

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 12:28, as we continue with Mark writing this testimony that he got from the Apostle Peter, who had not only led him to the Lord but had told him everything that he remembered of Jesus' ministry. And Mark was so impressed with the servant heart of Jesus, so he writes a lot about it - the Lord's moving and being available night and day, never seeming to be put off by any circumstance or a cost to reach someone. He was so interested in the souls of men, and Mark uses that to say to the church that's the kind of life we've got to live. The days are short, and the generations that follow should walk in His footsteps.

Well, in Mark 11 we started the last week of Jesus' public ministry, the Passion Week. And Mark gives to us information for most of the days: from Sunday, where He rode into town triumphantly as the Messiah that was promised, on a donkey (as Zechariah said He would come in chapter 9:9). "This is the day that even the rocks, if you won't cry out, the rocks will" (Luke 19:40). "This is the day the LORD has made" (Psalm 118:24). And the people sang, but Jesus wept because they wanted a political deliverer, and He had come to deliver from their sin. He had come to take care of the big thing first. He'd come one day to rule and reign - He will yet come. But He had first come to die. The Lord ended the day on Sunday by going and looking around the temple.

And Monday, coming back from Mary and Martha's house on Bethany, across the Kidron Valley from the temple area, Jesus cursed a fig tree He saw from afar. He expected to find fruit. He didn't find it. The next morning it would find itself withered at the roots. But that day Jesus went, and He cleansed the temple, again, for the second time, and He removed the money changers and the guys with the animals and the selling of the sacrifices; called the place a "den of thieves," said this was His Father's house, a place of prayer.

On Tuesday, when the Lord came back into the city, Peter pointed out the fig tree, and Jesus used it as an example to speak to the nation of Israel about how He had come to His own, but they hadn't wanted anything to do with Him; and about the need for faith in God and that the forgiveness He was bringing through His Son was responsible for every person that needed to come to Him. And the Lord told a

parable to the religious leaders - that He had given them so much, and they had responded with so little.

The rest of Tuesday is filled with a bunch of confrontations. Less than three days before Calvary, and Jesus is in the temple being accosted by groups of folks who had planned together, in their desperation, to try to take Him out, to lower His standing in the eyes of the people. Maybe if they could get Rome on board, they could even have Him killed.

And so the first group that came was the scribes and the Pharisees and the elders - wanted to know who Jesus thought He was. "Who gave You power to come and cleanse the temple like that? By whose authority do You do those things?" And Jesus asked a question about John the Baptist's ministry. "Was it heavenly in its origin or not?" And because these men had taken a stand against John, but the people had not, they really couldn't answer; and so they said, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Well, then, I'm not telling you by what authority I do what I do."

The second group that had come was the Pharisees and the Herodians who had partnered together asking Jesus about the legality of paying taxes. People hated it. Not only that, but the coins that were used had a picture of Caesar, who claimed to be God and had even offered forgiveness to people for confessing their sins to him. And Jesus took the coin and said, "Well, whose face is on it?" They said, "Well that's Caesar's." He said, "Well, then give it to Caesar. But you be sure you give to God what picture is on you. Give to God what belongs to Him." And Jesus turned the tables by questioning their true allegiance to the Lord at all; kind of like strike two.

And then, last week, the Sadducees came with questions challenging life after death, and they came with their typical argument. And Jesus put them in their place by saying two things to them: "You don't know God's Word, and you don't know God's power." Strike three. And it hadn't worked very well.

But this morning we run into one final fellow that the Lord uses before speaking to His disciples about giving and service and the kind of heart He was looking for. And then we get to chapter 13, which is a long sermon. Mark is not used to writing long sermons, but there's one here that Jesus gives Tuesday afternoon, late, to four of His disciples sitting across the way on the Mount of Olives.

But this morning we want to begin in verse 28, and we're going to look down through verse 40, as a guy comes with questions for the Lord, and the Lord has questions for Him. But I love the picture. Verse 28, "Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. 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. And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' " Matthew tells us, in chapter 22, that when the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had put the Sadducees to shame, they were thrilled. They hated each other anyway. And so to hear that the Lord had put them in their place, that made them excited and happy.

Amongst those groups of Pharisees was a scribe who was (Matthew said) a lawyer who wanted to ask Jesus a question. But Matthew writes he came to tempt Him (Matthew 22:35). It's an interesting picture because initially he came with the attitude of all of the Pharisees. "We know better than You, and You haven't got a clue, and we have all the answers." But he watched Jesus answering questions, and he realized that the Lord wasn't deceptive, nor was He off base; He seemed to be right on. And so though he had been driven, it seems, by an initial idea of holding up the Pharisee-side of the bargain, the scribal-side, he came with a softer heart and certainly one that Jesus makes mention of. And he asks Jesus in the typical way that a scribe would ask questions, as few axioms as possible, "What is the first commandment?" Or, "What is the greatest commandment of all?" And I'm sure they had talked about that.

And Jesus' answer to this lawyer directs him quickly to two passages of Scripture with which he was familiar. The first answer - Deuteronomy 6 - it is the Scripture that the Jews call The Shema. The Shema means "to hear," and it involves your relationship with God, that you would hear God and follow God and support Him and look to Him. It is the verses (verses 4-9 of Deuteronomy 6) that every pious Jew would quote verbatim every morning, would pray again every night. It would be in their phylacteries that they would wear on their arms or on their foreheads. It would be in the mezuzahs on the front door, as they kissed it and went out of the house. "***Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad.***" "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!" We have one God, and it made them distinct because every nation of the world believed in a multiplicity of gods except for the Jews.

They knew He was one. And the verses that Jesus quotes here, that are found there in Deuteronomy 6, just speak about loving Him - not all of the law and not all of the sacrifices, but the heart behind the matter; that, with every fiber of your being and emotion and understanding, you put Him first, you love Him with all that you have. And the second quote, there in verse 31, is from Leviticus 19:18, which talks about loving others, loving your neighbor as you love yourself. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." That's the way it's written in Leviticus 19. And Jesus says there is really no commandment greater than these two. This is really what the law is all about - loving God and loving your neighbor.

"So the scribe said to Him," in verse 32, " 'Well said, Teacher.' " (Or, "Great answer, Rabbi.") " 'You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 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.' " The scribe was learning, wasn't he? What was so problematic for the Pharisees that they had fallen into their religious outward ways - this guy was beyond that. He realized that all of the sacrifices and all of the trips to the place of offering were of little value if you didn't love God and love your neighbor, if you didn't walk with Him first. And his answer is so different than everyone around him who saw the law as just serving the behavior, where he sees the law as touching the heart. God's interested in the heart. That's what his answer was. So, he might have come angry or at least defensive, but he's quickly shown himself to be a man who's been listening and praying and trying to learn. And in the midst of all this religious wickedness stands a guy who's hungry to know.

Well, Jesus is clearly pleased with his answer because He says, in verse 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." I love the refreshing change. Right? There've been these liars and these deceivers that have headed His way all day, and yet here's a guy who Matthew says his initial intention wasn't very good. But having listened and heard Jesus' words, he wised up. In fact, that's the word that the Lord used of him. He was wise. "You've answered wisely." And He said, "You're not far from the kingdom of God." And among this pack of wolves and these religious charlatans lived a man whose heart was open to hear. And I like that. It's so encouraging because that's kind of the way it works with us, isn't it? You find people all around just writing God off, and there in the midst is a heart that God is speaking to and listening and will respond. So, here's a hopeful guy.

And two days and a half before the cross, here's a man that's listening and hearing, and with all of the discouragement Jesus must have faced, this I'm sure thrilled His heart. "You're not far from the kingdom of God." Now that's a compliment, but it's also a warning. He didn't say, "You're in." He said, "You're close." Right? "You're getting it." He did see that the ceremonial offerings were secondary to the condition of the heart of the would-be worshipper. He saw that actions were secondary to the intent of the action, I guess. He saw that a love for God and others with your heart was vital. He was so close. He was getting it. The question is - did he get in? Did he come to Jesus confessing his sin and relying on His sacrifice? I don't know. But Jesus' words had to be very encouraging to him, and it's the only smile I see on His face all afternoon. It's been just hammering, and now comes a man who's interested.

I do know someone who got saved because of this scribe. And I know that because of the testimony of the individual. John Wesley was born in 1703 (he was the fifteenth boy, so they must have had a fight at dinner) to Samuel and Susanna, his mother. And his salvation single-handedly turned Britain to the Lord and kept them from going the way of the French Revolution. There's no more pivotal guy, I think, in that time of history than Wesley. He grew up in a church home, in a Christian home, in a place where the family loved the Lord. He graduated from Oxford. At 25, he was ordained as a priest in the Church of England, though he would be the first to tell you, at the time, he didn't know the Lord; he wasn't saved at all. But he was a religious guy from a good family, and, as the Church of England would, he was anointed to be a pastor. He returned to Oxford. He started a place called the "Holy Club" with his brother, Charles, and with a guy named George Whitefield who, you might know if you've read any church history, was one of the most remarkable evangelists, certainly, of the day. And they started this club on campus. They vowed that they would rid themselves of sin, as a group - that they would pray an hour every day, they had communion every week, they fasted twice a week, they visited the prisoners, they went to the hospitals. "We're going to do it right, man," and these young men were excited about works but had no relationship with God at all. It was religion without a heart, like this scribe pointed out. And he was not saved, but he was filled with works. In 1735, when he was 32, John Wesley was sent as a missionary to The Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in America, to the American Indians in Georgia. And he failed miserably. He got sick, he was almost killed. He came back to England just, "Forget it!" And the guy was older now, and he was tired, and he was frustrated. On the boat from America to England, he met some German Moravian Christians who spoke to him about a

relationship with God, and it got him to think that he should just read the Bible, and it kind of reduced him to that. And, in his biography, on May 24, 1738, he wrote in his diary that he was reading this passage, and he heard Jesus say to this scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of heaven," and he believed that God said to him, "You're getting it now." And so he came home, he attended Aldersgate, where Luther's preface to the book of Romans was being read to the church at the time, and, hearing of God's grace, he gave his life to Jesus. And from that day on, Wesley rocked England. I mean, if you read the revivals that came to England during his day, Wesley's right in the middle of it. But he's a religious guy that was wise and hungry, and, like the scribe, he was close and then he finally surrendered his life to the Lord. So, he preached in St. Mary's in Oxford for years, and he preached in every church that would have him. He preached in the mines, he preached in the streets. He stood on his dad's tombstone, and, for the next fifty years (according to his diary), he preached 42,000 sermons. He traveled 4,500 miles a year on horseback. He preached three times a day, averaged 70 miles a day. Even at the age of 83, he was still keeping the same schedule. In fact, one of the last entries in his diary was, "I amaze myself that I never get tired of preaching or writing or traveling." He left behind disciples by the score in England, and the church in England was certainly never the same. And yet, he got saved reading this passage of all things.

I don't know if you remember the verses that got to you. I remember I got saved at a Thursday night Bible study listening to the multiplication of the 5,000 men and women and children eating. But he got saved reading, "You're not far from the kingdom of heaven."

And you can learn a lot from him and from the scribe because it seems to me, even from Wesley's life, that you can grow up in church and not be saved; and hang around Christian people for years and not be saved; and even be well-respected, as Wesley was, and not be saved. You know it. You can know the Bible and have it not touch you. You can be near but yet so far. You want to be sure that you haven't stopped at hanging around the church - until you've entered in to the body of Christ. And I don't know if this scribe did. But I know that, because of him, Wesley did, and because Wesley did, England was never the same. And it's well worth reading if you can get hold of some of John Wesley's stuff to see what God did through one guy who finally came to know the Lord even though, for years, he had grown up in the church. And, for ten years, he'd been a pastor. He didn't even know Jesus.....at all! You can hang around, but you've got to enter in.

Well we read here, at the end of this verse 34, that from that point on, nobody really wanted to question Jesus anymore. And so, as they applauded His answers, Jesus had a question for them, first for the scribes; not the one who was close, although he was no doubt in that group. But He really wanted to say to the people, "By and large, even though this scribe is close, the scribes, by themselves, in and of themselves, aren't close at all. They're lost in their religious ways." But before He says that, He challenges these scribes to consider the Scriptures in a really wise way and in a way that you can just imagine them having to kind of stop and think. And I wonder what went through their minds.

"Then Jesus answered and said," verse 35, "while He taught in the temple, 'How is it that the scribes say that the Christ (or the Messiah) is the Son of David? 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.'" Therefore David himself calls Him "Lord"; how is He then his Son?' And the common people heard Him gladly." Matthew 22 gives us the beginning of this conversation as Jesus said to the scribes, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?" And they answered, and they said, "He's the Son of David." And Jesus then responded with what we read here, as Mark picks it up, "How can the scribes teach that the Messiah, the Christ, will be the Son of David when David himself calls Him his Lord?" And so the Lord says, in verse 36, "David himself said by the Holy Spirit." Matthew records him saying, "Have you never read? Have you ever, in your studies, looked at what David himself said about the Messiah?" And Jesus quotes out of Psalm 110 which, by the way, is the most quoted Psalm in the Bible; Psalm 110. And it's in verse 1. "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" "

Now, a couple of things. Jesus, here, affirms that David wrote Psalm 110. If you pick up any modern scholarly book on the Psalms - modern - you will find that many of them question whether David wrote it; which makes them modern but not scholarly. Because Jesus said, "David wrote it." He adds, in Matthew 22, and we read it again here that He said "by the Holy Spirit." Look, David lived in a patriarchal society which meant that the father was the absolute ruler of his home. He would certainly never call his own son "lord." He'd call him his boy or son, but he wouldn't give him the respect of saying, "You're the lord of the house," or, "You're the master of the house." No matter how old he got, his dad was still the ruler, and he would share that place with no one or the respect that that position brought. So, Jesus presents these scribes - one who is listening, many who are not

- with an interesting problem. "If the Messiah is simply the Son of David, what is David doing calling Him 'Lord' "? Now you might know, or maybe you don't, that in the Old Testament, when you see the word "LORD" all in caps, all in capitals, it is the translation of those four letters YHVH, that tetragrammaton in Hebrew that we've tried to pronounce - Jehovah or Yahweh; it is probably Yahweh just because there are no hard "j" sounds in Hebrew. But, needless to say, that's what it represents - the LORD and who He is. But when you see the word "Lord" with a capital "L" and small "ord," it is the translation of the word "Adonai." And the word "Adonai" means master or boss or the first one in charge. So, Jesus now quotes to the scribes who are well-versed in the Scriptures, and He says, "David, prophetically, by the Spirit wrote that God spoke of the Messiah, the Mediator, as David's Lord. He's the Son of David. He's also David's Lord."

And so, in verse 37, He asked them that question, "How can He be both his Lord, Adonai, and also his Son?" And I love the picture. Jesus - beaten up by these guys, plotted against by these guys - in His love for these guys, reaches out to them and asks them to rethink their convictions and belief system based only on the Scriptures, the ones that they knew and loved. Look, this is a sincere question Jesus is asking. It's not at all like those three questions He's gotten from these guys who had been confronting Him. He just wants them to think it through and come to the right answer. Had they just stopped for a minute and considered it - that David's Son, his descendant, is not merely that, He is also the Lord of David's life - He has been asked to sit at the right hand of Almighty God on high to judge, He will completely triumph one day, every enemy will be made His footstool one day - that they could have looked at this verse and discerned that the Messiah would be both man and yet God; that He would be the God-man, this descendant of David. Not merely that. He would be the Lord of all. So, even the prophet Isaiah wrote, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given" (Isaiah 9:6). On a physical side, the Child is born. Most people in the world will acknowledge that. Christmas tends to get by with most folks that Jesus is that Child that was born. But if He's God, that Son that's been given, that changes the equation. So Jesus said to these scribes, "Look, I know you've read the Scriptures. You're good at that. Have you ever thought about this?" And I don't know what their initial reaction was or what they might have said. I'm sure it helped that one fellow that Jesus said was close. But Jesus is both the Root as well as the Offspring of David. That's what Revelation 22:16 writes. He's the Root (or, in other words, He's the source), and He's also the Son of David. He's David's Lord. He's David's Son. When Peter spoke on that sermon on Pentecost, there in Acts 2, this is what he said. Verse 29,

" 'Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: "The LORD (Yahweh) said to my Lord (Adonai), 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' " Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Messiah).' " And that same psalm shows up in the very first sermon that the church ever preached because it's such a beautiful argument from the Old Testament to say, "Look, He isn't just the Son of David. He is also the Son of God."

And, at this very late hour, Jesus is still seeking to stir the conscience of these scribes, asking them questions designed to drive them back to the Bible to get some answers, to stir their conscience, to consider that the Messiah may very well indeed be that Son of David as well. It had been a huge problem for them, you know. Back in John 10, they took up stones to stone Him, and Jesus said, "For what good work are you now planning to stone Me?" And they said, "Not for any good work. Because You, being a man, are making Yourself out to be God." Well, that's exactly what David said. It's exactly what the Scriptures declare. That He's put all things in subjection under His feet, that He's going to be the One to sit and rule, that one day He'll judge the world. Great argument! He's the Son of David according to the flesh. He's the Son of God according to the Spirit. He's the God-man. Now, unfortunately, Matthew tells us in verse 46 of Matthew 22, that this crowd of religious guys, these scribes, didn't respond. They just kind of looked at their feet, and they looked away, and they didn't answer. They weren't willing, it didn't seem, to consider it. But notice that the common people went, "Well, that makes sense." That's how you find a bunch of common people in church usually, "Well, it makes sense to me; God has shown Himself to me; that's good enough for me," while the religious kind of get stuck.

Well, having offered them this argument, this help, Jesus now, in His teaching, begins, in verse 38, to warn the people about the typical scribal way of life. "Then

He said to them," in verse 38, " 'Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.' " So the whole group of verses here talks about religion and how God hates it; and relationship, which is what God wants; and our recognition that Jesus is both God and man. There's a scribe who was close. There's a case given by Jesus to religious men so they might know the truth. And then there's a warning to the people that, for the most part, these religious guys had a way of life without a relationship with God. And they're pretty dramatic words because, if you read anything about 1st century Jewish life, most people regarded the scribes as godly. They admired their tenacity and their devotion and their willingness to go without. But Jesus sees right through that. He warns them about the kind of heart and life these scribes really lived. They were dishonest and self-serving and ungodly and hypocritical. They defiled the nation, destroyed the souls of the people in the process, claimed to be experts in the Bible and never even taught it. In fact, the entire sermon of which Mark quotes two verses, can be found in Matthew 23, and it is not a nice sermon, but it is one that they needed to hear. And Jesus didn't mince words, if you will.

Back in Luke 12, Jesus had warned about the leaven of the Pharisees. He said that was hypocrisy, appearing to be something that you weren't. In Matthew 23, Jesus goes to great lengths to say these guys are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites. In Matthew 6, He says that every one of their spiritual exercises is just a phoniness that is hidden. And then in Mark, He says the scribes are those guys that love to look good outwardly - clothes of identity, marks of distinction, holier than thou, got the long robe, "Wrap it around ourselves so we don't bump up against you. We're closer to God than you are." Notice the words "who desire to go around," verse 38. "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around." This is their way of life. "Let me go out in public where I can appear to be holier than everyone else. Let me go out in public where I can be honored." They love the greetings. "Good morning, pastor, father, teacher, wise one." "Good morning, grasshopper." They love the chief seats. In Luke 14, Jesus had dealt with some of the details of this - to be seen in places of honor, to climb the social ladder, to use their position and their platform to be reckoned with. "Be careful of that," Jesus said. It is so common to the religious man to look for recognition while feigning a relationship with God. He can't be any closer to God than you are. His breath and your breath are in the Lord's hands. Nobody's any closer. But, you see, it happens sometimes. Look, they "devour widows' houses." In those days, mortgage loans came with

extremely high interest rates. Foreclosures were the order of the day in that time of the life of the people. Today these crooks send computerized letters to widows on fixed incomes, asking for donations with some tainted kind of spiritual references that belie their hearts. They want the widow to live in poverty so they can live in luxury. It hasn't changed much. God says, "Beware." And they "make long prayers for pretense." The key is not "long." The word is "pretense." They are just pretending; it's all for show. Maybe you've heard people who pray prayers designed to impress people, not the Lord. We had a fellow who recently was asked to pray publicly (in the news) who came with a written prayer. And I thought how weird can you just pray with a written prayer? If you write the prayer, you're talking to people. Because I would never show up at your house and go like this, "Hey, how are you this day?" (Pastor Jack reads the question, then looks up at the congregation and back down at the paper). "I'm fine as well." It's not much of a relationship. Written prayer. Written prayers are designed for people to listen to. Crooked, right? "They make long prayers for pretense." And, "I'll be in my tower claiming healing for you. I was up before the crack of dawn with you in my heart, as I laid your needs before the Lord. So if you could just send me a little offering in the mail.....especially during Christmas, when things are tight." Don't send them squadoosh! Send them this verse.

So Jesus reveals the reason these scribes had such a deep-seated hostility against Him. He was honest about who they were. They masqueraded as religious lives committed to the Lord. They loved being seen as holy, but they weren't being willing to pay the price for such. So, tragically, that's how most of them went.

So, two lessons from our verses this morning. Number one - you're close to the Lord when you realize that God's interest is in your heart not in your behavior. Behavior is second, well-second to what's in your heart. You could do the wrong thing with the right heart and be in far better shape with the Lord than doing the right thing with the wrong heart. God's interested in a heart first. Second of all - salvation comes when you realize that Jesus is God. And more than simply having a Bible, that Bible needs to have you, and you have to be convinced of who He is and why you have to follow Him. And the second lesson kind of follows the first. Don't allow the spiritual corruption found in the scribes to be found in you. It pays to listen when Jesus warns us. It pays to listen. And instead of applying what you hear to someone you know, apply it to you. Because God will search the hearts. And it's interesting to me that the very thing that we dislike most in others - the lack of honesty or sincerity or hidden agendas or being two-faced - God hates in

our relationship with Him. And we get mad at Him, and yet we think we're perfectly justified in feeling that way. The mark of a true believer is still a pureness of heart, a belief in who He is, an understanding of the heart. And the fact that less than three days from where we're at, Jesus will be hanging on a tree for the sins of the world. We find Him so faithful to the very end - just giving it all to whoever will listen. Maybe this week, God will use you to share with someone who's so close and yet so far.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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