

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: March 9th: Mark 12:28-44: Some Notes

Content: The most important commandment(s); King David and the Messiah; Flaunting your faith and living your faith.

The Scribes and Pharisees would have enjoyed Jesus putting the Sadducees in their place. The First Commandment question here seems to have been a from the heart question rather than a trick question. Two processes had gone on side by side in Jewish history: spelling out the rules in ever increasing detail, and trying to sum up the rules concisely in one basic rule. The Scribes and Pharisees were experts in the Torah (the whole range of rules derived from but not actually stated in the first five books of the Bible). The Sadducees just stuck to the Bible rules. If you want to read all 613 Bible rules, good luck to you! If you want to look at shorter Bible summaries, have a look at Psalm 15, Isaiah 33: 15, Micah 6: 8, Isaiah 56:1, and Habakkuk 2:4. Jesus in his answer combines Deuteronomy 6:4, which the questioner might well have been expecting, with Leviticus 19: 18. Significantly, Jesus broadens neighbour to include everyone, not just other Jews. This was striking enough to get the questioner to say “Wow!”; though one non-Bible Jewish book had already offered “Love the Lord and love your neighbour” “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs” (about 100 BC). If you think Jesus’ summary makes living a God-like life easy, THINK AGAIN! (Not doing anything really wicked and sacrificing a few animals once a year was a great deal easier than showing consistent whole-hearted love for God and for all the irritating people you had to live with!)

The Son of David argument sounds a bit technical. It is actually hugely important. Virtually everyone Jewish accepted that the Messiah would come from David’s line: one King succeeding another King. But, assuming that David wrote Psalm 110, King David called his Messiah successor LORD. Jesus is saying forcefully that He, Jesus, is the Messiah and David’s LORD not his successor. Pause to reflect: all the promises of the Old Testament are to be fulfilled in a Messiah who is infinitely greater than Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David.... BUT a Crucified Messiah. You can well see why St Paul, an ultra-orthodox Jew re-interpreting the whole Old Testament narrative with Jesus as Messiah (Saviour) and as Temple (where God and humankind, Heaven and Earth, meet) recognised that both Jews and Gentiles were going to struggle with God on a Cross!

Jesus is hard on the Scribes (as he might have been hard on later generations of Christian leaders, maybe the Vicar associating with the Squire and not the labourers), because they were behaving a bosses not servants, and looking for applause rather than opportunities for service... and because in some cases they were actually extracting money from people who could ill afford it. (Like the poor widow.)

The widow’s mite story makes more sense if you think of 13 big collecting plates in the Temple Court of the Women – where rich folk could make a big public show of big contributions. (Our planned giving envelopes help, but putting your 10p in the collection

plate after someone putting in a £20 note is awkward. Many years ago, I mentioned that we had a refugee family at the 10 a.m. service, and asked the young people's group what part of the service that family might find embarrassing. It was one of the boys (not always the most sensitive of people) who said "When the plate goes round".

This isn't just a reminder about sacrificial giving. It is a reminder that (a) God notices the small things, and (b) God knows what we don't know. (b) is an excellent argument for not being judgmental!