

Introduction

1. Last week we found ourselves in the middle of Jesus's final public confrontation with the religious leaders:
 - a. They questioned His authority
 - b. They tried to trap Him politically
 - c. They tried to trap Him theologically
2. Today we come to the tail end of that public confrontation and we are introduced to a scribe who is less combative and he poses a rather simple question to Jesus:
 - a. The scribes often debated which of God's Laws were the most important:
 - b. According to their writings, there were 613 OT Laws
 - c. They were always looking for ways to boil down the commands into a single principle or convenient summary of the Law
 - d. They divided the laws into "heavy" and "light" and debated their importance, giving some more value or importance than others
 - e. In one recorded instance, when Shammai and Hillel were asked by an individual 'teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one leg' Hillel replied, "Do not do to your neighbor what is hateful to you; this is the whole Torah: the rest is commentary."
 - f. This is the context in which the scribe asks his question
3. Jesus will take this opportunity to not only answer the scribes question, but issue His final public warning to His followers and provide a simple example of genuine faith

A. Jesus summarizes God's law with the two greatest commandments (12:28-34)

1. After being impressed with how Jesus answered the attacks of the religious leaders, one particular scribe poses his own question (28): **"One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?'"**
 - a. This scribe doesn't appear to be one of those attacking Jesus, but rather an outside observer
 - b. Everything in the passage suggests that he was an honorable scribe who genuinely understood not just the Law but the intent of the Law
 - c. It appears he approached Jesus out of respect for His understanding of the Law rather than to trap Him ("recognizing that He had answered them well")
 - d. His question was simple: which of the OT Laws was the "foremost"—in other words, which was the most important; which could summarize the entire Law
2. Jesus answered by citing not just one but two OT commandments (29-31):
 - a. The **"first"** Jesus said is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: **"Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 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.'"**
 - b. The **"second"** Jesus said is found in Leviticus 19:18: **"The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."**

3. In an interesting twist, the scribe confirms Jesus's summary of the Law and gives us a clue as to why these two commands encompass all that God commanded (READ 32-33):
 - a. Loving God and loving one's neighbor are more important to God than religious rites and practices: (33b): **"is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices"**
 - b. The reason is rather simple:
 - 1) Love for God motivates obedience to His commands (READ Deuteronomy 30:11-20)
 - 2) Love for others covers a multitude of sins (READ 1 Peter 4:8)
 - 3) In other words, if we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength we won't sin against Him and if we love others we won't sin against them!
 - 4) Another way to say it, if we love God we will honor Him and if we love others we will honor them

4. According to Jesus, when these two principles drive a person's life, they are close to the Kingdom of God (34): **"When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."**
 - a. Notice here that Jesus told the scribe he was only "close" to the Kingdom of God
 - b. This reminds us that love for God and others is not enough to save anyone; it only makes them a **"promising recruit"** (R.T. France)
 - c. This scribe stood in stark contrast to the other religious rulers who were out to destroy Jesus and resembled another religious leader, a Pharisee named Nicodemus
 - d. When Nicodemus humbly approached Jesus seeking to know the truth, Jesus reminded Him that only those who are born again into a relationship with Him will be saved
 - e. It's unfortunate that we don't know more about this scribe like we do Nicodemus (who stood up for Jesus when he was arrested and then helped Joseph of Arimathea in retrieving and burying the body of Jesus after His crucifixion)

5. These same two principles—loving God and loving others—should be hallmarks of our lives as Christians (READ 1 John 4:7-5:3)

B. Jesus warns His disciples to beware of the scribes (12:35-40)

1. After silencing the religious leaders (34b), Jesus now turns His attention to warning the disciples to beware of the scribes:
 - a. As we've noted, the scribes were the scholars of Jesus's day; they were supposed to be the experts in the Word of God
 - b. They were also the legal experts (e.g. lawyers) who presided over the courts and ruled on matters related to the OT Law
 - c. However, like so many so-called Bible scholars today they didn't always interpret the Bible correctly
 - d. Also like many today, they added their own rules, regulations, and traditions to the Law and often taught these in place of the Law

2. So, Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the scribes and focused on two specific areas:
 - a. The first was their misunderstanding and mishandling of Scripture (READ 35-37):
 - 1) In this particular instance Jesus warns them against the scribes false understanding regarding the Messiah
 - 2) The scribes taught correctly that the Messiah would be a descendent of David

- 3) However, they totally failed to comprehend that Messiah would also be God in the flesh even though it had been revealed to them (Jesus quotes David's words from Psalm 110 as proof)
 - 4) The scribes had one job to do which was to accurately interpret and teach the Word of God and they failed miserably on the most important point!
 - 5) This would be the equivalent today of those so-called Bible scholars and pastors who completely failed to understand and teach the Gospel
- b. The second thing Jesus warned His disciples about when it came to the scribes was their false religious façade (READ 38-40):
- 1) The scribes in Jesus day were not permitted to charge for their teaching so they lived off subsidies, often provided by wealthy individuals
 - 2) However, they loved parading around as pious religious leaders and scholars:
 - a) The robes Jesus refers to were not normal every day robes, but festive or celebratory garments—in essence, Jesus is saying that they like to go about everyday life dressed up in their fancy clothes
 - b) They like getting greetings in the marketplaces (the Greek is more specifically that they desire or want such greetings)
 - c) They like the “**chief seats in the synagogues**”—these were the seats in the very front that faced the congregation—and the “**places of honor at banquets**”
 - 3) But it was all a religious façade; they were fakes who “**devour widows' houses (e.g. take their finances), and for appearance's sake offer long prayers**”
 - 4) As a result, they would “**receive greater condemnation**”
3. We should heed these warnings ourselves today:
- a. The Church is filled with so-called Bible scholars and pastors who promote false doctrine—in fact, we were warned by Jesus and the writers of the epistles that such men and women would sneak into the church as wolves in sheep's clothing and mislead many
 - b. Many of these leaders are hiding behind a façade—a false appearance of wisdom, knowledge and religious behavior
 - c. This should also serve as a warning to us personally to be vigilant in our own knowledge, study and devotion to God's Word
 - d. It's not enough to simply say we're Christians and do Christian things

C. Jesus calls attention to a simple act of genuine faith (12:41-44)
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1. In contrast to His warning about the scribes false teaching and religious façade, Jesus observes an example of genuine religious devotion and shares it with His disciples (READ 41-44)
2. At this point, Jesus is sitting in what is believed to be the Court of Women in which there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles where visitors would make their contributions
3. A number (“many”) of rich people made their way to the receptacles and donated large sums
4. In contrast, a poor widow arrives and tosses in two small copper coins
5. From a human perspective, the donations of the wealthy would seem more honoring to God because of their size
6. However, according to Jesus the widow put in “**more than all the contributors to the treasury**” because they put in out of their surplus (e.g. only a portion beyond what they needed) but she “**out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.**”

7. While we might think that the contrast Jesus is trying to make is between the rich people and the poor widow, the real contrast He is making is between the genuineness of the widow's faith and the false religious façade of the scribes He just warned the disciples about

Conclusion

1. Our passage today brings Jesus' public teaching ministry to a close
2. It is only fitting that it ends with a summary of what God requires, a final warning, and an example of genuine faith
3. We have been reminded that as His followers, we are to love God and love others by obeying everything He commanded us
4. We have been warned to beware of so-called Bible scholars, pastors and leaders who hide behind their religious façades
5. And we have been reminded by a poor widow what genuine faith in God looks like