

Growing Deeper in Mark

MARK 12.18-44

VERSES 18-23: The Sadducees are the next group to attempt to trip up Jesus with a question. Their question sounds like something that might have been asked at the Trump impeachment trial that has been going on this past week. Frivolous and disingenuous. Mark helps us to understand this by telling us that the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection of the dead. So, why would they ask a question about which brother a woman would be married to in the resurrection if she had been married to seven in this life?

VERSES 24-27: Jesus gives a condemnation of which we should all take heed. The Sadducees' error comes from misinterpretation of the scripture and a dismissal of the power of God. If you believe in the God of creation, how can you not believe in the power of God to raise the dead, or heal the sick, or give sight to the blind? We need to be careful about limiting God to doing only those things which we can understand or explain. God is far beyond our comprehension. But Jesus rebuked not only their lack of belief, he also rebuked their lack of understanding of the scripture. Over and over again in Mark's gospel Jesus affirms the authority of scripture and our need to submit to it. May we take heed to both errors, lest we be found to be 'badly mistaken.' (btw you notice Jesus answered even a foolish question?)

VERSE 28: A teacher of the law is next in line, but it seems he is asking a genuine question of Jesus. Actually, kind of a lay up for most Jews let alone Jesus. And we see Jesus encourages the man in verse 34. 'What is the greatest command?' Jesus even gives a bonus answer for extra credit!

VERSES 29-31: Jesus gives the answer they had all likely been taught as children to love God with all we are is our greatest responsibility. But Jesus links loving our neighbor as ourselves with it. Why? In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, Jesus makes it clear that loving our neighbor who is in need is a tangible way we love God. It takes our faith from the realms of thoughts and feelings to the realm of physical activity. We are to serve our neighbor as if we were serving Jesus himself. We need tangible expression of our inward faith. Serving is an important one!

VERSES 32-34: The teacher agrees with Jesus (good idea) and adds some of his own understanding of the scripture from the prophet Samuel, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." (Samuel 15.22) Jesus affirms this response and encourages the teacher he is close. Obedience is critical in loving the Lord, but salvation is not in obedience but through faith alone.

VERSES 35-37: Jesus turns the tables and asks a whopper of a question himself. How can David's descendant be his Lord? We are so used to thinking of Jesus in terms of his deity, it is hard for us to imagine how hard it must have been for his contemporaries to grasp. How can a carpenter from Nazareth who needs to eat and sleep, who has body odor and bad breath, who they can see with their own eyes, how can he be God? The wonder of the incarnation (God taking on human flesh) is an endless well of amazement to me.

VERSES 38-40: In spite of the good question from the teacher of the law just a few verses ago, Jesus warns about following the teachers of the law. A teacher who does not live by what they teach, or only selectively teaches is a dangerous thing...especially to themselves. This points out that we are all responsible for our own understanding and obedience to God. Check your pastor's teaching!

VERSES 41-44: The widow is a living image of loving the Lord with all that you are. Jesus affirms that we do not impress God by what we do but by why we do it. Large sums being given didn't catch Jesus' attention, but a woman who gave her all, who gave in radical faith, caught it. When is the last time you gave your all to Jesus? When is the last time you acted in obedience with a radical faith like the poor widow?