

# Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”  
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”  
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

## **The Great Commandment**

**April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018**

**Mark 12:28-34**

**Rev. Paul Carter**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 12:28; that's on page 848 in your pew Bibles. This is one of the best known and most beloved passages in all the Bible. You will have heard it before I'm sure. We'll read it, we'll try to understand and then we will attempt to respond to it as the Lord have us do. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 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?” 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.” 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.” 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28–34 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

As we've mentioned now several times over the last several weeks, Mark is showing us here 3 consecutive conflict stories that all took place in the temple complex during the last week of Jesus' life. The first conflict encounter was with the Pharisees and Herodians and concerned taxation and the proper place of secular and civil authority. The second confrontation was with

the Sadducees and had to do with the authority of Scripture and the reality of the resurrection. This last confrontation is with a single, solitary scribe – and he doesn't appear anywhere near as hostile as either of the two previous parties. He actually sounds like a reasonable guy – he appears to be a sincere seeker. He is wrestling with the Word of God and he sees in Jesus a teacher of remarkable insight and enormous authority and so he comes and asks Jesus a question about the heart and substance of the law. It is a very interesting conversation and we hear in it a variety of things.

The first thing we hear is some very valuable instruction.

### **Instruction**

Jesus answers a question here that I assume all of us in this room are very interested in. James Edwards put it this way,

The fact that Jesus adds the commandment from Lev 19:18 to the *Shema* indicates that it takes both commandments to realize **the one will of God**.<sup>1</sup>

Are you hearing that? In his answer to the scribe Jesus gives us THE ONE WILL OF GOD – I am very interested in that and I imagine you are too. One of the most common questions I get in pastoral ministry is some version of this: “Pastor, how can I know the will of God for my life?”

Well here is the answer. Jesus is telling you that the ONE WILL OF GOD for your life is that you would 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 love your neighbour as yourself – THAT is God's will for your life!

That's the answer to the question!

If you do that – then you are doing what God wants you to do with your life.

That's incredibly valuable instruction so let's take a minute and make sure we understand it.

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<sup>1</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 372.

The first thing you should probably understand is that it wasn't totally unique – meaning other Jewish Rabbis had said similar things before Jesus said what he said in this passage. In fact 20 years before Jesus, Rabbi Hillel was asked a very similar question, this time by a Gentile. That fellow asked Hillel what God required and what the law was really all about – but he didn't want a long answer. Preachers can give really long answers to really simple questions – I don't know if you know that but it's true. So this guy said: “Tell me the will of God, tell me what the law is all about – but you have to answer while I'm standing on one leg”. Boil this down for me into something I can receive and assimilate in the 8 seconds that I can balance on one leg – that was the question – and this was the answer that Hillel gave. He said:

“What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.”<sup>2</sup>

That's what he said – while this Gentile brother was standing on one leg.

And it sounds a lot like what Jesus said here – only Jesus back to the very foundation – he says that you can't love your neighbour until you love the Lord – loving God is primary and loving neighbour flows logically out of that. That was the unique contribution of Jesus. No Jewish teacher before Jesus had ever connected those two things in precisely that way – but it became standard Christian fare.

The Apostle John for example said:

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20–21 ESV)

Do you see that? Christians understood that these two things – love of God and love for one another – cannot be logically separated. True love of neighbour springs from a restored relationship to God.

Good theology is like good plumbing – that's what Jesus is saying here. If the main supply line

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<sup>2</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 432.

into your house is broken then it doesn't even matter about your internal pipes – you can get water to the bathroom or to the kitchen until you are receiving water from the well. But if you fix the main line then you will be able to overflow in your love to others – that's the idea. And that's Christianity in a nutshell. If you love God without any interest or concern for neighbour – that's mysticism. That's bad. That's deficient. That's heretical. And if you love your neighbour without any reference to God that's humanism – that's moralism and that's bad too. That's empty. That's unsustainable and that is still ultimately sinful because to be righteous you have to do the right thing, the right way for the RIGHT REASON – so Christianity is the narrow road between those two ditches – mysticism and humanism.

Now in terms of how Jesus phrases this instruction, he gives the first commandment – the greatest commandment – the foundational commandment – in words borrowed from Deuteronomy 6:4 – let me read that to you. It says:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4–5 ESV)

Alright, there it is! Jesus quotes the Shema – the Jewish Creed. This was the Jewish version of the Apostle's Creed – they said it every morning and it was understood as the foundational theological commitment of Biblical Judaism. Now what do you notice about that?

Jesus ADDED TO IT!

Don't you love that? Look carefully – what did the Shema say?

It said: “Love the Lord your God with all your HEART, and with all your SOUL and with all your MIGHT”. What did Jesus ADD to that?

With all your MIND.

That's not there. The Shema talked about 3 ways to love God and Jesus adds a 4<sup>th</sup> way – and he can do that BECAUSE HE'S GOD!

Don't you like that? Jesus was always doing that – that's why people said:

“What is this? A new teaching with authority!” (Mark 1:27 ESV)

The scribes didn't teach that way – Mark already told us that; he said:

he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:29 ESV)

Jesus did this all the time – he would AFFIRM what was in the Old Testament and then he would ADD to it – you have heard it said do not commit adultery, but I tell you do not even look at a woman with lust in your heart – do you hear that? He affirmed the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment – do not commit adultery – don't sleep with your neighbour's wife – and then he added to it – and don't watch pornography either – don't entertain sexual fantasies either – he ADDED A WHOLE THING HERE! He ADDED to the Word of God! Only God gets to do that – and Jesus did it all the time.

And that's helpful for us to see because it shows us how the Bible goes together. The New Testament doesn't CONTRADICT the Old Testament – it clarifies it, fulfills it and expands upon it – and that's what you see Jesus doing here.

Now, when it comes to the second commandment – the second most important commandment – Jesus gives us that in the language of Leviticus 19:18 – let me read that to you. It says:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18 ESV)

So the second greatest commandment is given – in the Bible – in contrast to a person's natural inclinations. Fallen human beings are naturally inclined to seek their own revenge and to withhold forgiveness – is that true? You know that's true. If you don't know that's true just come over to my house and watch my children play with each other. What happens when a child takes a toy from another child? You take it back and you smack the kid over the head with that toy – that's what kids do when mom and dad aren't in the room. And kids aren't very good at forgiving either – its hard for them – and its hard for us. We never really grow up in terms of our essential nature. Human beings want to get back at those who wrong them and we want to withhold

forgiveness from those who hurt us – and the Bible tells us to resist and reject those inclinations and instead to love our neighbour as ourself. You are forgiving towards yourself, you protect and care for yourself, you give yourself a pass for stuff all the time – now go ahead and DO THAT to your neighbour. And then on the backside of that command it reminds them that this, after all, is how God has treated them. God has been merciful to them – remember the whole incident with the Golden Calf? God could have obliterated you – God could have held a grudge on that score and who would have blamed him? But he was merciful and he forgave you – now go and do thou likewise. Treat others as God has treated you.

Again – this became part of the essential Christian DNA. Jesus said this kind of stuff all the time – in fact, it is woven into the very words of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray:

and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12 ESV)

God forgave you – so you need to forgive others – or the chain will be broken. Jesus said that – he said:

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14–15 ESV)

Do you see that? It's all connected! God goes first – obviously – but then we respond. We do unto others as God has done to us – that's what it means to love your neighbour.

Now, just before we leave this instruction – let's just notice that love – for Jesus – was not without content and it was not without reference to the law. When he defines love he doesn't just pull thoughts or feelings out of the air – he gives an answer **ROOTED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW**. He quotes from Deuteronomy and he quotes from the Holiness Code in Leviticus. That is hugely significant! Love and law are not separated in the Bible the way they are so often separated in the contemporary church.

The law teaches us how to love.

It's loving to honour your parents.

It's loving to not kill people. Isn't it? Isn't that loving? To protect life and to cherish life and to respect other people's lives? Isn't that loving? Sure it is.

And it's loving to not commit adultery – let's go one further since Jesus did – and say that it's loving not to watch pornography. That's someone's daughter isn't it? She's going to regret that career decision later in life isn't she? She might even have been forced into that work against her will so you FUNDING that is unloving. And it's unloving to your wife. How is she going to feel safe and confident in your bed if you've just been watching that? She's going to feel inadequate and unsafe – and that isn't loving.

And it's not loving to steal. When you download music off the internet illegally it makes it harder for artists to give their lives to making the world beautiful. That's not loving.

And it's not loving to lie. Lying hurts – think of how often David laments the wounds he has received from liars and slanderers in the Book of Psalms – the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment is the most commonly referenced commandment in the Book of Psalms, did you know that? True story. Because lying hurts. It's not loving to say things that aren't true.

And it's not loving to covet. Jealousy makes it hard to wish people well. Jealousy makes everyone in your life feel inadequate – it isn't loving.

Do you see how that works?

Law and love go together! The law shows us how to love God – that's what the first 4 commandments are for – and the law shows us how to love each other – that's what the last 6 commandments are for.

Love is the fulfilling of the law.

That's the instruction in this passage and it is worth it's weight in gold.

But there is more here that I want you to see – and we'll move faster now, I promise. The next thing I want you to see is the warning – there is a warning in this passage too, did you spot it?

## Warning

Look at the very end of the story. Jesus and this scribe basically seem to get on the same page with respect to the will of God and the sum and substance of the law. They agree that it's about loving God and loving neighbour – so that's good right? Except, look at what Jesus says:

he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (Mark 12:34 ESV)

When you first read that you think, well that's kind of nice. It's better to be close than far – except that at the end of the day, salvation isn't really about close or far – its about in or out and this guy – close as he may be – is still OUT. And OUTSIDE IS BAD - Jesus told a story once about people who were close but still outside. They came – too late and began to knock on the door and they called out to the Master and said:

‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ 27 But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 13:25–28 ESV)

Jesus didn't have any good news for people who were close but still outside. Outside is bad – whether you had hung out with Jesus, agreed with Jesus or said nice things about Jesus. Outside is bad – and this brother is outside.

What Jesus is saying here is that UNDERSTANDING and AGREEMENT do not equal CONVERSION. This brother AGREED with Jesus and this brother understood what the will of God was – but that's not the same thing as being saved. The Apostle James said the same thing to the same sort of people – he said:

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19 ESV)

The demons have good theology – the demons agree with everything Jesus ever said – and yet they shudder in anticipation of final judgment. Why? Because they aren't saved. They are smart – they understand – but they aren't saved.

And neither was this brother. He was close, he was wise – but he was outside and therefore, in



reality, he was above all people most to be pitied. Jesus said that too. He said:

that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. 48 But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. (Luke 12:47-48 ESV)

Jesus said that the more you know – the more you know your Bible and the more you know the will of God – the higher the standard by which you will be judged. To die NEAR the kingdom but outside the kingdom is the worst fate of all! Listen if you are going to reject Jesus and die in your sins you want to be able to say that you never even saw a Bible, let alone read one. You definitely don't want to be able to say that you had a PHD LEVEL understanding of the Bible like this brother – those are the people who are going to be punished the most.

Being close counts for nothing.

When it comes to the Kingdom of God you are either in or out.

And that of course, begs the question:

## Question

How do I enter the Kingdom of God?

That's the implied question in the text!

That's where Jesus is trying to get this brother to go. He is trying to get him to ask a better question - or at least a more urgent question. Because the truth is UNTIL you have been reconciled with God through Jesus Christ you CAN'T love God and you can't love other people. So there is an order of operations here – you have to ask these questions in the right order. Only AFTER you've been healed and forgiven and restored and FILLED with the Spirit of God – only then can you TRULY love your neighbour as you should.

And that is the point that Jesus goes on to make. This story is not telling us about the

reconciliation of Jesus with the scribes. Look at what comes next – he asks them a question about the identity of Messiah. He tells them basically that they are not asking the right questions because they haven't fully understood who Messiah is and what he has come to do – and as a result of that failure – look at the next story, look at what Jesus says about the scribes; look at verse 38; he tells the people:

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces 39 and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 40 who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (Mark 12:38–40 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Jesus says that these people – these scribes - are not ready to be the leaders of Israel. They haven't been reconciled to God and as a result they are filled with pride and they are marked by hypocrisy and they are only out to benefit themselves – have nothing to do with them! These people are in the fast lane towards the deepest pit of hell – don't be following them.

That's what he says!

And that leads us to our final discovery in this text.

There is an implied invitation; do you see it?

## **Invitation**

Jesus doesn't hate this man – he's not angry at this brother – he is trying to lead him to where he needs to go.

Look at where Jesus takes the conversation. This entire conversation – the three conflict stories - happens on a single day – in a single session when Jesus is sitting in the temple. Of all the people who have spoken to him that day – this brother is the most sincere and this brother is the one who is the closest – and yet even this brother – this sincere and wise brother – is still outside – so look at where Jesus goes. Look at verse 35. He asks the question that everyone else ought to have been asking. He says:

“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?” (Mark 12:35–37 ESV)

He says listen guys, I’ve enjoyed our chat about taxes and civil authority, I enjoyed our chat about the doctrine of Scripture and the resurrection – and I really enjoyed our chat about the sum and substance of the law – that was my favourite part – but here is what we need to talk about. Here is the GATE OF SALVATION. I’m going to lead you right up to the lip of the doggy door to the Kingdom of God. Here is what you need to do. You need to wrestle with the identity and dignity of Messiah.

Who is the Christ?

That is the question boys – the answer to which – can save your souls.

Get that straight brothers, and everything else will fall into its proper place.

Who is MESSIAH?

Now you all think, Jesus says, that he is the Son of David – and so he is. He is the Son of David – but you think that means that he is LIKE DAVID – that he is another David – another human king – but he is more than that – do you know it? You should. David did. David in the Spirit spoke to his son – the Messiah – as his Lord – he equated his Son with his God – did he understand that? Probably not in his entirety – but he saw it in the Spirit and he wrote it in the Psalms and he left it there for you to think about. Have you done?

Have you thought about what it means to call David’s Son David’s Lord?

Because that would be a good place to start and I would be more happy to help you with that.

That’s what Jesus says.

And that’s the invitation in the text. Jesus is saying – come unto me and be saved. Come to me – if you want to get right with God – come to me.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)

Do you want to get right with God? Come to me and I can help you with that. You said yourself scribe, that the sacrifices and rituals of the Old Testament were never the point – do you want to know the point brother? Then come unto me – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – and I will give you what you’re looking for. I will atone for your sins and bring you home to God.

And I can teach you how to love your neighbour - more than that, I can HELP YOU love your neighbour. I can give you my Spirit and supply you with grace upon grace. I can show you and lead you down the way of love and mercy.

So come.

Come!

Come unto Jesus and be saved.

That is the invitation. That is the Gospel. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray together.