaction ends, that this man who actually knew and could give an accurate summary of the Law still was not in the kingdom. He was close, but he wasn’t there. He wasn’t willing to bow down. He wasn’t there yet.

At this point, we have a shift in this Passion Week. We’re going to see Jesus now take control based off asking the questions, based off throwing out the challenges. And Jesus now steps into the role of teacher, and He’s the one that starts asking the questions to more silent responses. You want to know the summary? You want to know the summary of God’s heart, the Law of Moses, the Old Testament, the Word of God? We have it here for us. You can get caught up in the details, but the reality is either you are here, and you are able to, and you are excited to, and you are submitted to God in the sense that you will love Him with everything you have, or you are not. That’s what it comes down to. That’s the dividing line. And a great telling sign of that - if you have committed to that, to such love, complete love for God - is you will love neighbor as self. There is no question. It’ll be an instinct. It’ll be part of who you are as a born again, new creation. This is our goal. This is our goal, to glorify God in how we approach everything. We don’t give God a sliver. We don’t think an external act is enough because God is not fooled. We can’t deceive Him. He’s not mocked by that type of approach to Him. We know that our relationship to Him has to be all encompassing. That is the summary. That is the point, and that’s where we have to be. Let that be true of us, people that are wholly and completely devoted to Him in everything, every conversation, every task, every relationship that we encounter.