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Mark's gospel, chapter 12.

Now we remember that Jesus is in the temple. This is the day after He had cleansed it again. It is on Tuesday. It is His final week. Sunday He had made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the donkey. Monday He came in and cleansed the temple. Now Tuesday He returns to the temple with His disciples, where immediately He is challenged by the religious leaders concerning the authority by which He has done these things.

And he began to speak unto them by parables. [And He said,] A certain man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a place for the winevat, and built a tower, and [he] let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country (Mar 12:1).

Now, if you can hold your place there in Mark and turn to Isaiah, chapter 5, I think that you'll see how they were able to see exactly what Jesus was getting at. Verse 1 of Isaiah 5, "Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard and a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, gathered out the stones, he planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine press: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, than I have not done to it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now go to; I will tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge, it will be eaten up; I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: and I also will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold there was oppression; he sought righteousness, but there was a cry of those who were oppressed" (Isaiah 5:1-7).

So when Jesus said to these leaders, "There was a certain man who planted a vineyard and set a hedge about it and digged a place for the winevat and built a tower," their minds connected with Isaiah. "And he let it out to husbandmen, went to a far country."

And at the season [at a time when he should be reaping the benefits of that vineyard] he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him [the servant], and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled [mistreated]. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? (Mar 12:2-9)

The parable is very obvious. It is against the religious leaders, the husbandmen whom the Lord had set over the vineyard, the nation of Israel. And the Lord sent to them the prophets, His servants. But the prophets were mistreated; they were beaten, they were stoned, many of the them were killed. Finally, the Lord said, "I will send My only Son," or, "My well-beloved Son." And so, Jesus separates Himself in a total different capacity from the servants, the prophets that had been sent. Finally, the Son has come. And the religious leaders have determined to get rid of Him in order that they might somehow take possession of the vineyard. The question, "What will the lord of the vineyard do?" Of course, God is the Lord of the vineyard.

he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others (Mar 12:9).

So, here we see as last week when Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered and died, because it failed to bring forth fruit. The nation of Israel had failed to fulfill the purposes for which God had established them as a special people unto the Lord. They failed to bring forth that fruit that God was desiring the nation to produce. So, what will the Lord do? He will take away the privileges, the opportunities, and he will give them to others. And so, we see the door opened to the Gentiles, and Jesus here is prophesying and predicting that God is going to do His work, not among the Jews in this age, but more among the Gentiles. And thus, we see the work of God's Spirit in a powerful way among those Gentile believers in Jesus Christ. And then the Lord quoted to them the Psalm 118, which is a psalm that was predicting the triumphant entry of the Messiah.

And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? (Mar 12:10-11)

This particular Psalm, 118, "the stone set of not by the builders, or rejected by the builders, becoming the head cornerstone," is an often quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Peter quoted it when he was talking to the religious leaders in the fourth chapter of Acts. Paul quotes it in his epistles to the Romans and in also his epistle to the Ephesians. Jesus here makes reference to it. Obviously, it is a reference to Jesus, the stone. Now, you remember that there was that prophecy in Daniel of the stone that would come, not cut with hands, striking the image and its feet and growing up into a mountain covering the earth. The stone being Jesus Christ, rejected by the builders, the religious leaders, and yet in reality, it's the chief cornerstone.

There's an interesting story of the building of Solomon's temple. The stone was all quarried away from the temple and was brought to the temple site and then set one upon another. So perfectly were these stones hewn and so well designed that they did not need mortar for them, but they just would interlock and would lie flat. And in fact, these stones you can't even put a knife blade between them; they are hewn so perfectly. And so, each stone was quarried and then smoothed in the area of the quarry, which is actually on the north side of the city of Jerusalem. And then it was brought to the temple site, and each stone was marked for its place and set into the building. And as the story goes, a stone was sent from the quarry and the fellows who were doing the building didn't understand where it went. It seemed like it didn't fit in the natural progression of the building, and so they didn't know what to do with it and they just tossed it aside. And of course, in the years as they were building the temple, finally they came to the completion of the building. But the chief cornerstone was missing. And according to the story, they sent to the quarry for the chief cornerstone. "We want to complete the building, have its dedication. We need the chief cornerstone." And the foreman checked his records, and said, "It's already been sent." And they said, "We don't have it." And he said, "Well, we've already sent it to you." And someone remembered that stone that was tossed over and now the bushes had grown up and over it, and they dug the thing out. And sure enough, the stone that was rejected by the builders was in reality the chief cornerstone of the building. And thus, this psalm. But yet, tremendous prophetic significance. "The stone that was set of not by the builders has become the chief cornerstone. This was the work of the Lord, it's marvelous in our eyes." And so Jesus quotes this very familiar psalm, Psalm 118 to them, a psalm by which He is asserting that He is indeed that stone, the Messiah.

And they sought to lay hold on him (Mar 12:12),

He had directed the parable against them and they recognized that. And they wanted to lay hold on Him,

but they feared the people; for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way. And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man [you don't care for man]; for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth (Mar 12:12-14):

Quite an acknowledgment. True, it was flattery to try to throw Him off guard. And then they offered their question which was designed to entrap Him.

Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? (Mar 12:14)

Judah was a Roman province. As a Roman province, the governor was directly appointed by Rome, and the Roman government excised taxes from them that were paid directly to the Roman government. And there were three basic taxes. First of all, you were taxed on the land that you had. And you had to give one tenth of your crop to the government, that is your grains and all from the fields. You had to give one-fifth of the fruit, that which grew from the trees that were there on the land. Secondly, there was a straight across the board five percent income tax. And then thirdly, you had to pay each year a denarius to the government just for the right of existing. This was a tax upon everyone, a denarius because you lived. And so, the Jews hated this taxation. They did not really recognize the Roman authority over them. And this question then was a very clever question designed to entrap Jesus, for no matter how He answers, He's a loser. If He answers, "It is lawful to pay the taxes to Caesar," then all of these Jews that hate these taxes so much will turn away and not listen to Him again. If He says, "It is not lawful to pay the taxes to Caesar," then they'll run right down and report on Him and have Him arrested as a leader of sedition. So, they felt that the question was one from which He could not escape, a very cleverly designed question. It probably took them quite a long time to figure that one out.

Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy [cunningness], said unto them, Why tempt

ye me [why are you trying to tempt me]? bring me a penny [denarius], that I may see it (Mar 12:15).

Now, this was the denarius that they had to pay for existing. And of course, it had the current Roman emperor who at this time was Titus, and his little image was upon it. It's interesting to me that Jesus didn't carry a coin. He asked for one, and He held it up and He said,

Whose is this image and superscription? (Mar 12:16)

And it would have the picture, and under it the superscription, "Pontifus Maximus." "Who is this?"

And they said unto him, Caesar's. [So He flipped the coin back] And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. [If it's Caesar's give it to Caesar, but give to God the things that belong to God] (Mar 12:16-17).

Now in reality, these coins were all considered to be Caesar's, the government's. The people were able to use them, but in reality, they considered that it was all the government's. Even as your money all says "Federal Reserve Note," it's really the government's loaning you this medium of exchange, or letting you use this medium of exchange. So, Jesus thoroughly escaped the trap that they were setting for Him.

And they marveled at Him. Then come unto him [some of] the Sadducees (Mar 12:18),

Now, the Sadducees were the priests, for the most part. The high priest at this time was always a Sadducee. They were the materialists. They were not really spiritual men at all, but the materialists. But they had gained control of the whole religious system. And they did not believe in spirits, they did not believe in angels, they did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. So they said,

And they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, if a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed for his brother (Mar 12:18-19).

Now this was a part of the Mosaic law. It is given to us there in Deuteronomy, and it's a very interesting law. And the purpose, of course, was that the family name not die in Israel. And basically the law is like this: if you married a woman, and before you could have children, you died, it was your brother's responsibility to marry her. And the first son that was born would be named after you, so that your name would not die in Israel.

Now, say your younger brother doesn't want to marry her. He says, "Hey, hey, no, she gave my brother such a bad time. No way. You're not going to stick me with that one." Then they would come to the gate of the city where judgment was always made. You read that in the gates of the city that's where they always made the judgments. The elders of the city would be there in the gates to pass judgment. So, they would come to the gate of the city before the judges, the elders there, and the fellow would say, "My brother died, didn't have any kids and I don't want to marry her." And he'd take off his sandal and hand it to her. It's sort of like saying, "Hey, woman, you're an old dirty shoe as far as I'm concerned. No way." And she would spit in his face. And he would be released from the obligation of marrying her. But he was called "the man from whom the shoe was loosed" in Israel. He got that title after that, and it was sort of a dirty title. In other words, he wouldn't fulfill the family obligation and that was a very important thing to them.

Now, in the book of Genesis, and this goes back before the law actually, in the book of Genesis we find the case of Judah, the son of Jacob, and his son married this gal Tamar. And he died not having any children, so Tamar's brother took her to wife. And he died not having any children, and so the other brother was supposed to marry her. But Judah said, "Well, no, no. I'm a little worried about that tea that gal fixes." And two sons died and he said, "This is my last son, I don't want to lose him. He's too young; wait awhile before he marries you." And this is the story of Tamar; it's an interesting story in Genesis. She put on the clothes of a prostitute and sat in the way when Judah was coming by, the old man. He says, "How much do you charge?" And so she gave the price, and he said, "I don't have it with me, but here. Take my ring." And this is where we get the idea of giving a ring; it's a pledge to guarantee that I'm going to keep the covenant..."I promise you I'll pay you this little..." And of course, she coveted for a little goat. He says, "I'll send it back to you." And she says, "Well, what pledge do you give?" "Well, take the ring." And so he gave her the ring. Then the idea is, "I'm going to keep the promise; I'll send the goat." And when the goat comes, she gives the ring back.

Well, he went in unto her. You see, she felt that she was getting cheated because he didn't give the third son. And so, she was all veiled and everything else, and had the veil of a prostitute on and all. So, he went in and then went on down, and he said to his herdsman, "Take a goat back to the prostitute that's back there in that

corner, and get my ring back." And so, the guy came back with the goat and he looked around. He said to fellows around there, "Hey, where's the prostitute that hangs out on this corner?" "There's no prostitute around here." So, he came back, and the Jew said, "I couldn't find her; they said there's no prostitute around there." So later on word came to Judah that Tamar is pregnant. He said, "Have her stoned to death!" So Tamar came in and she said, "By the man who owns this ring I'm pregnant." Judah, of course, had it. What could he do?

So, the interesting thing to me as that as the lineage of Christ is traced back, it traces back through Tamar. That's interesting, isn't it? That God would bring His Son through this lineage. He was able to identify with sinners.

Another case of it in the Old Testament is in the book of Ruth. Elimelech, with his wife Naomi, sold their parcel and moved with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, over to Moab. And in Moab, Mahlon and Chilion married some young girls in Moab, and Elimelech died and the two sons died. And there were no children. So, the name was about ready to die. Naomi, of course, came back with Ruth. And later on, Boaz, who was a brother to Elimelech, married Ruth. He became what they called the "gaal," the family redeemer. He's the one that redeemed the family name by having a child through Ruth, whose name was Obed, whose son's name was Jesse, whose son's name was David. And in tracing the lineage of the line of Christ, it goes back through Ruth and Boaz.

So this idea of a kinsman redeemer is tied into the lineage of Jesus, which I think is significant, because that's what He became to be. He became a man that He might be kin to us, but His purpose was to redeem us. Man couldn't redeem himself. And so, He became a man that He might become our kinsman redeemer, and in two places in his lineage that particular Jewish law was kept, fulfilled.

So, here the Sadducees, they go an extra step. They create a hypothetical case,

Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed [he died without any children]. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed [without any children]: and the third likewise. And the seven had her [all seven married her], and left no seed [and died without any children]: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife [all seven were married to her] (Mar 12:20-23).

Now you see, they were creating a hypothetical case by which they were trying to show that the idea of the resurrection from the dead could only create a lot of problems. And here is a big problem, because you see seven guys now fighting over the one woman, for she had been married to all seven, but none of them had any children. And they pictured this big confusion at the resurrection.

Of course, there are others who have foreseen great problems with the resurrection. Say you have a kidney transplant. Who gets the kidney in the resurrection? Our bodies are made up of chemicals, and when a person died out on the prairie and they dug a hole and buried him, the body decomposed into the various chemicals. And the little prairie grass sent its roots down and fed off of the chemicals from the decomposed body, and those chemicals were drawn up through the root and into the prairie grass. And the cows came and ate that prairie grass with the chemicals from somebody's body. And someone milked the cow and got the chemicals out of the milk and drank the milk and assimilated it and became a part of his body. Now in the resurrection, what body will get these chemicals? These same difficulties that people have hypothecated all stem from the same ignorance. That Jesus said,

And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God [You fellows err, because you don't know the scriptures, and you don't know the power of God]? (Mar 12:24)

Your mistake lies in the fact that you don't know the scriptures; you're ignorant of the scriptures, and that's where your problem is.

For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: [and Jesus is affirming the resurrection of the dead here] have ye not read in the book of Moses (Mar 12:25-26),

Now the Sadducees, being the materialists, rejected all of the Old Testament except for the five books of Moses. And they said, "There is no place where immortality or resurrection is taught in the Pentateuch. That all came along later with the prophets and all. But there's nothing in the Pentateuch." So Jesus takes them to the

Pentateuch.

have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him [Moses], saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? [And Jesus said,] He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living (Mar 12:26-27):

And with their own book of Moses, He really cut them down.

Now, there was a certain scribe that was there and he was watching this whole transaction, interchange of thoughts and ideas, and he was captivated by Jesus and His answers that He gave.

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he [Jesus] had answered them well [was really coming up with some excellent answers], asked him [an honest question] (Mar 12:28),

These first two were dishonest questions. A dishonest question is a question that is not looking for an answer; it's looking for an argument. An honest question seeks an answer. I want to know, I ask a question; that's honesty. I have a point I want to prove, I want to get into an argument with you and show you you're wrong, I ask a question; I'm really not wanting your answer. I don't care what you answer. Your answer is wrong, and I'm going to prove it to you. And there are a lot of times that we are questioned by people, and the questions are not sincere; they're not honest questions. And one of the first things...and I can tell quite often by the question itself whether it's an honest or dishonest question. When a person says, "Why don't you baptize people the moment they accept Jesus?" I know that's not an honest question. They really don't want to know why we don't take you right down to the beach tonight and baptize you if you've accepted the Lord here this evening. They don't want to really know that. What they want to do is get into a big controversy with you, because they do believe in baptismal regeneration. And should you die before next Saturday, and had your chance to get baptized, according to their theology, you'd be lost. So, emergency baptisms. You know, get them into the tank as quick as possible and dunk 'em. And so they asked that question, and you know it's not an honest question. I really don't like to get into a controversy over scripture. The minute I can discern that a question is not an honest question, I'll quit talking. I mean, I'm not interested in getting in a dispute or an argument. The Bible says, "They that are ignorant, let them be ignorant still." That could apply to me as well as the next fellow.

This fellow has an honest question burning in his heart. It is a question that should concern every man who has become convinced of the existence of God. You say you believe in God. Hey, you can't rest there, you can't stop there. You see, if you believe that God does exist, then suddenly, as you start to develop from that basic concept "God exists," you start going out from there and you've got to handle a lot of things.

I grew up in a very godly Christian home. I believed in Jesus Christ from day one. From the time I was thirteen days old, I was carried to church, slept in the pews, and grew up in the whole environment and atmosphere. Yet, as every teenager I think must do, I came to that place in my own growth and development and maturing where I had to create my own relationship with God and develop my own foundation and my own theology, and my own building, you might say, of faith. And as I was going through that period, being challenged intellectually by my studies, by my philosophy classes and biology classes and all, there was a short period of time when I was questioning everything. And I began to question the existence of God. And I wondered if I really believed that God did exist. "Maybe there is something to atheism, maybe it is all just something that has just been conjured up by man." And I went through a couple of weeks of real misery as I was sort of in this place of floating and almost sinking, as these thoughts were coming, "Maybe God doesn't exist, and maybe it is just all man's concepts and ideas, as he needs to believe in something." And as I was going through this in my mind, I started to sink. And then I thought, "Well, it is easier to believe that God exists than to not believe that He exists." As I looked at the world around me, the universe around me, it is much easier to believe in the existence of God than not to believe in the existence of God. If you don't believe in the existence of God, then there are so many things that you've got to explain. The imponderables: how can you see? How can you hear? How can you walk? How can you feel? How can you remember? How can you have all of these capacities just by random, blind chance? And not to believe in God left too many unanswered questions. So I said, "Well, alright. I believe in God." You say, "Well, that's not much." Well, if you're sinking, it's an awful lot to let your foot hit on something solid. And I thought, "Well, yes, I believe in God. But wait a minute!" I couldn't stop there. Just in the belief in God, I couldn't stop there.

If God then does exist, and I've come to that belief by the observation of creation around me, myself, as I observe creation I see the design and I see the purposes. I see the delicate balances in nature. I see the oxygen/nitrogen cycles. I see the water/dry land proportions, two-thirds to one-third. All of these are by design.

They must be because they are all necessary for man's existence. If God has a design and a purpose for all things, then He must have had a design and a purpose for me. And if God has a purpose for me, then what is God's purpose for me? And that's at the point that this man was that came to Jesus. "What is God's purpose for me?"

This is basically what is his question:

Which is the first commandment of all? (Mar 12:28)

Really, what is the most important thing?" "First," being in order; not, "What is the very first commandment God gave?" The first commandment was, "Don't eat the tree in the middle of the garden." But, first in the order, that is the most important commandment of God. What is it?

And Jesus answered him, The first of all commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord (Mar 12:29):

He goes back to Deuteronomy in what is known as the shema, the hear. It is that portion that the Jews roll up in these little boxes that they tie on their wrists. The boxes that they put on their foreheads; they all have this shima in it. "Hear, O' Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." It used to be in their feast days, when they would gather in the temple mount, that they would start chanting this. And it would build and build and build, as they would chant together, "Hear, O' Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." It is interesting to me that even in this declaration, the shima, the great commandment, the first, the primary commandment, that the word one..."the Lord our God is one Lord"...the word one is the Hebrew word echad, which is a compound unity. There is another Hebrew word for one, yechyd, which is an absolute unity.

Now, I have four fingers, but I have one hand. Now, on the one hand, there are the four fingers and the thumb. So you have one hand, but in it is a compound unity. There are better examples of compound unity. You have one egg, but it's composed of a shell, a white and the yoke. Yet, it's one egg; compound unity. "The two shall be one," speaking of marriage. Echad, one, there's two but they become one, the compound unity. So the Lord our God is echad, a compound unity, "is one Lord."

It is also interesting to me, and it's a baffler to the Jehovah Witnesses, that here and elsewhere in the New Testament the name Yahweh is translated into the Greek, Kurias, the title that was commonly given to Jesus Christ. Now if there was so much on the Jehovah Witnesses, and there's so much to that name, Jehovah, evidently Jesus and the New Testament writers didn't know that. Because instead of translating the name Jehovah, or Yahweh into Greek, they used the Greek word Kurias, which is the Greek word for Lord, which is the title that was given to Jesus Christ. And we read that God has given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Kurias, which is the translation from the Old Testament of Yahweh, or Yahovah. So, interesting problem that they have to wrestle with.

Jesus is saying, "The primary thing, the most important, the basic thing is that you must know the true and the living God. That's first: knowing the true and the living God. But with so many religions, how can you know who is the true God? This was my next step as I was building my own faith and relationship with God. And so, I studied for a time Mohammedism. I studied Buddhism, and I began to make a serious study of the Bible. If God does exist, and God did create me for a purpose, then it would be necessary for God to reveal Himself to man early in the history of man. And God would of necessity have to perpetuate that revelation to the present day. So I immediately rejected all of the religious systems of the past that have fallen by the wayside. I didn't bother to look into Greek mythology or Roman mythology, or these other religions that already are parts of the history of man but are not current today. Because that would be an emission that God wasn't capable of keeping the revelation to the present time, and that God wasn't interested in man today; He was only interested in the early man, and He doesn't care what happens to us today. I also rejected all of these new religions that are coming out in recent years. These men who finally have received the "true revelation" of God. It's been hid from all men up until now, until we are blessed by this prophet, who has now the true understanding of God, and he brings us this new light and this new way. I rejected all that because that immediately then dismisses all of those people that have been born and died up to the present time, as if God doesn't care about them or wasn't interested in them, but suddenly God is now interested in man. I couldn't buy that. It had to be a revelation of God that began early in the history of man and was maintained to the present day. And that's why I chose the three that I did.

But as I studied, the more I studied, the more I became convinced the Bible was indeed the revelation of God.

And today I have no questions, no qualms, no doubts. That it is indeed the revelation of God to man, and it stands separate, apart, distinct, and in many cases, in opposition to the religious systems of man. For the religious systems are man's attempt to reach out to God, where Christianity is God's attempt to reach man. In the religious system, man being good enough to be accepted by God, in Christianity, there's no way man can be good enough to be accepted by God. He has to just trust in the grace of God. There's no good work that you can do. It is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by His grace alone. So rather than a system of works that can bring you to God, it bypasses all that and says, "There's nothing you can do to be worthy of God, you can only receive His grace, His love, His mercy that He extends to you through His Son Jesus Christ." God is reaching you; you can't reach Him.

And of course, as I read the Bible, I became fascinated with that prophetic aspect of the Bible, which the Bible itself declares is the built-in proof of its origin, that the Bible originates with God. "That you might know that I am God and there is none other like Me. I'm going to tell you things before they happen, so that when they happen you will know that I am indeed the Lord." Jesus said, "I've told you these things before they come to pass, so that when they come to pass you might believe." And so that prophetic element that we can even go up until the present time and read and know that God has spoken of the very days in which we now exist and has prophesied in advance things that we see in the world around us. The fact of the nation of Israel, whether or not the Arabs want to recognize it, they are there. God's word said they would be there. The Ten Nation European Federation, the movement that you read about all the time towards electronic funds transfers. And you're seeing the systems inaugurated in the stores when you go to these stores that are now using these scanning cash registers. God said, "I've told you in advance so that you might believe." And so, that built-in proof system. The most important thing for any man is to discover the true and living God. "Hear, O' Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." It's important that you know who God is.

Secondly, you must come into a loving relationship with Him,

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart [the deepest area of your life], and with all thy soul [that conscious area of your life], and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength (Mar 12:30):

Love God supremely; God must become the center of your existence, the center of your life. And all men's lives revolve around some axis. There is that center to every man's life, and it is important that you look into yourself and find out what is the center of your life. Upon what does your life revolve? What is the axis upon which your life is revolving? And with most people it is self. For most people are living self-centered lives. But the Bible assures you that the self-centered life is destined for emptiness and frustration. And the book of Ecclesiastes gives you a classic example of Solomon who lived the self-centered life, did everything for himself and ended up with that plaintive cry, "Vanity, vanity," or "Emptiness, emptiness, everything is empty and frustrating!" He did it all; he had it all. But because it was centered around himself, it was unfulfilling and he ended as a bitter cynic, as does that person who lives for himself. When you get to the end of the road, you say, "It wasn't worth it. Life is a mistake, a tragic mistake. It's a farce. There's no meaning; there's no purpose. I began as an accident, I go out as an accident. And there's no reason." Oh, how empty! How futile! That's because you've got yourself at the center of your life; you need to get God at the center of your being. And that's what Jesus is saying is the most important. That's primary; get God at the center of your life and come into a loving relationship with Him. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."

Now, the second commandment in order, in priority, similar to the first, it's,

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Mar 12:31).

You cannot do this unless God is at the center of your life. You see, he's striking at that self-centered life, because now instead of loving yourself supremely, you've got to love your neighbor as you love yourself. You can't do that unless you love God supremely. And it's only as you love God supremely, that you can fulfill the second, loving your neighbor as yourself. But in this is all the law in the prophets. This sums up the whole Old Testament. It's what it's all about. A loving relationship with God, that you might have a meaningful relationship with your fellow man; God at the vertical axis of your life, in order that the horizontal plane might be imbalanced.

Now, people get all messed up in this horizontal plane. Their interpersonal relationships are just messed up completely. And so, you go to a shrink and you try to understand yourself, and "Why do I react? Why do I respond? Why do I yell? Why do I scream? Why do I drive people away? Why do I act in such an anti-social way?" And he tries to delve into your psyche and all, and to tell you, "Now, if you'll just do this and that, and take a little Valium and all, it won't make any difference." So, he's trying to help you to balance out these

interpersonal relationships out on the horizontal plane. And so, no sooner do you get one in the focus and you sort of balance it, then the whole thing begins to go overboard. And the other side is way up, and you get up on the other side and jump up there, so that you can balance this thing out...and so, you see people spending their lives trying to keep things in balance. And it's always just sort of topsy-turvy. You've got to come to the center axis, man. It's out of kilter. Your relationship with God, it's just way off. And if your axis tilted, then the horizontal plane spinning around that axis is going to be just in a crazy whirl. Just up and down, up and down, up and down, until you say, "Oh, God, stop this thing. I want off!" First thing: get right with God, know God, love God. The second then will fall into order, loving thy neighbor as thyself.

Now, this fellow was intrigued with the answer. He thought, "Alright, I'll buy that." And he repeated it just to confirm it in his mind. And he said,

Well, Master, [that's good] thou hast said [you've told] the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more [important] than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices [that you could ever give]. And when Jesus saw [that it was sinking in] that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God (Mar 12:32-34).

You're not far from the kingdom of God because the moment God comes at the center of your life, you are in the kingdom of God. That's what the kingdom of God is about, is having the King on the throne. The moment you bow and submit your life to God as King, as the Lord of your life, then you're in the kingdom of God, you see. But no man can serve two masters; no man can have two kings. And if you are sitting on the throne of your life, if you're living a self-centered life, then you're not in the kingdom of God, and you can't be in the kingdom of God as long as you're living a self-centered life. It's not until you're living a God-centered life that you've really entered into the kingdom. And this fellow was beginning to see the picture. And Jesus said, "You're not far from the kingdom." Get God into the center of your life, and you've come into the kingdom of God.

And no man after that durst [didn't dare] ask Him any question. And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, [said to the scribes], How say the scribes [how is it that you scribes say] that Christ [the Messiah] is the son of David? (Mar 12:34-35)

Now this, of course, was something that is taught that the Messiah will be the Son of David, because there were many predictions in the Old Testament. "He will sit upon the throne of David. He'll be the root out of the stem of Jesse," and so forth. And God promised to David, "I will build you a house;" and by this David understood that the Messiah was to come through his seed. And so, "How is it that you say that the Messiah is the Son of David?

For David himself said by the Holy Ghost [through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit] (Mar 12:36),

And Jesus here recognizing the Holy Spirit as the One who inspired the writing of David. David, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in Psalm 110 said,

The Lord [or Jehovah, Yahweh] said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? (Mar 12:36-37)

In that patriarch society, the father always ruled. As long as the old man was alive, he ruled. His word was law. Even when his sons were eighty, ninety years old, if he was still alive his word was the law. And in that culture there is no way that a father would call his son Lord. That would be a total antithesis to the culture and society itself. And so, how is it that if the Messiah is the Son of David, how is it that David called Him Lord? Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How can He be a Son?

And the common people heard him gladly. And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing [robes], and love salutations in the market places (Mar 12:37-38),

"Oh, Rabbi, Rabbi, doctor, doctor."

And [they loved] the chief seats in the synagogue, and the uppermost rooms in the feasts: Which devour [and yet these scoundrels devour] widows' houses (Mar 12:39-40),

They take advantage of the little old women on Social Security, with their letters that they write of the desperate need that God has for their Social Security check this month, or God is going to be broke. And God's business

is going to fail, unless they sacrifice. I've got a stack of letters in there that you can't believe, you can't believe the junk that these men write. I know that there's got to be a hot spot seven times hotter.

and for a pretense [they] make long prayers (Mar 12:40):

And, all right. Jesus said it, "They are going to receive the hotter spot." Free translation...

these shall receive greater damnation (Mar 12:40).

Go to it, Lord! It's hard for me to express how I feel about those who would take advantage of people for religious purposes or under a religious guise. I really had no intention, when I was a young man, of being a minister. I had very set ideas. I was always sort of a goal-oriented person. And I knew from the time I was in junior high school that I was going to be a neurosurgeon, and I had studied all about the brain. From the time I was a kid, I'd check out all of the books from the library and read about the brain, fascinated with the human brain. And I just knew I was going to be a neurosurgeon, taking all the courses to prepare me for that profession. And I had a big thing against most of the ministers that I knew. I didn't feel that they were true, honest, normal people. I saw a lot of hypocrisy and it troubled me, and that's one of the reasons why I never wanted to go into the ministry. But when the Lord began to speak to my heart concerning the ministry, I said, "Oh, no way! I don't want to be one of those guys. I'm too normal, Lord. You know, I don't like to wear ties. I don't like to dress up in suits all the time. I love sports and..." The Lord said, "Who asked you to wear suits all the time? Who asked you to wear a tie all the time? Who said you can't enjoy sports? Who said you can't be normal?" You'll find me a very normal person. I don't try and create some illusion that I'm super spiritual or better or...God help us.

But then this thing of this gimmickry on money, this is the thing that really bothered me thoroughly. And I said, "Lord, I could never ask people for money." And the Lord assured me that He would be my supply, that He'd take care of my needs. And so, this is a thing of the ministry that galls me, these many, many gimmicks that are used for raising funds or for extracting or extorting money out of people. Let's go on....

And Jesus sat over against [went over and watched them give by] the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much [their large gifts] (Mar 12:41).

Now Jesus had earlier sort of come against this, and He said, "When you give, don't be like the Pharisees who like to sound the trumpet before them and make a big display over what they're giving to God." He said, "Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing; just give to the Father and see what He'll reward you." Don't look for the reward of man, the "aahs and the oohs."

So, He watched these rich people casting in these large amounts with great ostentation.

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing (Mar 12:42).

I have some mites at home. And I wanted to bring them tonight, and it was my intention to bring them to show you a mite. You can buy a hundred of them for a penny over in Israel. They're worth about one one-hundredth of a cent. This little gal threw in two of them.

And he [Jesus] called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you [I'm going to tell you the truth about this little woman], That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast [their money there] into the treasury: for all they did cast in of [gave from] their abundance; but she of her want [out of her need] did cast in all that she had, even all her living (Mar 12:43-44).

God doesn't measure your gifts by the amount. Never. But by what it costs you. By that measure God always measures what we give to Him. What did it cost me to give? David said, "I will not give to the Lord that which cost me nothing." Paul the apostle, talking to the church of Corinth, suggested that we examine ourselves. He said, "For if we will judge ourselves, then we will not be judged of God." As you look at yourself tonight, as you examine your heart, can you honestly say that your heart, your life, is centered in God? That He is the center of your existence? That your life is revolving around Him? If not, then you're far from the kingdom and you are heading down a road that can only bring despair, emptiness and frustration. I would encourage you: discover the true and the living God. Make Him the center of your affections, love Him with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind, with all your strength, and you'll find out how God intended man to live, rich, fulfilled, as you walk with Him. And thus, may you walk this week with God at the center of your life. May you be filled with His Spirit. And may God, by His Spirit, guide you, strengthen you, help you. In Jesus' name.