

March 5, 2017

Suffering Servant, Sovereign Lord ***Examining the Passover Lamb***

Mark 12:13 – 44

In our journey through the gospel of Mark, we are in the last week of Jesus' life on earth as He heads to the cross. He's entered Jerusalem to the wild acclaim of the crowds; and He's been met with the bitter antagonism of the civic and religious leaders of the Jews. And unwittingly, their antagonism is crucial to the fulfillment of the Scriptures. You see, Jesus comes to Jerusalem during this Passover week as the ultimate Passover Lamb. All the Passovers the Jews have celebrated since that first one in Egypt so long ago will be consummated in the death of the real Passover Lamb they will crucify in a few short days at the instigation of these guys. But before that happens, Mark, as do the rest of the gospels, tells the story of that last week through the interactions Jesus has with the Herodians, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. It began in the passage we looked at last week and concludes here in chapter 12.

The confrontation centers around five questions; four of which are asked of Jesus and one that He asks. And if we keep in mind that here is the ultimate Passover Lamb on display, these confrontations serve to not only highlight the wisdom and grace of Jesus, but confirm His place as the Passover Lamb. You see, in Exodus 12, the head of the house was commanded to take a lamb into the house for five days, from the tenth of Nissan to the fourteenth; and he was to examine the lamb to make sure it was without defect or blemish. This really served two purposes. The first was to make sure you hadn't overlooked any defect or blemish and it really was worthy to be the Passover sacrifice; and secondly, it would become part of your household. The kids would name it 'Fluffy' and cuddle it, dress it up like my wife used to do with her beagle, feed it secretly from the table and basically fall in love with it. This was on purpose so that when the lamb was killed, the ugliness of sin was utterly exposed as everyone in the family realized that this blameless lamb died for their sin.

Here, Jesus enters Jerusalem exactly on the tenth of Nissan and undergoes examination by the Jews until the fourteenth of Nissan when He was crucified. We are shown this in four scenes where Jesus is questioned by the civic and religious authorities. Essentially the questions challenge Jesus' authority, His allegiance, His eschatology, and His theology. As far as the Jewish religious leaders were concerned, they had two goals. They wanted to question Jesus in front of the crowds in order to turn the people against Him; and they were looking for a single thing to charge Him with a crime so they could put Him to death by Roman law. But after those five days of examination by the Pharisees, by the Sadducees, by the scribes and by the Herodians, Jesus has answered all their questions and objections and He was found to be without defect or blemish.

Ryan took us through the first question about His authority last Sunday, and so we'll look at the rest of them this morning. The second question is a challenge to Jesus' allegiance. *13 And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. 14 And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"* The point of all this was to make Jesus declare Himself for one side or the other. In other words, 'Where is your allegiance? Declare yourself.'

They think they've got Him because if He says 'No, don't pay the tax' then He'll be executed by the Romans as a revolutionary, and these guys will have done their job. But if He says, 'Yes, pay the tax' then all His talk about the kingdom of God will have been so much empty rhetoric and the people will know He's an imposter and He'll be discredited and their authority won't be challenged. If He says 'Pay the tax' He'll lose the people; and if He says, 'Don't pay the tax' He'll lose His life. It was a very good question. But you have to marvel at the way Jesus handles these guys. He refuses to be drawn in to a yes or no answer. *15 But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." 17 Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.*

First of all, Jesus upholds the right of earthly authorities to demand our limited allegiance. A denarius was a Roman coin, which at this time had the image of the emperor Tiberius Caesar on it. It was literally his, minted out of his wealth. The image was his and the inscription read, 'Tiberius Caesar, son of the God Augustus, Pontifex Maximus'. The claim was that Caesar was not only divine, he was the high priest as well, that's what Pontifex Maximus meant. And Jesus says, 'This is Caesar's coin, it's got his picture and description on it, so give him what is his.' In other words, Jesus was affirming the legitimacy of Roman rule, and its right to demand a limited allegiance. But at the same time He was also limiting the extent of human government. 'Give to Caesar what is Caesars. It's got his image and his inscription. It's his money, you have to give it.' But there are boundaries to his domain. 'Give to God what is God's.' He upholds the right of human government to demand a limited allegiance, but He also undermines it. Caesar gets what Caesar owns – but that's it.

Secondly, Jesus points them to our ultimate allegiance. In answering the question, Jesus subtly changes the verb. They ask Him 'Should we pay?' which is a word that literally means to give as a gift. 'Should we give Caesar the tax?' And Jesus in answering says, 'Render to Caesar what is Caesars', a word that means 'Pay Caesar what he deserves. And 'Render to God what is His', that is 'Pay God what He deserves'. What does Caesar deserve? He deserves his money, but he doesn't deserve your ultimate allegiance. He deserves his money with his image, but you bear the image of God. On the one hand He's actually saying, 'You must submit to the government'; but on the other He's saying 'You must not give your ultimate allegiance to any government. You must not worship this so-called god'. Caesar may deserve his money, but God deserves your worship. Caesar may have thought himself to be divine, but Jesus points to the real divinity. Caesar's face is on the coin, but God's face is on you. Jesus makes the connection for us that while Caesar may own all the coins, God owns all of us and our ultimate allegiance belongs to Him.

The third question comes from the Sadducees. The previous question came from the secularists, now here come the rationalists. The Sadducees didn't believe in angels or the spirit world, they didn't believe in miracles or heaven and they didn't believe in any kind of resurrection. Because they only believed in the first five books of the Law, in which they saw no mention of resurrection, they refused to believe in life after death. In other words you couldn't quote passages from any of the prophets or Psalms that do talk about resurrection to make your point with them because they refused to accept those books as divinely inspired.

So they came at Jesus with what they thought was an airtight argument: **18** *And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying, 19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife."* Their question was grounded in the issue of *levirate* or brother-in-law marriage mentioned in Genesis 38:8-10 and in the book of Ruth, and explained in Deuteronomy 25:5-6: *"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel."*

What the Sadducees were trying to do was to reduce the argument for a resurrection to the absurd. In other words they were saying that if there really was a resurrection there would be chaos in heaven. They were approaching the problem strictly from a rational, logical point of view. And haven't we all wondered about that? I mean, you fall in love here on earth with a wonderful woman, get married, have kids, grow old together, and then you die and go to heaven, and all of a sudden you're not married anymore. Of course there are those who are probably wondering about those other two wives they've had and what that awkward scene in heaven will look like. The Sadducees were doing what we do, applying what we know about this world to the next. And Jesus says that is an argument from ignorance. In his book called *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn says, *"We tend to start with Earth and reason up toward Heaven, when instead we should start with Heaven and reason down toward Earth."*¹

Listen to what Jesus says, **24** *Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?"* First of all, He tells these scholars of the law that they are ignorant both of the law of God and the power of God. What they claim to know best, the Torah, they actually know least. And because they don't understand the Bible, they misunderstand God. Ignorance of the Scriptures inevitably leads to a distorted view of God and what He can do. It leads either to your god being too small or to your god being too weak. You see, the Scriptures tell us that this life here on earth is but a shadow of the things to come. You understand what a shadow is? A shadow is a two dimensional image of a three dimensional object. You can tell certain things from a shadow but you don't know the full reality until you see the actual object.

1 Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

The Bible urges Christians to set their hearts and minds on heaven precisely because that is the reality of the universe. Heaven is more real than anything we see or hear or experience on this earth. What we see and hear and experience on earth are the shadows of this ultimate reality. In a very real sense, what we have here is a two-dimensional existence, with occasional, fleeting impressions on our best days of what heaven might be like. The very best of this life is still only a shadow impression of what heaven will be; and conversely, the very worst of this life is still only a shadow of what hell will be, precisely because we live in what C.S. Lewis called the 'Shadowlands'. If you don't know the Scriptures, you'll be lost in the rational world of the Sadducees, and you won't know the power of the God that created the heavens and the earth, and will one day bring in the new heavens and the new earth in all its glorious, brilliant reality.

And then Jesus gives them a dose of heavenly reality. *25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.* And our first thought might be, "Well if that's supposed to comfort me, it's not working". Others might be thinking, "Hallelujah, free at last!" But the world of the resurrection is very different from the world we inhabit right now. You and I will still be you and I, but we will live forever in a new reality. You see the things of this temporary life are meant to point in a shadow sense to the things of our forever life. Marriage is like that. Remember the words of the apostle Paul about marriage in Ephesians 5: *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*²

In other words, marriage here on earth points to the reality of the relationship with Christ we were meant to have. The deep intimacy in marriage, the joy and closeness of our marriage relationship was meant to foreshadow as it were, the incredible and profound terms of our relationship with God in eternity. That is why our marriages here on earth are temporary. I like how Charles Spurgeon puts it: *"God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean."*³

This is hard to wrap our minds around because we are so earthbound in our thinking. But I will tell you this. You will never be disappointed in the joys of heaven. Because I can hear some of you thinking, "Whoa, if there is no marriage in heaven, there won't be any sex. I'm not going." But as Sam Storms puts it: *"I can assure you that whatever physical or sensual pleasures one experiences in this life through sexual intimacy will be magnified and intensified apart from sexual intercourse in the next life. I don't know how God will do it, but I am convinced that the joys of heaven, the happiness and pleasures of heaven, will infinitely exceed those on earth."*⁴ In other words, don't reason from earth to heaven because you literally can't imagine the infinite superlativeness of forever life.

2 Ephesians 5:31-32 ESV

3 Randy Alcorn, *We Shall See God: Charles Spurgeon's Classical Devotional Thoughts on Heaven*,

4 Sam Storms, *Tough Topics: Biblical Answers to 25 Challenging Questions*, (Crossway, 2013), 228.

And finally Jesus refutes these supposed authorities on the law of God by showing them from the only books they accept the truth of the resurrection. **26** *And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.*" Hundreds of years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead, God comes to Moses and says, "I am their God". He doesn't say "I **was** the God of..." because they're not dead. They're still alive. Moreover, this statement implies and confirms the covenant God had made with them, and that covenant was an eternal covenant. Tim Keller said, "Notice that Jesus did not hang the hope of life after death (like the Greeks did) on the idea of an immortal part of us. Rather, He rests in the commitment of God to us. (I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). This is a very powerful argument for life after death. We have a God, who cannot, at our death, scrap that which is precious to Him!"⁵

No doubt noting that Jesus has confounded the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, up comes a scribe to try his hand at questioning Jesus. **28** *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?"* He was not trying to say that there are some commandments that are important and some that are not. The rabbinic tradition had identified 613 commands in the first five books of the Bible and had made distinctions among them as either being 'light' commandments that were less demanding, and 'heavy' commandments with severe penalties for disobedience. This guy is asking, 'Which commandment is the heaviest? Which one should we obey even at the expense of the others?' For example, if the commandment to circumcise your son on the eighth day conflicted with the commandment to 'do no work on the Sabbath', the command to circumcise your son took precedence.

But Jesus gives this guy more than he asks for. He answers his request for one supreme commandment with two: Love God supremely and love your neighbor as yourself. And if you think about it, if you want to know what is most important to God, listen to God Himself answer the question. **29** *Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 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.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* In other words, the most important part of obedience to God is to love Him more than anyone or anything else, and to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.

Love God supremely. How do we do that? What does that mean? If you understand the context of Jesus' answer, you begin to understand that to love God means that it starts with obeying Him. Jesus quotes the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6. *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.* And the context of the Shema is instructive.

5 Tim Keller, *The Gospel of Mark*, (New York, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005), 161.

To love God like this is to obey His commandments all the days of your life (6:2) It means that you will teach these commandments to your children and grandchildren, (6:2) when you sit, walk, lie down and rise up, remembering that He is the God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. (6:7) It means that the words of His law will be on your heart (6:6) and on your home. (6:9) To love God supremely means that *You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you...for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God*, (6:14-15). The fact that this is strengthened by the repetition of the word **all** four times – all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength – emphasizes the comprehensive nature of how we are to love God. In short, it calls for the total commitment of our entire being. Someone once said, *"It does not take much of a man to be a believer, but it takes all there is of him"*.

And for the first time, Jesus takes the command in Leviticus 19, *you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD*. and marries it to Deuteronomy 6 to create the heaviest commandment. In other words, the love that grows out of our love for God compels us to share that love with others. And Leviticus 19 shows us that this love is not just some sort of good feeling toward others. This love is shown in very practical ways. Loving your neighbor as yourself means that you will care for the poor (19:10), you won't lie or steal (19:11), you will be honest in business, and care for the physically handicapped (19:14), deal justly with everyone (19:15), avoid slander and watch out for the life of others (19:16), refuse to hold hatred against your brother and also faithfully rebuke him when he is wrong (19:17), and not take revenge or bear grudges (19:18). When you obey this second commandment, you demonstrate that you have embraced the first.

And then we have the irony of this scribe telling Jesus how right He is. *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. 33 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 Jesus says "Right! You are really close to entering the kingdom of God". Which raises the question, what did Jesus mean here? Was He saying "Right, you are so close, just try harder! You're almost there!". *34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."*

No, what Jesus was saying was that the entrance to the kingdom is through a relationship with God Himself – Love God supremely. Loving your neighbor as yourself is the outflow of loving God. And I believe that scribe began to see that and Jesus saw that. Which is why He said "You're not far from the kingdom. You've been trying to enter by doing the obedience thing. But you've left out the relationship thing. Love God supremely, then loving your neighbor as yourself will be the evidence that you have entered the kingdom." Obeying rules and regulations will never get you into the kingdom because you can never measure up to God's perfect standard.

Finally the examination is over. The Lamb had been examined and found to be blameless. That's why Mark says, *And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.* Their done with Him, but Jesus is not done with them. It is His turn to ask a question: *35 And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? 36 David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.' 37 David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?" And the great throng heard him gladly.*

You see, these people were expecting a Messiah, the Christ, who is the son of David. They were looking for a human Messiah, but Jesus throws them a curve. He points out that the divine record testifies to the fact that this Messiah is not only human, He's divine. He is not simply David's son, He is David's Sovereign. David's words in Psalm 110 won't work if Messiah is just a human being. He must be more and this is where Jesus is trying to take them. And this is exactly where they refused to go. They didn't see that Jesus had divine authority; they didn't understand they owed Him their highest allegiance; they didn't see the scope of eternity; they didn't understand that everything flowed from loving God supremely; they didn't see that He was not only the son of David but the Son of God.

But even as Jesus was being examined, don't we feel our own hearts being examined? Do we understand that Jesus has authority over all our lives? Do we live like that? Do we really see that because we bear His image and belong to Him we owe Him our highest allegiance? Is the starting place for our understanding of everything grounded in the word of God and the power of God instead of rooted in our earthbound view of how things work? Is God the supreme love in our lives? Do our lives bear witness to this in the way we treat those around us? This text is asking these questions of us this morning and a lot depends on our answers.

And how do we answer the question Jesus asks? It is essentially the same question He asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Do you understand that Jesus is more than a good man and a great teacher? He is the very Son of God sent to take our place on the cross as the Passover Lamb. The perfect Lamb of God, fully examined and not found wanting, went to the cross to make a way for us to be reconciled to God and come into relationship with Him. My prayer is that your eyes are opened this morning to see the Lamb of God, crucified in your place, nailed to the tree for your sins, worthy of your total submission and allegiance and love.

Our gracious heavenly Father,

Open our eyes to see the beauty of Jesus this morning. The perfect Lamb of God, slain for our transgressions and raised to life by the power of God in order to bring us to God in eternal joy and fellowship. Help us see with our eyes opened to eternal things and filled with the hope of rising again. Let our days be marked by unswerving allegiance and love to You and know that our delight in You here on earth is but a shadow of our eternal joy in heaven we pray, in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.