

Love the Lord Thy God

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

- [0 : 0 0] Now as we come to this closing section of chapter 12, and when we reach the end of chapter 12, well that will be this section of Mark's account of the gospel, complete for now, and a future stage, Lord willing, we will take up the closing four chapters in due course.
- But we come to this verse 28, where after all the, if you might say, niggling kind of questions people have been asking Jesus, the Sadducees and the Herodians and the Pharisees, and so on, and they've all been trying to catch him out.
- But here now comes one, a scribe, and having heard them reason together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, which is the first commandment of all?
- Now when he says the first, he means the first in importance, the greatest and most important of all. There was something like, you know, 670 something regulations and laws altogether in the laws of Moses, but they weren't all, clearly, of equal weight and moment.
- And I say, oh, how can you say that? Surely if it's given by God, it's all of equal value. And we might be inclined to say that, that anything that is given by God is surely just as valuable as anything else.
- [1 : 1 7] Except that that is not the testimony of Scripture. And it is not the testimony here of Christ. Because even if you think back to the Old Testament and to the law, clearly there are those aspects of it which Moses himself transcribes at the instigation of the Lord, Exodus 24.
- At verse 3 and 4, Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments, and all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words which the Lord hath said, will we do?
- And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning and built an altar under the hill of 12 pillars, according to the 12 tribes of Israel. And then again, in Deuteronomy, we read in chapter 31, verse 24 again, came to pass when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, whether it's parchment or vellum or, you know, of animal skin or whatever it was that was written on.
- It was clearly some kind of perishable earthly material that Moses wrote down these words on at the inspiration of the Lord, writing the words of this law in a book until they were finished.
- Then Moses commanded the Levites, which bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.
- [2 : 4 5] In other words, so that it can testify to where you're going right and where you're going wrong. But even there, we have to recognize a distinction between that which Moses writes down at the behest of God on materials which are perishable, compared to God's own writing with the finger of God upon the tables of stone, which are designed clearly to be, to a great extent, imperishable.

Those ten commandments that God writes himself upon the mountain, on the tables of stone, are clearly designed to outlast that which is on the lesser material, that which is all the detail that Moses writes down.

And clearly, in the things of God, there is that which is primary and fundamental, and there is that which is secondary and dependent on other commands.

And what we might say, for example, the ten commandments, you could say, all the other laws and commands that follow, they are in a sense dependent upon these other commandments, these ten commandments of God, and that they follow on from there.

So when somebody says, what is the greatest and most important commandment of all, you might think, well, it's commandment number one, I shall have no other gods before me. But that is in itself, enunciated, expounded, more perfectly elsewhere.

[4 : 15] And that Jesus cites, as being in Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And these words which I command thee, this day shall be in thy heart. Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, when thou risest up, thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Now Jesus doesn't go into all the detail about all these things. But clearly, this is the most important commandment of all. The Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and soul, and mind and strength.

There is a hierarchy of importance in that which God gives. We would perhaps, as I say, in all reverence, hang back from making such a claim, were it not for the fact that Scripture itself indicates a ranking of importance, of that which is primary and fundamental on the one hand, and that which is secondary and dependent on the other thing.

Again, Jesus himself talking about the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. At verse 23, he says, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.

[5 : 56] Now he doesn't say, so the other things aren't important, he says, these ought you have done, and not to leave the other undone. It is good to tithe all the things you tithe, he says, it's good to pay attention to detail, but you've neglected the weightier matters.

In the judgment of Christ, there are those things which are weightier, those things which are of more solemn importance. There is a hierarchy of importance in even the commands of God.

But it is not in the sense that you could say, well, this one matters, so you ignore all the others. But rather, the others flow from these primary ones.

If you were to go to the source of a river, and you could say, well, this is the spring bubbling up here, and it flows down from there, and you say, well, which is more important, the river further down, a few miles downstream, or the spring here, it's all important, but the one flows from the other.

It is all part of the same flow, it is all part of the same river. But the source is God himself, and there is a hierarchy of importance, which then is the first of all the commandments.

[7 : 17] Now, also we should notice here, again, how comparatively rare it is for Jesus to give, and I can say this with all reverence, because it is true, a straight answer to a straight question.

Quite often, people would ask Jesus questions in which they wanted a straight answer, a yes or a no, or a straight simple kind of answer, and he would tell them a parable, or he would give a slightly tangential answer that seemed to sort of leave them off in a different direction, and at the time, it must have been quite difficult sometimes to understand some of the things that Jesus meant.

We now can see the bigger picture, because we've got all of the scriptures now. We can compare one with another. We can see from a distance, from a perspective, like an artist taking a step back from his painting, as opposed to working away closer than the canvas.

We can see the fullness now of what Jesus revealed, written out for us in the Word of God. But at the time, it must have been difficult at times.

But here is a straight question, asked with all humility and reverence, and it gets a straight answer. A straight answer. The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

[8 : 34] This which was called the Shema, which is what was recited twice daily by every debunked Jew. Shema from the Hebrew meaning, to hear.

And it's from here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And then this expounding of duty. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

Now, you could preach a whole series of sermons on this one verse. We don't have time for that tonight. But one thing we should recognize here is the defining characteristic of our relationship to God is defined by the nature of God Himself.

I'll say that again. The defining characteristic of our relationship to God is defined by the nature of God Himself. God is love. Yes, there's a lot of other things too, but God is primarily, ultimately, love.

We don't know what love is, except how God reveals it and reveals Himself. All other human responses, such as we could say, well, fear the Lord, yes, and we could serve the Lord, and we can obey the Lord, and all of these things would be true and right and good.

[9 : 59] But there is, in a sense, you could say, a measure of self-interest in all of these things. We fear God because we don't want punishment. We obey God to avoid, perhaps, trouble.

And maybe we trust in God because, you know, to whom else shall we go? But love is that which of its very nature must go out from itself.

You cannot program love. You cannot compel love. It is as though, this instance has been used, I've probably used this as an example in the past, somebody has a very, very, in the olden days, had a very, very faithful slave.

A very faithful slave who did their bidding, the master's bidding, regard as, serve them diligently, serve them as seemed to be the case, lovingly and everything that they could possibly do.

But they did it. They were devoted, or so they seemed. And what the master really wanted from this slave was to have that loving service, not just dreading obedience.

[10 : 58] So if you set the slave free, then you will know whether or not he is doing it simply because he's a slave and he has no choice of whether he's doing it out of love to the master.

If you really love something or someone, you have to be prepared to let them go and then see if they return that love themselves. Love isn't love till it's given away, as the old phrase would go.

And this is what God himself put into practice. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to create Adam or Eve without free will so that they simply had to obey and love and do whatever God wanted.

They have to serve him and do everything that he said. They didn't have a choice. They obeyed. They were completely in harmony with God because they did everything that he wanted and everything he said because they didn't have the freedom to choose otherwise.

They couldn't love him. They could serve him. They could obey him. They could fear him. They could do all these things, but they could not love him until they were given the freedom to do so.

[12 : 06] And the minute you give someone free will, you run the risk that they may choose it to be exercised in an opposite direction from what you would wish.

And that is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden. It is exactly what happens potentially with anyone given the freedom to love. You cannot coerce love.

You can coerce obedience. You can bring forth fear. You can command people to trust and obey and do what you want. Yes. But you cannot coerce love.

And therefore, this commandment, this greatest commandment of all, is that if you would be the Lord's, then, yes, you can outwardly do all the necessary things and you should as well.

But your motive must be that of the freed slave who does it out of love, does it in response. We were slaves to sin.

[13 : 10] We didn't have a choice about the sin we committed. Well, we had some choice in the sense of which sins we committed and how bad we chose to be. But we weren't free to be the Lord's until he set us free.

And when the Lord sets us free, he sets us free to love him for that love to go forth out of us. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God because this is what he has done for us.

And this is his very nature with all thy heart. Now, we're inclined to think of a heart in terms of, oh, Valentine's Day and lovey-dovey stuff and so on.

That's not the sense. It's not merely the seat of the emotions in that it is in the sense of wholeheartedness, uprightness of heart, single-mindedness in that sense that the whole heart is focused undividedly upon the Lord.

There is only one God. There aren't multiple gods. There isn't a whole pantheon of idols that we can divide our love between. One God, the whole of our heart, devoted to him, not to subdivide our affections.

[14 : 24] This is why, you see, it is impossible really to claim that we love the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind and strength if other things have a greater or prior claim on our affections or on our desires.

If we rank anything more important than the Lord, and this plays out well into our own ordinary everyday lives, the number of times people put other things before the Lord, you wouldn't believe it.

It is all of our heart we are to give to the Lord. And all thy soul, now this involves not merely the emotional desire and love, it is also the spiritual realm, that part of us which is, is what makes the difference between life and death.

The living soul, all of our spiritual being, devoted to the Lord. we do not accept or acknowledge any other spiritual creature to give our worship our love to.

We don't worship angels, we don't love other idols, other gods, all of our soul, our entire life force is to be given to the Lord.

[15 : 36] But it's not to be just blind devotion, it's not just, oh well, we leave our brain outside when we come into church, as some people accuse Christians of doing, oh, it is all of the mind, the intelligent, rational function of our brain is to be engaged also.

We are to look around at the evidence of creation, we are to see the beauty and mathematical perfection of all that God has done. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament show this handiwork.

It is not the believer who leaves their brain outside when they engage with the Lord. It is the atheist, the agnostic, the unbeliever, who refuses to engage the brain, who insists on keeping part of it buried in the dust of the earth.

It is all of the mind to be given to the Lord and to recognize that because of this, when there are those things which we do not understand, when there are those things of which we can grasp so much but we can't quite see how the rest fits in and this is where we trust and believe that the Lord who has worked all these other things out in perfection, this bit that we can't quite grasp, we love him with all of our mind and we see and know God has got all these other bits fitting together perfectly.

Our mind, our rational intellect tells us it is logical that he will have this bit covered as well. That which I myself cannot understand, I trust that God knows perfectly.

[17 : 20] I love him with my mind as well and with all of thy strength. It is not to be half-hearted, it is not to be lukewarm.

What does the Lord say about the one lukewarm church in Revelation 3? I will spew thee out of my mouth because thou art neither hot nor cold, neither one thing nor the other. I have food in both camps, you're liable to get torn apart right up the middle.

It's not a comfortable place to be. All thy strength, it takes all your strength because there will be times when loving the Lord means you have to hold on with both hands as Satan tries to prise your fingers off of that hold that you have upon him.

It will take all of your strength and it will take all of your life. You will need it all, heart, soul, mind, and strength.

It is all of you that he desires because he has given all of himself for you, sinner, so that you may be saved.

[18 : 29] Now, where we recognize that God is love, we recognize also that yes, everybody on this earth loves something or someone.

You know, in 1 John, we read in chapter 4 from verse 7, Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God for God is love. Now, lots of people see it from these verses and they say, oh, so if you just love another person, if, for example, one person loves their homosexual lover and they love him, so I love him, so I'm just like God because God is love, or I love another man's wife that I'm not entitled to, then, oh, well, I'm just like God because I love and God is love, so because I have this love for this other person, or because I love my country, or because I love my car, or because I love that little doggy in the window, therefore, I am just like God because God is love, no, we are not just like God, but it is a matter of fact that there would not be love in this world except God had given it, in the same way as God gives the rays of the sun to warn the plant life of the earth, to bring it on up through the soil, and he sends the rain upon the just and the unjust, all that is in this world is there because God has put it there, and everything that God has put there in some way points to himself and reflects himself, so it is with love, even that which we love, which may be very impure or very imperfect, yet we have a burning love towards it, and everybody loves something, everybody loves someone, perhaps, you might say, even if it's only we hate everybody else but I love myself, every kind of love that is in the world is in some way a trickle-down fact of the love the Lord has placed in this world, because love ultimately traces back its source to God, that is what 1 John means there, that whoever loves is of

God, just as if we talked about that river a few minutes ago, where you've got your source bubbling up high in the hills, and then there are other little tributaries joining, other streams flowing to the river, a few miles downstream, it's a big wide river, which is more important, the source or the river further down, it's all the same flow, but supposing further down you've got a factory that is pumping out effluent and pollution into that river, and it means that below that factory of the river, it's filthy, and it's toxic, and it's full of chemicals, and the fish are all dying, there's something wrong with that river, poison has been put into it, but it is still a river, and it does still trace its source to that pure spring in the mountains, and whatever kind of twisted or sinful or perverted form of so-called love people may practice in this world, and there is much that is sinful in terms of what people call love in this world, it is still the case that everyone that loveth, that love is ultimately born of God, and knoweth God, because without

God there would be no love at all, yes it is like the polluted river, yes it is toxic in what has been pumped into it, and Satan takes what God has made pure, and he twists it, and he pollutes it, and he defiles it, but God is love, he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love, and therefore if we are to fulfil that first and greatest commandment of all, it means that what we love should not be merely our country, or our husband, or wife, or children, or the little doggy in the window, or our nation's flag, or whatever it may be, our first and ultimate, most important love of all should be the Lord, and everything else takes its second, third, fourth place from that, every decision that we take, in terms of our employment, in terms of our relationships, in terms of our political choices, in terms of the direction we seek for our lives, or those of our children, should be informed by that ultimate love for the Lord, putting him first, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and Proverbs says, it says, my son, give me thine heart, and we can see this is a cry from the Lord, with all thy soul, thy spiritual life force, all thy mind, intellect, and with all thy strength, a passion for the

[23 : 35] Lord, this is the first commandment, now such, if you like, a prece, such a summary of the whole law of God, it fits perfectly because all the other laws and commandments plug into this one greatest commandment, all the others flow from that, because everything that God commands, we will do if we love him, everything that might inconvenience us a wee bit, if it's a question of doing it because we love the Lord, or, oh, now I don't want to do that because I love myself more, or I want to do this with my time, my way, or whatever, if it's a choice between the love of the Lord, or the love of the world, or the love of myself, who should win?

Who should win if I'm to love the Lord with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my mind, and all my strength? This comprehension of it all, in this one verse, is brief, and simple, and as we said, comprehensive.

It is brief, in that it is easily remembered. The only thing you might struggle with is exactly what order it is. I don't think the order necessarily matters. Heart, soul, mind, strength, as long as you've got the four corners, as it were, of that foundation.

All aspects of your life. It is brief. It is simple, such that a child could understand it, but at the same time it is comprehensive, in that it may encompass every command, and precept, and detail, of the law of God, including the New Testament and the Gospel.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. This is the first command. And the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

[25 : 31] Now this is cited, from the Ten Commandments as such, though they would also flow from it. But in Noviticus 19, in verse 18, thou shalt not avenge, nor bade any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

I am the Lord. We should also recognize here what this commandment is not saying. It is not saying, oh, your neighbor is to be right up there with God. You are to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

And yourself is not to be in competition with God. Yourself is beneath God. Yourself is lower than God. Yourself is less than God.

Yourself only should receive your own love after the Lord. But once the Lord has had his due on the level at which you place yourself, your neighbor should likewise be at that same level.

Love your neighbor as yourself. It rules out on the one hand the idolatry of man who likes to put himself on God's throne. No, man is at man's level.

[26 : 37] Love your neighbor as you love yourself. But at the same time it rules out seeking to grind down or crush others. We are to lift them up to the level at which we would seek to be ourselves.

But that level is the level of mankind, the level of ourselves, not the level of God. there is only one God and there is only one throne on which he should be.

But we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, to do unto them as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, as we would have them do unto us. There is none other commandment greater than these.

So as Jesus puts it in Matthew 22 at verse 40, on these two hang all the law and the prophets. And the scribes said unto him, well, master, well done in other words.

Thou hast said the truth, for there is one God and there is none other to eat. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, with all the soul, with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

[27 : 45] Now, of course, some people quibbled with that in those days. They thought sacrifice was the most important thing of all. You have the whole burnt offerings and those are purely to glorify God because the priest doesn't get any of them and the sacrificer doesn't get any to have a feast with afterwards.

There's no chunk of meat for you to have a party with afterwards with your friends. No, the whole lot goes in the altar and it has no purpose but to glorify the Lord as a whole burnt offering.

But this says the scribe rightly, this is greater, this is more important because this affects every aspect of life.

God is love and he has given us all his very nature in love itself and if we are to worship him as we ought, we do so with all of ourselves, all of our love, all of our lives.

Remember what we read in Deuteronomy earlier in chapter 6, it said, you know, these commandments, write them on the doorposts of your house as you're going out and you're coming in, they're there to remind you.

[28 : 51] Put them as frontlets between your eyes, bind them and your wrists. And of course, some of the scribes and pharisees did these things physically, they bound them in a little pouch on their wrists or between their eyes and they made a big deal of the fact they had these physical little bits of the law bound about their persons or on their doorposts of their house.

But what Jesus meant and what God meant is that in your dwelling place and in the work that you do with your hands and in what you look out from with your eyes upon the world, it should all be as it were through the lens, filtered through the experience of the word of God.

Every single aspect of your life, you're rising up, you're sitting down, when you wake, when you sleep, when you eat, all that you do and you teach them to your children, it is to infuse and imbibe every aspect of life.

And the scribe recognized this. When Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, honestly, faithfully, not trying to make a big show of it, but discreetly, he said unto him, not far from the kingdom of God.

And no man after that durst ask him any question. Now we don't know the ultimate fate of this scribe, we don't know whether he became ultimately a believer in Christ, we know that he came close because Jesus says he's not far from the kingdom of God.

[30 : 11] He may have been like Festus, I think it was, was it Felix? I think it is Festus elsewhere, he said, almost unpersuaded to be a Christian. But the fact is, he is close because he has grasped the nature of the most important commandments of all.

And Jesus answered and said what he taught in the temple, how say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, the Lord said to my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

David therefore himself called him Lord, and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly. Now, one reason the common people heard him gladly is because clearly with these questions he is running rings round the learned, round the scribes, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, the chief priests, whom Jesus knows his own Bible, his own scriptures inside out, far better than they do.

He knows not only what it says, he knows what it means. And when the common people heard him gladly, they are delighted that there is one who can open up the word to them, and who can also unpick some of the thorny little questions and perhaps make the learned and the wise look like maybe they're not quite so learned and wise.

Jesus isn't trying to be super clever here. He's not trying to catch people out, but he is trying to make them think. He is trying to point them gently to the reality which can only be fulfilled.

[31 : 45] these verses that seem to be contradictory. Psalm 110 of course, he's citing at verse 1, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies like fruit still, was recognised by everyone as being a messianic psalm.

That when David said, the Lord said to my Lord, he knows exactly what he is talking about. He knows who he is talking about. Everybody recognised that this was a psalm speaking of the Messiah.

One of the things that is helpful if you have the authorised version in front of you is that there is a distinction made between Lord in capitals, which is a covering over of the divine name, and Lord where only the initial letter is capitalised and the rest of the ORD is in small letters.

Now, where that is the case, when you've got the smaller letters, that is almost always a reference to the Messiah, a reference to the Christ who is to come, and Jesus makes explicit reference to this here.

The Lord, in capitals, said to my Lord, not in capitals, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David is regarding the Messiah as my Lord.

[33 : 01] How is he then David's son? If he was David's son, he'd be inferior to David as the father of any family, head of his family, and his children were under him. So how can he be junior to him at the same time as being the Messiah, his Lord, up there?

And you know, there's other instances in that. Mr. Campbell during the communion season, they reference to Isaiah chapter 6. And then again, if you go to Isaiah chapter 6, in the year that King Isaiah died, I saw also the Lord, small O-R-D, is referring to the Messiah, to, if you like, the personification of the second person of the Trinity, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

But in verse 3, we're back to Lord in capitals. And you see again that in verse 5, verse 8, verse 11, verse 12, Lord, small O-R-D, and Lord in capitals, are used interchangeably.

The Father and the Son, the Godhead, and the Messiah, used interchangeably, each regarded as being on the throne, each regarded as speaking, and how God the Son, as the Messiah, fulfills this place perfectly.

And yet, the Messiah is at the same time, wholly human, descended, according to the flesh, from David. This cannot be reconciled, except with a Messiah who is both divine, superior to David the King, and human, descending, according to the flesh, from David the King.

[34 : 40] And Jesus, of course, being wholly human, and wholly divine, fulfills this place, this purpose, this calling, perfectly.

This is exactly what he has designed, in the sense of his coming amongst us as a human being, to do what his enfleshing, his incarnation, is intended to do, to become human, so that God takes on human flesh, so that he can die, so that he can die in the place of his people, and pay the price of their sins.

But these verses that Jesus is quoting, which are a conundrum to the Jews. How can he be? Now, how did David say, the Lord said to my Lord, how can he be his son if he calls him Lord? Because he is both God and humanity at one and the same time.

Now, this is too much for people to grasp in Jesus' day, but he is pushing them, nudging them gently in the right direction, nudging them in the direction of grasping, thinking about these things.

Just as when somebody said to him, good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, why are you calling me good? There's nobody who's good but he's God. And he doesn't say, you're wrong to call me good because there's none good but God.

[36 : 01] He doesn't say, why are you calling me that? Do you understand why you call me good? Do you realise there's nobody who is good but God and yet you call me good? Do you understand what it is you're saying?

He doesn't say he is wrong. Just as Jesus is not saying that the scribes are wrong to say that the Messiah is David's son, he is that according to the flesh but he is so much more.

It is as though you were to refer to the queen as the Duchess of Edinburgh which she is, she is the wife of the Duke of Edinburgh so she is technically and absolutely the Duchess of Edinburgh but if that's all that you refer to her as then you are selling her short because she's much more than that and just as the Messiah is much more than merely the son of David.

He is also not only the son of God but God the son, the second person of the Trinity. Now our time is going I realize but I'd like us to notice in these closing verses from verse 38 onwards a contrast, a contrast between what we might say false religion and true with those whom Jesus criticized, described, loved to go in long clothing, loved salutations in the marketplaces, the chief seats in the synagogue, the uppermost rooms at feasts, devour widows houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

He's not saying they should never have the top seats at the synagogue, they should never wear those long robes, they shouldn't be given a place of honour in the synagogue, it is right in a sense that people who are learned and those who are perhaps the leaders of the people should be given that place by virtue of their office, what he is pointing out is those who just live for that adulation, that all of their religion is focused upon these earthbound rewards.

[37 : 59] It is as though somebody were to say go into politics and to crave high office in government, not in order to serve the people or to make good laws but so they can ride around in the flashy cars, so they get the posh residents, so they get, you know, all the privileges that they never have to queue, they get somebody else to make the phone calls and send all their correspondence for them and everything opens up for them and they're VIP and they love this side of it.

Now of course, if you're going to govern effectively, then you're going to need to be taken to all your appointments quickly by government cars and you can't be queuing for the bus when you've got an appointment with the ambassador of whatever country it is.

You have to have these things that make your life smoother and more efficient in order to govern the country better. But for some people, that's all they live for.

And for those who desired simply to be seen as the cream of the community, it was this, VIP status, that they lived for.

And in order to get it, they were prepared to pretend that they were faithful to the Lord for its religion, for a pretense, make long prayers.

[39 : 15] Notice something that Jesus says here. These shall receive greater damnation. Now that single word tells us that there are degrees of damnation, just as there are degrees of glorification.

In my Father's house are many mansions. Some people will be much nearer the throne than others when it comes to glory. And some people will be a lot deeper down in the furnace than others when it comes to hell.

And that is only as it should be. You cannot, for example, treat somebody who's gone through their entire life, never know, never heard of Jesus Christ, and they end up lost in a lost eternity compared to somebody who's had all the privileges and who has absolutely spat them back and turned their back on the Lord and refused every offer of grace that they knew all about from the gospel.

There are degrees of damnation, just as there are degrees of glorification. They shall see the greater damnation. But finally then we see here true religion.

Jesus sat over against the treasury and he held how the people cast money into the treasury. See, he's not just looking at the amounts, he's also seeing how they do it.

[40 : 33] He's seeing whether they do it ostentatiously, whether like it says elsewhere, they're thumping a trumpet before them before they give their arms or their collection or whatever, or whether they give with a cheerful heart, or whether they give grudgingly, or whether they only give a tiny little bit of what they got.

He's not just looking at the amounts, he's looking at how people give. Because man looketh on the way out of appearance, but God looketh on the heart. And many that were rich cast in much.

Now we're inclined to read this and think, oh yes, they were the hypocrites, they were the bad people. They're not bad just because they're rich, nor are they bad for giving of their abundance. It is right and good that those whom the Lord has blessed with abundant wealth and riches should give generously.

They ought to, they are doing right. Many that were rich cast in much. So far, so good. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farling.

Now, although we often talk about the widow's mite, we tend to talk about the singular, but this instance is mentioned here in Mark, and it's mentioned also in Luke 21, and it's always the plural, mites.

[41 : 47] The mites together make a farling. Now, some of you might be old enough to remember the old money before decimalisation. A farling was the smallest unit coin you could possibly get. A quarter of a penny.

Two farlings made a halfpenny. And here we have these two mites which together make a farling. Quarter of a penny. This is how poor she is. She doesn't have a thing.

She probably couldn't buy much for that anyway, but the point is, this was all she had. It would be the easiest thing in the world for her to say, well, they're not going to thank you for my two mites.

Look at all this abundance people are throwing in. They're not even going to notice. I'll just keep it for myself. For her, this was not about the treasury. It wasn't about the collection. It wasn't about the amount of money.

For her, it was about the Lord. And what was she doing? She was giving to the Lord all that she had, all her living. She was loving the Lord with all her heart and soul and mind and strife.

[42 : 48] she was putting true religion into practice. Why would somebody with almost nothing give that little bit that they had left?

Why would they do that? It can't possibly make much difference to the amount of money that's there in the collection box. It can't make much difference to the wealth of the temple itself or the chief priests or whatever. It's not for them.

She's doing it. She's not concerned with how much difference it might make or whether it'll be missed or whether or not she could just as easily keep it and easily get away with it. She's concerned with giving the Lord her all.

That is what it's about for her. And that is what Jesus commands. Because this is true religion in action. This is the commandment when we're speaking about being put into practice.

She gave all that she had, even all her living. All those who were rich, they still had plenty left after they'd given. They weren't bad for keeping something for themselves, but here's an example of somebody who has emptied themselves, that they might give it all to God.

[43 : 58] And notice again where the focus must have been. She could have looked around the temple and look at the wealthy priests, look at the vestments, look at how rich they all are, look at these rich men, they've given plenty.

She could look earthbound at the institution of religion, but instead she looked heavenwards and she looked to the Lord and for the Lord nothing was too much because that is what he had given for her.

He had given his all for a redeemed sinner as we must have, us that she was, who had given her all for the Lord, who had given his all that she might be saved.

So I will get good to you.