

Mark 12: 28-32

28 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?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." 32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 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." 34 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.

Shema Yisrael, the video we just watched, is a very important prayer in the Jewish religion. We'll talk about it more in just a few minutes. I wanted you to hear the opening lines.

Last week we finished chapter 10 in the Gospel of Mark with the story of Blind Bartimaeus. This week we skip forward to chapter 12. As we do this, we skip over several important happenings in the life of Christ. Probably most important, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem. In chapter 11, verses 1-11 we have the scripture we always read on Palm Sunday, the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the donkey. We've skipped over those verses, so now he is in Jerusalem and the chief priests, the Pharisees, the Elders, the Sadducees, and the Scribes are beginning to question him. You have to remember, Jesus is a threat to their power, their way of life. He has only been in town a day and he has already thrown the moneychangers out of the temple. So the temple leaders are beginning to ask him questions trying to trick him. They ask about his authority to do the things he has been doing; they ask him about paying taxes; they question him about how widows are to marry the brothers of their dead husbands. Each time Jesus is able to turn their questions on them by asking them questions. Now we come to verse 28, where we start today's scripture lesson. Before we go there; we need to remember that the New Testament has not been written yet. Actually, the Gospel of Mark we have spent so much time in this year was supposedly written some seventy years after the death of Jesus Christ. The Bible as we know and study it doesn't exist. The Torah was the book the Jews used as their holy scripture. Within the Torah were the laws, rules, and regulations governing Jews. Obviously we find the 10 Commandments in the Torah, just as we do in our Old Testament, but those ten laws are but the beginning. I think you've heard me say this before, there were 613 laws the Jews were required to live by. Of these, there are 365 laws that tell you what **not** to do, and another 248 laws that tell you what **to** do. The Scribes were the keepers of the law. According to Wikipedia, "Scribes in Ancient Israel, ...were distinguished professionals who could exercise functions we would associate with lawyers, government ministers, judges..." They were the keepers of the law, the teachers of the law, and at times, they interpreted the law. Now we get to today's scripture lesson; Chapter 12, verse 28, **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?"** A Scribe had been listening to the Pharisees and chief priest trying to trick Jesus. He recognized that they had been trying to set a trap for Jesus, but he also recognized that Jesus knew the law. So he asked his own question, of all the laws, which one is the most important.

Back in September, I challenged each of you to start your morning with this question; **God, what can I do for you today?** I wonder how many of you are still starting your morning asking that question. Each morning when devout Jews woke up, they quoted the Shema. First, let's see if we can understand what the Shema actually is. I copied this definition of the Shema is from the jewishvirtuallibrary.org "The *Shema* is an affirmation of Judaism and a declaration of faith in one God. The obligation to recite the *Shema* is separate from the obligation to pray and a Jew is obligated to say *Shema* in the morning and at night. Now, let me read you another quote, this one from Wikipedia: *Shema Yisrael* ("Hear, O Israel") are the first two words of a section

of the Torah, and are the title of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. The first verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is one," found in Deuteronomy 6:4. Observant Jews consider the Shema to be the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism, and its twice-daily recitation is a religious commandment. It is traditional for Jews to say the Shema as their first words and as their last words, and for parents to teach their children to say it before they go to sleep at night." The prayer goes on to quote several other verses in Deuteronomy and Numbers, but the first two verses read, **Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, is one Lord. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** Hopefully I haven't lost you here, but it is important for you to understand why Jesus answered the Scribe as he did. As a devout Jew, Jesus would understand the importance of the Shema and at the same time, He understood exactly what the Scribe was asking. Listen again to verses 29 and 30: **"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.'** He answered the scribe with the first portion of the Shema. But, Jesus added another dimension to the Shema. Did you pick up what He added: He added "your mind". The Shema says heart, soul and strength. Christ said heart, soul, **mind** and strength. By adding the dimension of the mind, Christ is recognizing that man has the ability to think for himself and he should use that ability to want to worship God. Not worship just because it is the law. But he doesn't stop there. Listen to verse 31: ³¹ **The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'** This second commandment or law is not part of the Shema. Actually, in giving us what He called the second great commandment, Jesus quoted from Leviticus 19:18, **Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.** Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus Christ took 613 laws and condensed them into one, **Love!** Let's spend a few minutes looking at the first commandment, piece by piece: Christ said, **Love the LORD your God:**

Love the LORD your God: With all your heart: Sometimes the word heart is used to refer to the seat of our emotions, but that is not the intention here. What Jesus is saying is that we are to love the Lord without pretense. We are to be genuine in our love for Him and not to just say we love that Lord, not just love the Lord for an hour on Sunday morning, and then live as if He didn't exist the rest of the week. We must live that love 24/7. We are supposed to be genuine in our love and not be hypocrites.

Love the LORD your God: With all Our Soul - This involves the idea of our emotions. That is, our love for God should touch us at our most intimate levels. We are to love the Lord with all our emotional self. You should feel the love you have for God inside you. Each one of us here loves someone with our soul; whether it 's a parent, a child, a spouse, a sibling, we each have someone we love with our entire soul. They are a genuine part of us. Life without that person would leave an enormous hole in your soul. That is the love you should have for God, only deeper.

Love the LORD your God: With All Our Mind - That is, we are to involve the intellect in our life for the Lord. This love is not mindless and empty-headed, but we are to love the Lord because we have considered Him, meditated on Him and therefore make a conscious decision to love the Lord. In other words, you shouldn't love God just because the preachers says so, but you should love Him because of who He is and what He has done for you. He gave you a mind to use, use it.

Love the LORD your God: With All Our Strength - This implies that our love for the Lord is not to be a thing that is done in word alone, but should also see expression in our physical bodies. If we love the Lord, then our body is His as well. We have no right to separate the physical from the spiritual. True love for Jesus is always carried out by the physical man, as well as the spiritual man. Combine all four, heart, soul, mind, and strength and you wind up with the perfect love God has for us and wants us to have for him.

And the second commandment: To call it secondary is misleading, because both of these are so closely intertwined. In fact, it is absolutely impossible to do either one without the other. Jesus is simply telling us that

we are to love others with the same love which we have for ourselves. That is, we are to place others in such a position that we are constantly looking out for their best interests, their welfare and their best good. The whole idea here is that we are to love others with the same type of compassion and obligation that we feel toward ourselves. If we would not do something to or for ourselves then why would we do it to or for our neighbor? We all grew up hearing the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I think Christ is saying to take this to a deeper level.

Jesus is very plain about these two laws. We are to put God first. So I have to ask you, is He first in your life? Is He ahead of your children, ahead of your spouse, ahead of your parents. Have you put God ahead of your things: your job, your money, your house, your boat, your car, your... well, you see what I mean. Each of us have things that we hold dear. Do we hold God above each of them. If not, why? What can they do for us in eternity? The point I'm trying to make is, do you put God above everything else? He put you first on his list, He gave you His only son and let Him die on the cross for you. Shouldn't He be first on your list?