

READ THIS FIRST

The Gospel of Mark: The King and His Kingdom

Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as his “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) and expects us to faithfully represent him to the world. In order to faithfully live out this mission we must grow intimately familiar with who Jesus is and what he has done. Thus, it makes sense to have our first weekly study focus on the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Though this series, “The King and His Kingdom,” will not be an exhaustive study of the person of Jesus, we will become thoroughly acquainted with his message, mission, attitude and actions. Not only will we see Jesus in action, but we’ll also get a glimpse of what life looks like in Jesus’ Kingdom. Mark is a fast-paced, hard-hitting, action-packed book and we will spend fourteen weeks examining the highlights of his account.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to deepen your love for Jesus. Whether you are just beginning to explore what it would be like to follow Christ or you’ve trusted him for a long time, my hope is that your heart would be delighted by his majesty, power, humility, trustworthiness, sacrifice and victory. Only as we grow satisfied in Jesus will we be able to bring his love and grace to our hurting world.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons
Lead Pastor

The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Mark’s Gospel. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to info@secondmilechurch.com.

Week 11

KINGDOM LOVE

Mark 12:28-34

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*"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." The second is this: "You shall love your
neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment
greater than these."*

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(Mark 12:30-31, ESV)
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Introduction

We are a culture obsessed with determining what is #1. Magazines debate the top companies, the most beautiful people, and the top tips for discovering the new you. Blogs and discussion forums erupt with debate about which college football team is *really* the best in the land. We don't want to mess around with things that aren't of supreme importance.

This passage of Scripture is a discussion about what's #1 from God's perspective. When it all boils down, what is it that God really wants from his people? What's most important?

This is an important study because even though we care about what's most important, we get easily distracted into secondary things and can sometimes lose focus on the top priority. Not only that, but our different personalities and passions cause us to develop different "pet" issues—things that we care about more than most people.

Fortunately, Jesus is crystal clear about what's most important—loving God with everything we are. Unfortunately, living out this most-important command is extraordinarily difficult. How do you love God will all that you are all the time? Is there anybody other than Jesus who has ever done so?

Not only should this particular text drive us to be more loving to God and our neighbors, but it should also drive us to the cross to receive grace and forgiveness for all the times we've failed to love as we should have. As we receive the mercy and love of Jesus for us, may it melt our hearts to joyfully obey the most important command—to love our God with all of our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Investigation

Read Mark 12:28-34.

1. What appears to be the scribe's motivation in asking his question? Is he a genuine seeker of truth or is he testing Jesus? How can you tell?
2. Jesus answers the scribes question by quoting from two Old Testament passages, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. In what ways are these two commandments really just one commandment?
3. The scribe affirms Jesus' answer, saying that loving your neighbor "is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (12:33). Why is this correct?
4. What was it about Jesus' answer that was so amazing that "no one dared to ask him any more questions" (12:34)?

Implication

5. Love is a word that is used so many different ways in our culture that it has almost lost its meaning (i.e. "I love pizza!" or "I love when it rains!"). How would you define love?

6. The Bible clearly teaches that nobody can truly "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" and "love your neighbor as yourself." If living this way is impossible, why do you think God would command it?

7. In what ways have you been religiously compliant (i.e. made sacrifices and burnt offerings) but neglected loving your neighbor?

8. What are two specific things that you can do to cultivate a greater love for God and people?

Other Issues

What is the role of the law in the life of believers who are saved by grace?

First, on the one hand, Jesus shows us that love actually *defines* the lawful life. Jesus is saying, "what the law is really after is a loving life!" Of course, many of the Bible's commands are, for clarity's sake, cast as negatives — "thou shalt not." But we must not be deluded by this. When Jesus says all the laws boil down to "love God and neighbor," he is saying we have not fulfilled a law simply by avoiding what the law prohibits but we must also do and be what the law is really *after* — namely love. As Jesus shows in the Sermon on the Mount, the point of "thou shalt not commit adultery" is to be a loving spouse. (To just refrain from extra-marital sex is not enough.) The point of "thou shalt not kill" is to be a great, loving, self-sacrificing neighbor. The point of "thou shalt not steal" is to be radically and gladly generous. The point of "thou shalt not lie" is honest and personally revealing communication. We are not to be islands to each other. So every negative is actually pointing to a positive. Instead of watching our step around dozens of "thou shalt nots", we are to find ways to love God and others deeply. Jesus here defines Christian ethics in a way that is delightful and very positive. It is all about good relationships, with God and others.

Second, Jesus shows us that law actually *defines* the loving life. Consider what Jesus is saying — that God gave us the law to show us how to construct a loving life. That refutes Joseph Fletcher. He says, "don't do the legal thing — do the loving thing." But Jesus here is saying, "ah, but how do you know what the loving thing is? You may, in your limited wisdom think is it loving to lie, to hide the truth, but as your Creator I am telling you that you are wrong! What do you think the law is for? It is God's answer to the question, 'what is the loving thing to do?' Obey the law — then you will be truly a loving person." Of course, in a fallen world, there may be situations in which the technically legal thing and the most loving thing seem to contradict. We should be very slow, however to trust our own wisdom in these matters. Anyone who says that "the loving thing" goes against God's law is really saying, "I know better than God what is the most loving and beneficial behavior." But how could you know better than God? God is the Creator of every person and the whole universe of human relationships, and therefore his law: 1) reflects what he will love and hate to see in us (so unless we follow it, how can we love him?) and 2) reflects what human beings need (so unless we follow it, how can we love them?)

There may be one more insight we can glean from Jesus' teaching here on law and love. The law is not being fulfilled unless is observed as a way of giving and showing love to God or others. If it is done as a way only or primarily to get love from God and others, in "works-righteousness," it is not being used properly. It is possible to concentrate on ritual and requirements "burnt offerings and sacrifices" (v. 33) and compliance with all behavioral regulations and still miss the inner dynamic of "*faith expressing itself through love*" (Galatians 5:6).

In summary, therefore, Jesus is saying that we must obey the law out of love (in a response to his grace) and in order to love (in response to his wisdom).²⁴

Does “love your neighbor as yourself” mean that we should love ourselves?

When Jesus says, “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” he is not commanding us to “love ourselves.” Rather, this commandment assumes that we all love ourselves. Someone may say, “how can he assume this when so many people struggle with self-hate?” but that is to read into the word “love” more than is meant. In the Bible, love is not primarily a feeling, but an action. (That is a major implication of Jesus’ teaching here. He is showing us that love is a duty, not just an emotion.) Love is giving priority to someone’s needs and concerns. Even if I feel distaste for my neighbor, I am loving my neighbor if I meet his needs and give his concerns priority equal or greater than mine. Thus, when Jesus assumes our self-love, he is not talking about healthy confidence, or “self-esteem” as we use the term today. He is assuming an endless supply of self-concern. Even people complaining of “low self-esteem” show their intense concern for their own welfare — otherwise why does their lack of self-esteem bother them so?! “To love our neighbor as ourselves” means: to meet the needs of others with all the energy, delight, creativity, and consistency with which we meet our own.²⁵

²⁴ Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 163-164.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.