January 11, 2015

Mark 12:28-34

Jesus’ Priority: What Matters Most?

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Mark 12:28-34 The Message

One of the religion scholars came up. Hearing the lively exchanges of question and answer and seeing how sharp Jesus was in his answers, he put in his question: “Which is most important of all the commandments?” Jesus said, “The first in importance is, ‘Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.’ And here is the second: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment that ranks with these.” The religion scholar said, “A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate—that God is one and there is no other. And loving him with all passion and intelligence and energy, and loving others as well as you love yourself. Why, that’s better than all offerings and sacrifices put together!” When Jesus realized how insightful he was, he said, “You’re almost there, right on the border of God’s kingdom.” After that, no one else dared ask a question.

Up in the Air begins in an airport. Ryan Bingham, consummate flier, is always on an airplane, and flies 332 days a year. He says, “To know me is to fly with me”. He is a member of every travel club you can join and his lifetime goal is to get 10 million frequent flier miles. He spends most evenings by himself in his hotel room. He goes from city to city to fire people because their bosses do not want to do it themselves. He also gives seminars about achieving success. His favorite theme is how to travel lightly through life. He says to the people gathered there, “How much does your life weigh? Imagine that you carried a backpack and you pack it with everything in your life. You start with the little things. The knickknacks, then you add the larger stuff, the clothes, the TV, then your couch, your car, your home. Stuff all of that in your backpack. Now fill it with people. Start with casual acquaintances, friends of friends, folks around the office, then you move to people that you trust your most intimate secrets with, brothers, sisters, children, parents, husband, partner, wife, girlfriend. Make no mistake. Your relationships are the heaviest components in your life. All those arguments, secrets, negotiations.” Then he says, “The slower we move, the faster we die. Make no mistake, moving is living.” He sees relationships as slowing us down in life. He says “some animals were meant to carry each other, to live symbiotically over a lifetime, star-crossed lovers, monogamous swans.” But he says, “We are not swans, we are sharks.”

Bingham’s life seems so tidy and neat. It is not cluttered with all of the demands of life as a husband, father, dog owner. Another character confronts him at the end of the movie and says that he is living in a cocoon of self-banishment. She tells him he has set up a way of life that makes it impossible to make human connections.

What is important in our lives and what place do our relationships with other people have in our lives? What matters and why? The sermon series that we are in the second week of is titled, “What’s the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian? It is based on a book written by Martin Thielen, and the subtitle is “What Matters Most?”

And Jesus gives us the answer. Mark 12:28-34 from The Message translation, “One of the religion scholars came up. Hearing the lively exchanges of question and answer and seeing how sharp Jesus was in his answers, he put in his question: “Which is most important of all the commandments?” Jesus said, “The first in importance is, ‘Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.’ And here is the second: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment that ranks with these.” The religion scholar said, “A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate—that God is one and there is no other. And loving him with all passion and intelligence and energy, and loving others as well as you love yourself. Why, that’s better than all offerings and sacrifices put together!” When Jesus realized how insightful he was, he said, “You’re almost there, right on the border of God’s kingdom.” After that, no one else dared ask a question.”

PRAY. What is the most important thing? Loving God with all that we are and all that we have and loving our neighbor as ourselves. This passage is found in all four of the Gospels, in different forms. And in Mark’s version that we read today, it has something that the others don’t. When Jesus sees that the person who asked this question is getting it, Jesus says, “you are not far from the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God for Jesus is the life that we were meant to live and the world as it was meant to be. It is more important than any rules. Love of God and love for your neighbor.

Jesus is telling us that the essence of life is relationship. Ryan Bingham in the Up in the Air movie would disagree with Jesus. Would you side with Jesus or with Ryan Bingham? How important are our relationships?

As a community of faith, we are all helping each other find the right way to God. And it starts with an encounter with Jesus. As a Christian, I believe in Jesus’ life, in his teaching, in his example, in his death and in his resurrection. “The nonnegotiable item in Christianity is Jesus Christ. Take Jesus out of the church, and you might have an impressive religious organization, a nice building, and noble ethical teachings, but you won’t have Christianity.”

In his new book “Christ Actually,” James Carroll says, “If Jesus were not regarded as God almost from the start of his movement, he would be of no interest to us. We would never have heard of him. Nothing but his divinity accounts for his place in Western culture — or in my heart: not his ethic, which was admirable but hardly uncommon; not his preaching, which was firmly in line with Jewish proclamation; not his heroic suffering, which was typical of many anti-Roman Jewish resisters; not his wonder working, which was attributed to all kinds of charismatic figures in the ancient world. Nothing but a two-thousand-year-old divinity claim puts Jesus before us today.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

But, Jesus is mysterious, I don’t understand how Jesus can be both fully human and fully divine. But, “if we can understand him, comprehend just what God was up to in him, then we are lost. Because we need something beyond us, something bigger than us, something just beyond our grasp.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Who is Jesus to you?

I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). I place my faith and trust in Jesus. I accept his love, grace, and forgiveness. And I try to follow him as my Lord. Yes, there are days that I question, and days that I doubt. But, Jesus has transformed my life and continues to transform it. Jesus gives my life meaning, direction, and purpose. Jesus gives me courage and strength for living. Jesus gives me hope for life and hope even for death. My faith in Jesus Christ is the most important part of my life.[[3]](#footnote-3)

And when my parents baptized me when I was 5 months old, they were celebrating what God had already done. They were committing to teach me about this Jesus that would transform my life. I find my identity and my worth in my identity as a child of God and as a follower of Jesus the Christ. At his baptism Jesus heard these words, “You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.” And in our baptism, we are accepted by God. We hear those words, you are a beloved child of God, my beloved daughter, my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. Baptism reminds us that wherever we go, whatever we do, or whatever may be done to us, God loves us, God accepts us, God holds onto us.[[4]](#footnote-4) Today is a day for us to celebrate our baptism and blessing. May we hear, see, and feel the promise and blessing of baptism once again.[[5]](#footnote-5) For we are marked by the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever.

In baptism God loves us forever. Baptism is the promise that God will never let us go.[[6]](#footnote-6) As we celebrate our baptism today, may we remember that it is our job to never let God move from the number one position in our lives. Listen, the Lord your God is one. So love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy. And love others as well as you love yourself. There is no other commandment that ranks with these. What matters most in your life?

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/fully-human-fully-divine/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/fully-human-fully-divine/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This paragraph is taken nearly verbatim from Martin Thielen’s page 71 because I could think of no way to improve upon his words. I believe them to be true. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/baptism-of-our-lord-b/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/baptism-of-our-lord-b/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/baptism-of-our-lord-b/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)