

THE KING'S ROYAL LAW

Mark 12:28-34

Every Palm Sunday we typically celebrate the royal entry of King Jesus into Jerusalem as we study that passage. It's part of the Easter season. However, we just studied Mark's Palm Sunday text so I won't put you through that. However I still want us to be thinking of Jesus in light of His Kingship.

Last Easter, that was our emphasis. We spent our time in John's gospel looking at the *The King Not of This World*, *The King Crucified and Buried*, and *The King Resurrected*. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" The answer was yes and the placard Pilate had made for the cross of Jesus that was nailed above His head was His crime: "Jesus, King of the Jews". Today we know He raised to life and ascended into Heaven where He sits as King of kings and Lord of lords. And one day will return to reign on earth as King. In that day, He will sit on His royal throne judging the nations (Psalm 2; Rev. 20). Zechariah tells us He will be the only one and His name will be the only one (Zech. 14).

But what about until then? If He is the King, why did He leave? And what are we to be doing in the meantime as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven? The King came, He was cut off (Dan. 9:25), and we know He's coming back to rule – but what about until then? Has this King given us any orders in the meantime? We'll answer that today naturally in our next portion on Mark 12. We have a royal task.

And I'll be honest. I'm going to sound a bit like a parrot today repeating much of what we are learning in our *Engagement Project* study at our house on Sunday nights, but I don't really care because I want you to catch the vision of this study even if you aren't coming to it.

Mark 12:28-34.

"One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?'" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 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."

The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all your heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."

Coming back to Mark's Gospel, we find ourselves in question number 4 out of 5 in chapter 12. These questions are all important questions and have significant answers but up until now, they have been shameful questions due to the fact that they have been disingenuous and designed to trap Jesus. This question, however, seems to be a little more respectable and genuine. As the religious leaders have been questioning Jesus, one scribe, a little more noble than the rest it seems, has been listening and maybe even secretly applauding Jesus' responses. He's sort of like a secret admirer of Jesus who hasn't made himself known until now.

And I have to say the more I think over his approach to Jesus in relation to his scribal kinsman, the more I start to like this guy. In his praising Jesus for His response and identifying with Jesus' answer tells us he's probably willing to break ranks with his Jewish elites who were not thinking for themselves about the truth of the Word of God but were merely following man's traditions. Jesus Himself tells this thinking man that he's not far from the kingdom of God, meaning He's still on the steps of heaven, but not quite in because He needs Jesus. It's possible to be close but not be in. To have grown up and spent time in the Word but never received Jesus. That's where He's at. Making up his mind about Jesus after careful consideration.

His question in **verse 28** is, "*What commandment is the foremost of all?*" and as we're going to see we might as well be asking, "**What is the King's order? What are His greatest commands?**" Jesus responds to the man in **verses 29-31**.

1. **In our vertical relationship with God, it is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (with all of your being).** (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Jesus references Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This is what Jews call the **Sh'ma** and recite twice a day, morning and evening, and just prior to death. The devout Jews wore it in a little box on their head and wrist called a phylactery. **It's the creed of Israel** and comes from the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4, which is "*Hear*". Out of all the 613 commands in the Law of Moses, Jesus said this is number one and essentially covers the first 4 of the big 10 commandments in Exodus 20. The next greatest commandment covers the last 6 of the ten commandments involving our relationship with others.

2. **In our horizontal relationship with others, the 2nd greatest is to love your neighbor as yourself.** (Leviticus 19:18)

He references now Leviticus 19:18 and it's likely the first time these two verses have been intertwined. Jesus says in **verse 31**, "*There is no other commandment greater than these.*" And in the parallel account of Matthew 22:40, "*On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*" So not just the Law, but all the Prophets as well, beyond the Pentateuch of Moses' writing.

So like the two foundation stones, all other 611 laws in the Mosaic law and the entire OT rest on these. Think about that. Our relationship to God and men braided together in these two. They form a cross, vertically and horizontally if that helps you memorize them. They're like 2 gears that mesh perfectly that if kept would drive Israel to the blessings of God promised to Abraham.¹ And that's why I think this really silences the Pharisees as you see in **verse 34** because in essence, it summarizes all His teaching.

In a book with so many commands, don't you find this refreshing?

- 613 commands in the Law alone (248 negative commands & 365 positive commands)
- In the NT some have counted 1,050 commands.
- In the entire Bible 6,468 commands.

But if you were to boil them down, they'd all rest on these two. This is so like Jesus to bring us back to the simplicity of this **foundational compound commandment**. It's another display of His **unmatched wisdom!**

Sometimes it's necessary to get back to the basics. To the fundamentals. We get lost in all the information out there but can be set back on the path to **clarity** by remembering the King's order to **love God & love people**. His response reminds me of the abbreviation **TMTITKTMTTMT**: The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Or the acronym **KISS**: Keep it simple, stupid.

You'll have to give me time to explain but I think Jesus even boiled it down even more into one command from Him. Remember He said, *"If you love Me, you'll obey Me"* (John 14:15). *"He who loves Me is the one who keeps My commands"* (John 14:21). So if you love Him, you'll do what He says. In other words, **to keep His commands is to express your love for Him – it is to love God with all your being.** So by keeping a secondary command we can keep the first. And what is His command that the NT makes a big deal out of? We see it in John 13:31-35, when Jesus was revealing to the disciples He was leaving and He said, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* Here's our new commandment: to love one another. And it's a big deal. The apostles call this **The Law of Christ** (Galatians 6:2) and it fulfills the Law.

Romans 13:8, *"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."* Isn't that amazing? When you read the Law and see commands like don't murder and covet or commit adultery, you need to see the heart behind the command. Doing those things is the opposite of loving your neighbor. If you love your neighbor you won't steal from him or murder him, will you?

Now, Galatians 5:14, *"For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* So now, not just two commands but one.

Look at James 2:8. Here's the "Golden Rule" for Kingdom citizens: *"If however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.* This is the royal law we've been given from our King as ambassadors of the kingdom in this world:

The Royal Law = to love one another (James 2:8)

It does make sense to say that if you want to express your love for God you should love your neighbor.

But what grade would you give the Church on keeping the Royal Law of Christ? How do you think we're doing at loving God by loving our neighbors? Let's be honest. Let's be real here. Do we even know our neighbor's name? Do we pray for and reach out to our neighbors? Or are we like the Levite and Pharisee who drive by our neighbors who are imprisoned in sin and spiritually blind and spiritually destitute?

The reason we struggle with keep the royal law is because it's not easy to love individuals all the time, especially when they have different beliefs and because we'd rather focus on ourselves. It's too difficult for us because we love ourselves. The command is to *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* It's not saying that in order to love others you need to love yourself. It's implied that we do love ourselves and that's the problem. We're like Linus in that Snoopy cartoon who says, *"I love mankind. It's people I can't stand!"* You know what he's talking about. C. S. Lewis said *"It's easier to love humanity with a capital H than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular."* That one stings, doesn't it?

You see, here's the thing. We don't love God with all of being because we love ourselves and part of obeying Him is to start serving Him and others. But we'd rather be served and do things our way. That was the problem for most of the religious **scribes** in Jesus' day. We've studied the Pharisees and Sadducees in

Mark. Rather than the Law exposing their sinfulness and humbling them as they see their need for forgiveness, they turned it into a system of self-exaltation to the point that even their religious works and deeds of helping others were ultimately about themselves. If they prayed, it was, *“Lord thank you for not making me like that tax-collector”* (Luke 18:11). If they put some money in the coffer, they sounded the trumpet to let everyone know how generous they were (Matthew 6:2)!

For every 613 commands in the Law, they had conjured up more man-made laws to keep from breaking those laws. Remember it was the Oral Law we’ve discussed that acted like a fence to the fence of the Law. **“The 613 Fence”** we called it. And by the 1st century, these manmade rules and regulations had become so sacrosanct that they were made equal with Scripture. So now, they weren’t even really following God’s Word anymore (fulfilling the greatest command), but were following these oral laws they’d passed down – man’s traditions. It was an apostate (or false) form of Judaism and we have apostate forms of Christianity today just like it.

This was why Jesus said *“Take My yoke upon you”* because His yoke is easy and His burden light. These men had placed an unnecessary and worthless yoke on people to bear that was paralyzing them from carrying out the Sh’ma rather than helping them. Manmade legalistic rules and regulations beyond the Word of God choke out the productivity of God’s people. Keep us from bearing fruit.

It’s weird but people are saying love your neighbor today by having nothing to do with them. Separate from your neighbors to love them, they say. Well, if you read that devotional I put in your handouts about why we’re relational beings and all the problems isolation is causing society, you’ll see why I’ll tell you to break the barriers to love your neighbors in the ways they’re comfortable with.

❖ **People weren’t made for isolation but for relationships.**

But, back to the scribes real quick. I hope you see the problem with works-based gospels that say you have to be good enough to get to heaven. When you don’t understand you’re save by grace through faith in Christ and you think you have to work for Heaven and salvation, your entire focus is going to be on you – because you have to be good enough and you have to pay for your own sins – instead Christ’s work for you.

❖ **The natural consequence of a works-based salvation is pride and self-focus.**

These scribes in Jesus’ day were so self-focused and self-righteous that they misunderstood the entire purpose of the Law. They had the Law to teach them how to love God and their neighbor but as we’ve seen, they’d grown to hate their neighbors and despise the Gentiles who weren’t as *“holy”* as they.

Picture Jesus and this scribe sitting in the Temple courts and discussing this. When scribes says in **verse 33**, *“To love one’s neighbor as himself” is much more than all burnt sacrifices and offerings*” picture that just next to them, smoke is rising up from the altar in vain because someone is offering it who doesn’t have a heart for God or doesn’t know God. They don’t see their sin but are offering a religious work. That’s tragic. Hosea 6:6 says, *“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”*

❖ **Love is more important than ritual. (Is. 1:13-20; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-9)**

In *The Engagement Project* there is a video clip about a messenger who comes before a medieval king and take’s the king’s order written on a scroll and hops on his horse rides through the forest to another magistrate under the king’s command and when this magistrate opens the scroll that reveals the king’s royal order, His royal law, he gets up from the dinner table and says in amazement, *“It’s too simple. It’s too difficult. It’s brilliant.”*

❖ **The Law of Christ is too simple, too hard, and brilliant.**

And it is. I think we'd much rather try and reach people through marketing schemes and fancy programs all sorts of ways. What if instead, we just went back to the basics? Love God and love our neighbor. Speaking the truth in love.

Part of the reason why we struggle to love is that this word "LOVE" is really a broken word in our day. There are too many **counterfeit loves**:

- **Mis-Defined Love** = We're all guilty of this one because the English language is limited in its terms of love but it's using love as to mean "I really like" something. "I love this weather." "I love this ice cream" "I love this shirt" "I love my dog". Love doesn't mean anything anymore because the word is so broad and the significance of what true love is has lost its original meaning. Most people define love as a warm fuzzy feeling between them and another person.
- **Feelings-Based, Fuzzy Love** = This is the love that is all about mushy feelings that make us feel comfortable or meet desires. The love based on feelings. Progressive Christianity might fit into this as well because there are progressive Christian who do away with hard doctrines like sin and hell and anything that doesn't make them feel good. It's where God agrees with everything they want. It's about them and making them feel good and where God doesn't require of them of anything.
- **Twisted Love** = This is the love that has no regard for truth and because of it, love is warped. It's really the mainstream love of our culture right now. We want to love one another but anyone who speaks the truth and present biblical morals and ethics (*which is really how you love your neighbor*) is "unloving" according to our culture. Love is tolerance for everyone except those who stand firmly on God's standards, no matter how lovingly as well. People don't understand that unless you love according to God's standards, you're not loving them but harming them.

This is the love of Rob Bell, a preacher who abandoned Christianity and wrote a book called "*Love Wins*," said things like, "We need more love and not less.... When love wins, homosexuals will have the right to marry one another and hell will be redefined as the terrible evil that comes from secrets hidden deep within our hearts. When love wins, the gates of heaven are opened to a much wider audience than those who believe in Christ. What a glorious day for all of us when love wins." It's painful to even quote that because it's so heretical. A love without truth is nothing other than calling darkness light and light darkness.ⁱⁱ It's perverted love. Like Erwin Lutzer said in his book *We Will Not Be Silenced*, "We love people best when we speak the truth to them."

And what's happened in is that the radical left like the LGBTQ+ has hijacked the word love and redefined it and captured the moral high ground by it. Now not to support things like homosexuality is hate speech. But they've just redefined it, like the word marriage. 1 Corinthians though remember, says, "*Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing.*" God is love, yes, but He is also just. He will not be letting everyone into heaven who doesn't accept the gift of His Son's love. He can't overlook the sin issue unless the blood of Jesus Christ had been applied to us through faith in Him.

- **Absent Love** = The last one was love absent of truth and this is truth absent of love. Our speaking the truth should have the note of love behind it because if it doesn't Paul said we're a noisy gong and clanging symbol. It's just loud for a little bit and then forgotten. But truth in love sticks much better and resonates with people. Truth spoken in love wins God's heart and man's.

- **Royal Task Love** = Real love. Speaking the truth in love. Love and truth intertwined and intermeshed through word and deed. It's not always a mushy, feeling good kind of love. In fact sometimes it's downright painful because **it's a sacrificial giving of self for the good of others.** It's **agape love** in the Greek. Sacrificing yourself for the good of others, just like Christ did for us when He died for our sins. The cross says in **truth** that you are a sinner and need a savior but it also says I **love** you and seek your restoration. The cross is truth in love.

I think this is key to reaching people for Christ in this culture a little bit at a time. You know why I say that? Because **it's what won us over.** God spoke and lived the truth to us in love. **It's the cross of His lovingkindness that draws us to Himself.** It's King of the Universe stepping down from His glorious throne to take on the weakness of human flesh and being born into a world suffering from sin to die for us. That's what drew us to Christ. If He is lifted up, He said, He would draw men to Himself. And He did. Romans 2 makes that clear that it's, "*the kindness of God leads [us] to repentance*".

God showed us self-sacrificial love and calls us to do likewise for others who don't deserve it either. It's a natural consequence of His loving us in Christ because His love, and you know this is true is you know Christ, His love has been poured out in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).

❖ **The natural consequence of a truth and love-based salvation is expressing truth in love to others. (1 John 4:19-21; Rom. 5:5)**

1 John 4:19-21, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

This is the kind of love that Mark is challenging his Roman audience, a persecuted people, to accept. To love even their **enemies** as Christ did (Romans 5:10). To love the **ungodly** (5:6). To love the **sinner** (5:8).

To wrap it up, I want to share with you a little tidbit from the Engagement Project again about how powerful this is. It's a real story about a far left LGBTQ+ icon and publisher who wrote smear articles about Christians and specifically men's ministries because she was a feminist. Well, when one of the young men in the men's ministry saw she was writing smear articles about them, he told the older gentleman who was the head of the ministry that they needed to "*take her out*". You know what I mean? The older man told the young man he should "*take her out --- to dinner*". They ended up having her over many times at their house for dinner. She accepted the invite to learn more about these fake and cold, hypocritical, self-righteous Christians so she could go home with more handfuls of dirt to smear on them. She even started reading her Bible to find contradictions in their beliefs and character.

However, as she began to have meals with them, and they just kept showing her lovingkindness and answered her questions in truth with sincerity. They saw her as a slave to sin and Satan. And she began to notice these guys were the real deal, something she'd never experienced before. What else impressed her was the fact that they had a complete worldview that answered questions her worldview couldn't. Throughout all those dinners, they didn't invite her to church. But wouldn't you know it, she showed up one day and gave her life to Christ. Now, instead of writing smear articles against Christians as a feminist, she is a married happily to her husband and has written a book on how Christ's love through His people has changed her life.ⁱⁱⁱ

Isn't that great? Guys, I think this is our major challenge right now. To be truthful and loving at the same time. It is possible. Jesus did it with the woman caught in adultery. He maintained God's standards but showed God's love and grace. He saw her as a sinner, but a sinner enslaved to her sin who needed set free.

Speaking truth in love. It's too simple. It's too difficult. It's too hard.

ⁱ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 2* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 319.

ⁱⁱ Erwin Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), chapter 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Engagement Project with Del Tackett.