



ENCOUNTER

Towards Simplicity

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Discussion Notes

The Crossing Church

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OPENING

We are making a transition on our journey through the Gospel of Mark. While the first half of Mark centers on Identity - Who Jesus Is, the second half is about His Purpose. Jesus' ultimate purpose is to give His life on the cross. We are getting up close and personal with the life of Christ on this path that has the potential to change our lives. God is offering us hope, change and life. Remember, the closer we get to Him, the more our lives will change.

SCRIPTURE¹

Mark 12:13-34 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising – have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: '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 mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Exodus 3:5-6 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I AM the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

OBSERVATION

This week we are looking at three groups of political and religious leaders who asked three questions of Jesus in order to trick and discredit Him. The Pharisees required a strict adherence to ritual law and traditions; the Sadducees were an influential Jewish sect that denied the existence of the spirit world and

¹ All scripture is NIV unless otherwise noted.



any possibility of a resurrection; and the Herodians, who were in agreement with the Sadducees, but politically were pro-Herod and supported a family of corrupt kings who ruled Israel. They asked questions which they thought would stump Jesus because they had one thing in common: they wanted to get rid of Jesus.

APPLICATION

The first question involved the paying of taxes to the oppressor and Jesus said that they needed to pay their obligations while rendering to God what is His. The second question regarded life after death and Jesus said that our God is the great I AM, the everlasting God who has always been and will always be. The third question regarded the commandments and which are the greatest. Jesus answers that all previous commandments are fulfilled by obeying two: Love God and love each other. If we live by these two, we won't violate all of the others that came before. He fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets.

Question: How do you express your love for others? How do you express your love for God?

We all have questions, don't we? When we have an issue or a struggle, or something we don't understand, we question Him. Sometimes, if we don't receive an immediate answer, we conclude that He doesn't love us or care about our situation. We may even decide that He doesn't exist. We get stuck in our unresolved questions and they become a barrier to our faith. Maybe we have assumed that there are no answers to our questions. Just like the Pharisees, we put God in a box and try to play games with Him. We underestimate His POWER! But God is a great mystery and we must take some things on faith. The wisest decision we can make is to go to Christian friends or pastors or ALPHA to find answers because we are seeking to know our magnificent God.

Question: What lingering questions do you have about God and your faith?

Question: Specifically, to whom do you go to ask your questions?

Remember Job? He was angry with God because of all the tragedies he had endured. He questioned God who answered using His own scriptures to remind Job of how mighty He is. (Job 38 & 39) However complex our questions are, God keeps pointing us in the same direction: to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love the people He created.

Question: Tell us about a time when you didn't believe God would answer your question or your prayer. How did He come through for you?

In conclusion, Jesus simplified all of the commandments for us and combined them into two. Is it possible that if we simplified our lives we could devote more time and effort to the things God values most? We have spent a lot of energy in creating complex lives: acquiring things, stature, and the respect of people, but what have we lost in the process? If we are willing to surrender all to God, we may need to simplify our lives and give up the things that steal our time and energy.

Question: What would you do if you determined to simplify your life?

Question: What could you do to love God deeper and love people greater?

Question: When do you plan to read your Bible from Genesis to Revelation? Many of our questions are answered there.

As you wrestle with your most complex questions, rest in God's most simple response: love God, love people, serve others.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we have many questions, but we know that You will reveal everything to us as You please. Help us to find satisfaction in living for You and trusting that You will give the answers to us in Your good time. In Jesus' name. Amen.