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“You’re the Answer! What’s the question?” **Sermon on Mark 12:28-34**

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There are many questions in the 12th chapter of Mark's Gospel. Most of them come from the religious establishment and are directed toward Jesus. The answers they want from him are the kind of answers that will kill him.

Which raises the question, “Why”? Why do they want to kill him? One reason is that when Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem, he toppled over the tables of the money changers and pointed a finger at that religious establishment.

“My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of robbers.”

A “den of robbers” is a sanctuary for robbers - a safe place. Jesus accused the religious authorities of trampling the poor, starving the widows, and raking in the cold hard cash... all the while looking saintly in their white flowing gowns, folded hands, and pious smiles.

One thing about the truth is that it often doesn't go over well with those who have ears to hear. So, they conspired with one another to kill him. The problem was that Jesus was popular with the masses. “The crowds were spellbound by his teaching.” It's like they never heard the Word of God before.

So, in order to get away with killing Jesus, they hatched a plan to make him unpopular. Make him say something that will turn the crowds. One of those “gotcha questions,” like, “Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?” They posed question after question after question...

Ahh! They're out to get him! So, we're about to hear their final question - aimed at Jesus - but also at all of us.

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes... came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; 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,"—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that, no one dared to ask him any question.

One of the scribes, who was looking to kill Jesus, came near and asked Jesus, "Which commandment is first of all?" The scribe knows the answer.

It's like me asking you what the speed limit posted on I-440. So, what's the speed limit on 440? It's 55 mph. I know the answer. You know the answer.

The scribe knew the answer. Had it memorized... "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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... And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The scribe is asking what is the temple, the pews, the prayers, the hymns, the youth group, the Sunday school, the flowers, the choir, the organ, the preaching... why do we give a pledge on this pledge Sunday? Why do we do all this?

He knew the answer. He had an A+ in Biblical Theology. Because, number one, we are on this earth to love God and love our neighbor. He knew the answer. He just didn't live the answer.

By that, I mean we know the speed limit is 55; it's just that none of us go 55. You go from A+ to F- when you know that you know that at the heart of the whole thing is to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor... when your neighbor happens to be Jesus, who happens to be God, and you're out to kill him.

It's at the heart. It's the most important commandment. If you get this down, you got the whole thing. If you play this commandment card, you win every single time. Whatever the question you face. Whatever person you face. Whatever you fear you face. If we know the answer, if this is something that we're supposed to be about, why are we so heavily invested in everything else?

Why do we have this great anxiety? Why do we have this fear? There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a

liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. (1 John 4:18-21)

We know the answer. What was the question? What's the greatest commandment? We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength. And to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So why are we so heavily invested in weapons, walls, and stereotypes, and "I'm not going to talk to her anymore?" And "I'm right and you're just wrong, and I deserve!" "I deserve!" "I deserve!" What do you deserve?

The world is getting hotter and going to hell in a handbasket.... I'm afraid.... I'm afraid... I'm afraid. I'm afraid there is no fear in love.

Question: What is the greatest commandment?

Yesterday, Guy and I led a graveside service for the Rev. Dr. Bill Bryant, who sat right over there on a Sunday Morning with Bette. Bill and Bette came to this church because when Bill retired, Betty got to choose the church.

Bill retired from being the executive director of the Outreach Foundation. He was a pastor at First Presbyterian. For a time, he was an interim associate pastor for adult education with us here at Westminster.

For his service, his children wanted us to read Romans 8... "Nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus." Why? Because they thought that their father personified that text. They thought their father personified "Nothing."

When "Nothing" is lived out... it changes everything.

Story after story. "When he was pastoring a church in Greenwood, MS, the phone rang on a Saturday night, and it was a guy from a band who called Dad up from the Ramada Inn and said, "We'd like to come to church on Sunday." "Come on!" "Well, our bass player is Black!" "Come on!"

And they came, and they worshipped, and they left. And some elders came into Bill's office and said, "Pack your bags." And he said, "No." Actually, a little stronger than that.... Nothing! Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ Jesus. From our neighbor.

And when you live the nothing... there's no fear... only love.

They told stories... "There was a young girl in our youth group who had a hard home life. She had a hard life. She struggled with who she was. But Dad listened to her. Saw her. Heard her. Loved her. And when you see your dad love what everyone else is afraid of - the grace of it, the power of it - there's nothing that will get in the way of the love of God.

Question: Do you believe in God the Father almighty?

Question: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord?

Question: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

Question: What's the greatest commandment? You are to love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Question: Why are we so afraid of that? Why are we conspiring to kill that?

When we know the answer. When we could be the answer.

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