

MARK 12:28-34

SALVATION—FOR YOU BUT NOT ABOUT YOU

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He [Jesus] had answered them well, asked Him, Which is the first commandment of all? Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. But after that no one dared question Him.

If all of you were living in a prison camp right now, what would be the foremost question on everyone's mind? "How do we get out of here?" Would it be important to you to get out by your own doing? Or just to get out? Would it be important to you that your plan is the right plan? You would just want to get out. You are in prison right now, in a dying and unraveling world trapped in sin and sin's punishment--death. How does one get out of here? All wonder that same thing—except those who have convinced themselves that by themselves they are "good with God," or, that God doesn't exist. However, only JESUS is the way out. He was/is our substitute under sin's punishment. He opens the way for us to freedom and acceptance before God.

Back in Bible times it was the same way. The promised Savior was the way out for all, but many thought an idol would work, or thought they had their own way out, to their own credit, and to elevate them in the eyes of all. To them, Jesus was nothing. For them, Jesus' words that salvation was only by God's grace and mercy, not by individual efforts, were nothing.

In such a setting stand the words of this text this morning. They come from the last week of Jesus' earthly life. He had ridden the donkey into Jerusalem on Sunday to the shouts of the people "Hosanna, Son of David!"—that is, "Come save us now, O Promised King, son of David's royal line! Save us from this world of sin and death!" Jesus' enemies were not pleased, for they were not convinced He was the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, the Savior. Their plan for freedom before God was better, "Be perfect like we are." They were the show, not Jesus. They were less pleased the next day when Jesus with emotion forced the buyers and sellers out of the temple, angered at the misuse of His Father's House. He disrupted His enemies' little self-centered-game. In fact, already earlier that morning the disciples had seen Jesus' distaste for self-show. A fig tree, which had all the signs of being ripe with fruit, but had none, was cursed by Jesus to wither. The point: Those who are full of self-show for self-glory are repulsive to God. In anger the leaders sought to destroy Him.

On Tuesday they repeatedly challenged Jesus so as to prove Him wrong and a fraud. A delegation demanded to know where Jesus received the authority to say that He was the Savior from this prison-world! Jesus shamed them by pointing out how they did not even believe that John the Baptist and his baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sin was from God. So self-centered they were. Jesus then spoke a parable regarding men entrusted with the care of the master's vineyard, but at harvest time refusing to honor any of his messengers, even his son; because they wanted control. The enemies knew He was talking about them. A second challenge came from Pharisees and Herod's men. Should taxes be paid to ungodly Caesar? If Yes, then Jesus would be against God. If No, then Jesus would be in big trouble with Rome! Jesus' replied, Both! They were not so clever. A third challenge came from the Sadducees, seeking to prove Jesus was wrong about the resurrection; for they maintained there was none. Jesus promptly showed them from the Old Testament how greatly they erred. Their little show of self-wisdom was foolish—like a three-year old telling his father how smart he was, all the while wearing pajamas that he put on inside-out!.

A final attempt to prove that Jesus was not the one sent to rescue the world's imprisoned sinners, came from a scribe. A scribe was a man who meticulously labored to hand-copy scrolls of the Old Testament, letter by letter. Such men naturally knew the multitude of commands God had set for His people. (Some say they had counted six hundred, including both Do's and Don'ts.) The scribe had seen how wisely Jesus answered. He wanted Jesus to pick which command of God was "first"—foremost/greatest. Likely he intended to debate the point and prove Jesus wrong and discredit Him. Jesus answered, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 *Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love th LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,* and Leviticus 19:18 *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* God looks at man's heart. God has no ranking system of His commands. He does not assign various merit points to each. Such would involve "putting on a show of credits" before God to get out of this world. Getting out of this world into heaven is a matter of the heart, clinging by faith to the One Whom He promised, Who provides the way out, the escape, with forgiveness from sin and freedom from death. Trust Him, love Him, with all heart, soul, mind, and strength; love those around you—Jesus has died for them too!

Do you sometimes think of your Christian faith and life in terms of merits or credits, some having higher ranking before God than others? Going to church on Sunday is better than being a good father or mother on Monday; better than being a good husband or wife on Saturday? Going to Communion is better than thanking God for the food at the table and praying that He bless it? Putting money in the offering plate is better than taking the time or the effort or the cash to help one in need? Points for deeds would be salvation by one's own works, and does not lead anyone out of this prison.

The scribe, unlike Jesus' previous challengers, realized that a heart that loves the Lord and loves others is more pleasing to God than racking up points for deeds X, Y, or Z. The scribe got it. He said, *Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices* Points for deeds is not important. His words remind us of Jesus quoting Isaiah 29:13, *These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:8-9).* Jesus replied, *You are not far from the kingdom of God.* "You certainly understand what is incorrect about good deeds and incorrect about bringing sacrifices and offerings with an empty heart. You are not far from the kingdom of God." But he was still missing the sweet spot.

Imagine driving your vehicle into a huge snow drift, hoping to plow through, but getting hung up, high-centered, stuck, a prisoner of the drift. You could put all the gravel you wanted under the tires, but it wouldn't do any good because the tires are not in contact with a solid base. You could keep digging snow out under the tires, but it would just make the gap between the tires and the road more obvious. Such efforts are no good, and accumulate no credit points. Until one realizes the snow jammed under the vehicle, on which the vehicle is sitting is the problem, nobody's going anywhere. It's too difficult to shovel it out. "Maybe I could somehow throw some heat under the vehicle to make the snow melt?" is a bad idea in the cold and snow. You just have to realize you are stuck and have to rely on someone else to tow you out. This is where the scribe was. The scribe realized what wouldn't work to get to heaven, but he didn't see that he was a sinner, was still stuck, and needed someone to pull him out. He needed someone to get him back onto solid ground. He needed a Savior through whom his sins were forgiven. He was close to understanding his situation before God, but his focus was still on himself—"I am in a right standing with God on my own." Not so. In Jesus alone, is each free from prison and the snow drift.

Through Jesus, realize the joy of being "good with God." You can stop the restless and ceaseless striving to combat the forces imprisoning you. Jesus is here. Against all odds, He opens the prison fore you. He has the love and He has the power to do so. Against all odds, He hooks on with the 40-wheel-drive of payment in full for your sins, and walks you out of that drift. The relief, the joy! He also puts you in His cab and takes you to His home to warm-up, be nourished and stay.

Jesus' enemies, with their own little merit-show were all put to shame. No one dared challenge Him further. Do not challenge and oppose Him. Rejoice in Him. RESCUE and SALVATION is all about Jesus, but it's for you!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---