

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #258

Tuesday of Passion Week... Day of Testing and Teaching

An Expert in the Law Questions Jesus About the Greatest Commandment MK 12.28-34A (Parallel Text: MT 22.34-40)

28^{MT} Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ^MA teacher of the law, ^{MT}one of them--who was an expert in the law--^Mcame and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he ^{MT}tested him with this question:

“Teacher, ^Mof all the commandments, which is the most important--^{MT}the greatest commandment in the Law?”

29 Jesus answered, ^M*“The most important one is this: ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. 30 LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’* (Duet. 6.4-5)

31 *“The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* (Lev. 19.18) *There is no commandment greater than these. ^{MT}All the Law and the Prophets hang on these.”*

32^M“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34A When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

CONTEXT DIGEST	
Location	The Temple Courts in Jerusalem
Timeline	Early April (Month 39)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VIII: Passion Week
	C. Tuesday: Day of Testing and Teaching
Title	8. An Expert in the Law Questions Jesus About the Greatest Commandment

COMMENT:

The third question came from a man who belonged to a powerful sub-group within the Pharisees: a teaching scribe, or expert on the Law. In our day he would have been a seminary professor-- a Ph.D in some aspect of Old Testament theology. Apparently he had not personally witnessed the earlier exchanges between Jesus and his foes related to questions one and two. He came upon the group of Pharisees debating Jesus' earlier answers, and so learned of the wisdom of the Lord's answers. He thought he would give the renegade Rabbi a try.

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The question was deceptively easy. "What is the greatest commandment in the Law?" The problem was that no matter which answer Jesus gave, other options for the "greatest, most important" command could also be suggested. Determining what was most important depended on the criteria selected for evaluating greatness, and there was no clear-cut Biblical answer available.

Jesus didn't hesitate or waver. He went straight to the classic Jewish confession of faith found in Deut. 6.4-5, regarding the priority of loving God with our whole being. He added the second command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev. 19.18). Then he made the statement that revealed his unique, authoritative status as the interpreter and ultimate expert on the Scriptures. **"All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commands."**

This kind of sweeping summary statement showed the confidence Jesus had in his own understanding of the Scriptures. Such an authoritative pronouncement was unique in Jesus' day.

The expert was deeply impressed by Jesus' answer. He had never heard the truth presented so simply, yet clearly. The ability to reduce extremely complicated, complex truths to their most summary, simplest statements is an indication of the deepest kind of insight, and wisdom. The expert could see this in Jesus like no one he had ever met.

Jesus revealed his transcending authority and knowledge even further in his closing comment to the man. **"You are not far from the kingdom of God."** The fact that Jesus could make this assessment meant that he had complete knowledge of both the kingdom, and of the expert's thoughts and feelings regarding it. In other words, Jesus knew everything about the man; something only God can do.

Jesus summed up the entire message of the Old Testament here in one word: love.

Since God is perfect, and loves all of his creation, including every person, the most important thing we must do is to love God back with our entire beings, and express his love to everyone else as well, in the same way he loves us.

Jesus will have much more to say about the priority of love in his final extensive teaching session with his disciples on Thursday night. Here he stated the centrality of love as the most important command and concept of the Scriptures in no uncertain terms.

APPLICATION:

Everything we think, do, and are should be an expression of love. We have been created in the image of God the Trinity, who is love. We were made by love, in love, for love, through love, to BE love, even as God is love.

How much does your quest to love God dominate all your goals, actions, and life-pursuits?

Do you have plans and practices and are unrelated to love for God? What are you going to do about those things? When? How?