

## “So You Want To Love God?”

Scripture: Mark 12:28-34

Graphics: heart, temple, sacrifices

Big Truth: The people of the PUMC are invited into deeper service for God’s Kingdom here on earth. The only pathway to greater sacrificial justice and mercy through service (not reluctant obligation) must be a journey through to the heart of God through passionate worship and prayer (not rote ritual).

Focus Phrase: Passionate worship of the One True God leads to sacrificial service for His Kingdom.

### 1. Introduction

- A. Congregation participation this morning (here and online): Raise and keep your hand up if you’ve ever **studied for a test**. (Online, just give us a hand emoji in the chat). Keep your hand raised if you actually **TOOK the test**. Now, keep your hand raised if you **ENJOYED studying for and taking that test?**
- B. It seems like studying for and taking a test is something that we all HAVE TO do at some point, but it’s something that only a small handful of people actually LIKE doing.
- C. In my free time, right now, I’m studying to take and pass the Federal Aviation Administration’s Remote Pilot’s License Exam so I can fly my drone in new ways in new places. I’m one of those weird people that kind of LIKES studying. The test taking is not as much fun.
- D. When we have to learn something new - something we didn’t know before and haven’t done - it takes time and it takes investment. And, you could just learn the material and take the test, knowing only what’s on paper, and you might even pass. Or, you could study, learn, understand, and then apply what you learn to whatever subject it is you’re trying to master.
- E. If you do the latter, then the more you learn and apply, the better you get. If I learn to drive, take and pass my driver’s test, and then never drive, then would I be much good at driving? Probably not. But, with time and practice, I can become a good driver.
- F. Today, we’re fast-forwarding in the book of Mark...to Mark 12. Jesus was having an argument with some religious leaders (what’s new?), when a religious leader from a different tribe, so to speak, came near to overhear what Jesus was saying.
- G. And what the scribe heard, and what Jesus had to say, are at the **heart of the heart of the Good News** of the gospel. In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus gave us what we now know as the **The First Commandment** or Greatest Commandment.
- H. And if there ever were a TEST of what it means to not just know what Jesus wants us to DO, but truly UNDERSTAND what Jesus wants his disciples to be

about, it's contained in one simple command from Jesus...based on ancient information from God to His people. The question Jesus asks is, "So you want to love God?" which is the title of our message today.

- I. You can learn and understand lots of things in sports, business, hobbies and more...and you can even be really smart about the bible, and the church, and ministry. But to truly pass the test on being a disciple, these two commands are all you need to know...but knowing is not as important as understanding and applying what Jesus is commanding us.
- J. It has to do with loving God...and loving your neighbor. But actually it has to do with loving God which **leads to** loving your neighbor AND loving your neighbor which leads to loving God.
- K. If you're taking notes, write this down: **Passionate worship of the One True God leads to sacrificial service for His Kingdom.**
- L. Let's pray and then we can dive into this text this morning.

**M. PRAY!**

## 2. Scripture

### A. **READ Mark 12:28-34**

- B. When a scribe came near to hear Jesus, he was immediately pleased. Now, we're not totally sure WHY he was pleased, but one thing we DO know is that this scribe had different opinions about the Law than the Sadducees, with whom Jesus was arguing.
- C. In fact, right before Mark 12:28, Jesus and the Sadducees were arguing about the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, but Jesus did (obviously!). Do you know who ELSE believed in resurrection? The scribes and Pharisees. So no wonder this scribe liked Jesus' answer. "Ya, Jesus, you TELL 'em!"
- D. Thinking that Jesus was pretty astute, this scribe asked which commandment of the law was first (foremost). This was a test, of sorts, but more a way to learning, really.
- E. Jesus' answer is our focus today and the center of the gospel. "Love God with heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself."
- F. That's all. Jesus reduced 613 Jewish laws to two! That's all the scribe needed to know!
- G. Now, Mark placed this encounter with the scribe in a series of theological clashes between Jesus and various temple officials. Of note, though, is that this particular scribe isn't hostile to Jesus like the others. He wasn't trying to pick a fight. He wasn't trying to trap Jesus. **Quite the contrary: This is the**

**only example in the gospels of a scribe actually agreeing with Jesus.** That tells us that this is important stuff!

- H. The scribe asked a defining question. Depending on how Jesus answered, the scribe would ask him another question, then another. The HOPE was that eventually, he'd pigeonhole Jesus into the school of one great Jewish scholar or another. There was no hostility evident in his approach. Engaging in debate was simply what scholars did. Steel sharpens steel, right?
- I. But see, Jesus is wise...he sees all things inside and out. Jesus' answer defied easy categorization. Jesus offered a schoolboy's answer to a tricky man's question.
- J. The answer came in two parts:
  - i. First, Jesus recited the famous *Shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."
  - ii. And second, He followed that by the command to love one's neighbor as oneself found in Leviticus 19:18.
- K. By boiling this down to these two commands - #1 and #1, Jesus was clearly implying that it's not so important what believers think ABOUT the law, or which school of thought they followed. **But it IS important how faithfully they LIVE OUT the law.**
- L. We can see Jesus drawing a distinction between two different ways of knowing: head knowledge and heart knowledge. When we get in our cars to drive somewhere, I don't know about YOU, but I almost always plug my destination into my GPS and away we go! Yet, if you know the streets, the turns, the places to avoid and the short-cuts, you can drive it without needing a GPS, which ONLY gives you the head knowledge. Knowing how to get where you're going gives you confidence to get there - head knowledge AND heart knowledge.
- M. This scribe KNEW all about the scriptures...he'd spent his life memorizing them in order to know them and teach them. He had faith! But Jesus, honestly, seemed unimpressed by such hard-earned theological knowledge. For Jesus, knowing MUST lead to doing.
- N. James 2:17 reminds us, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."
- O. Over in Luke's gospel, after Jesus gave this scribe the answer to his question, he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Who was it, in that famous parable, who stopped to bathe the wounds of the mugging victim? Not the pastor. Not the seminary professor. They passed by on the other side. It was the immigrant who had no skin in the game...and was despised by the people of the man whom he helped!

- P. The lesson? Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Q. As we come to the end of this section, Mark seemed to imply the scribe is pleased with Jesus' answer. "You are right, Teacher," he said.
- R. Did Jesus truly win this scribe over? We don't know for sure, but the last sentence from Mark says, "After that no one dared to ask him any question."
- S. Maybe Jesus' simple, straightforward answer came a little too close to home - not just for this confident scribe, but for a great many others as well.
- T. Maybe even us.

### **3. Application**

- A. I'm sure you've heard this scripture many times. I'm sure you've heard more than one sermon preached on it. I wrestled with what kind of application I could bring to us today that would help us.
- B. Then I realized, the harder I try to be crafty about applying this to our lives, the more I get in the way of the Holy Spirit speaking this word directly into your heart: God wants your worship. God wants your service in the Kingdom.
- C. As you hear this text and think about your life, the two parts - love God and love your neighbor as yourself - give us all we need to know. But even more, those two parts of the most important commandment, give us all we need to understand to be a disciple...to pass the test.
- D. The first part is all about passionate worship of the One True God. The second part is all about sacrificial service in the Name of Jesus.
- E. Passionate worship of the One True God leads to sacrificial service for His Kingdom. Let's look at each part.
- F. Passionate Worship of the One True God.**
  - i. The religious leaders in Jesus' day had the conviction that if they simply follow the letter of the Jewish Law, then God would be pleased.
  - ii. The problem is that it was impossible to follow the letter of the Law. And, in fact, God never intended His people to follow the letter of the Law apart from the HEART of the Law.
  - iii. God gave the Israelites the Law so they could live out the covenant He made with them. He made that covenant with them because He loved them and wanted to keep them from harm.
  - iv. What started as a faithful response to God's love, became a rote ritual that was disengaged with the heart of God.
  - v. If you and I are to come to the place of passing the test of discipleship to Jesus, we must come with passionate hearts of worship. This is what John

Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, would call *personal piety*. It's about lighting the flame of the Holy Spirit in your own heart!

- vi. It's allowing the Holy Spirit to grab ahold of your heart...and THEN it's allowing the Spirit to connect YOUR heart to the hearts of all the others in worship.
- vii. Give your heart to God in worship every time we gather here...every time you worship online...every time you worship at home during the week... every time you pray.
- viii. Develop a hunger for God and His presence in your life.
- ix. Passionately worship the One True God. Then, engage in sacrificial service for God's Kingdom.

### **G. Sacrificial Service for God's Kingdom**

- i. At the end of our text, Jesus commented to the scribe, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." Jesus wasn't talking about some future eschatological reality after He returns. Jesus was talking about the Kingdom of God already breaking into the world when Jesus was born.
  - ii. That Kingdom is the current reality for all those who are followers of Jesus - for all those who are passionately worshiping God.
  - iii. The second commandment, which is actually part of the first, is to love your neighbor as yourself.
  - iv. Jesus didn't say to love God OR love your neighbor. The church can sometimes get out of balance on one or the other - too much emphasis on acts of piety and learning and not enough emphasis on social justice - acts of mercy.
  - v. The fullness of your experience in the Kingdom of God right now today will depend on your willingness to worship passionately and serve sacrificially. If you'll remember, those are two key areas of focus in our SHIFT Intentional Discipleship Plan.
  - vi. Sacrificial service for God's Kingdom entails the hard work of forgiveness...offering grace...listening without fixing people...loving without judging...having empathy for the others' wounds.
  - vii. Sometimes it means keeping your mouth closed when you want to tell people how right you are, so you can listen and love. It's knowing the names of people with whom you work, worship, and meet, especially the ones who can't give you anything.
  - viii. As the Holy Spirit directs you, give your time. Give your resources. Give your comfort and free time.
- H. Worshiping passionately and service sacrificially. It's really just doing what Jesus did.

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. We've come to a point in our journey together as a church when we have to put down markers so we can remember where we've been and where we're going.
- B. The marker I'm inviting you to put down today is to love God by making a new commitment to passionately worship God. The marker I'm inviting you to put down today is to love your neighbors by sacrificially serving them like Jesus.
- C. Worship of the One True God leads us directly to the sacrificial work of justice and mercy in our community and in our church.
- D. To passionately love God through worship of God compels us out to love our neighbor. As we love our neighbor like we love ourselves it compels us back to the heart of God in worship.
- E. Church, I don't often do this, but today I feel led to invite you to come forward to say to Jesus, "I want to give myself to the work of being a disciple that loves You and loves my neighbor more." Put down a marker.
- F. It may be that you're thinking, "I'm doing OK with that." Then come and celebrate. Re-commit to more of what God has in store for you.
- G. It may be that the Holy Spirit is prodding you to reach out to His leading and take hold of a deeper prayer life, or more passionate worship. It may be that He's asking you to join that ministry team or go deeper with that class or study group. Or joining together with our prayer groups consistently. Then come a commit to that.
- H. It may be that you've been here for a while and haven't fully committed to being a disciple of Jesus - an apprentice of Jesus. Come and commit your life to Him today and let's grow together in love for God and each other.
- I. I'm OK if every single one of us comes up here today...I'll be up here, for sure.
- J. Honestly, this isn't a test to pass, but a life to live for God.
- K. In a while, the praise team will lead us in a closing song.
- L. As you come, there'll be some music playing as we get ready for that.
- M. As you come, I'll lift up a time of prayer for us and then we'll close in song. Don't let this moment pass without getting real with Jesus for a few minutes.
- N. He's here. We're here. Let's pray...
- O. PRAY!
- P. Lord, I want to Be A Christian in my heart...