

Mark 12:18-44 - Hollow Religion Vs Real Devotion

Last week we saw the religious leaders directly challenge Jesus about his authority, and then try to trap him with a question about taxes. Neither challenge paid off for them, as Jesus simply replied with questions and comments that exposed their real motivations – they were objecting to his authority, ultimately because they didn't want to submit to God's authority over their lives. In today's passage we see more questioning and through it all, Jesus continues to confront the religious leaders about their understanding of the Scriptures and their own attitude towards God. The challenge for us is whether we be prepared to love God wholeheartedly, with genuine worship, or fall into hollow and hypocritical religion like the Scribes and other leaders.

Read Mark 12:18-27

What does Mark say is a defining characteristic of the Sadducees? (v18)
What does this tell you about the sincerity of their question outlined in v19-23? What is the real purpose of their question?

Jesus manages to answer their question on two levels without falling into the trap of providing a silly answer to an impossible question.

What does he say about 'whose wife will she be'?

What does Jesus say about the deeper issue of belief in the resurrection?

What does Jesus say is the real problem? (v24)

How do you think this episode might be a warning or an encouragement to us?

Read Mark 12:28-34

For once Jesus and a religious leader seem to agree! Why do you think they say that these two commands (loving God with everything, and loving neighbour as yourself) is 'more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices'? What form of religion are they critiquing?

What might this form of religion look like today?

What do you think it looks like to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," and to "Love your neighbor as yourself"?

Think back over the past week, and consider a few particular things that happened, or things you did. What might it have looked like to embrace these commands more fully in those situations?

Do you think we need to obey these commands to be Christian? Why / why not?

Read Mark 12:35-44

After the positive dialogue with this one teacher of the law, with no one daring to ask any more questions, Jesus goes on to highlight that most of the teachers don't even really seem to understand what the Scriptures say about the Messiah. In his question to the crowd in v35-37 he's not saying it's wrong for the leaders to say that the Messiah is the son of David – he is a son of David! By asking how a man can call his great-great-great... grandchild his own Lord, Jesus is saying that the Messiah must be more than merely a 'son of David'. The Messiah, when he comes, will be Lord of all.

After this, the final two episodes give a final challenge and encouragement.

How does Jesus present:

- a) the example of the teachers of the law (v38-40) as the opposite of the 'greatest commandments' (v29-31)?

- b) the example of the widow (v41-44) as a very real and profound example of faithfully living out the 'greatest commandments' (v29-31)?

Final Reflections...

How does being convinced of the hope of resurrection and the power of God (v24-27) help you to love God with all your heart and mind and your neighbour as yourself?

What will you pray for in your own life in response to this passage?