

OUR GOD IS THE ONLY GOD

Mark 12:28-34

Key Verse: 12:29

"The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"

Chapter 12 is the most exquisite epic, the historical poem of Israel. Especially, the parable of the tenants (1-12) is indeed remarkable in its inclusiveness of God's purpose and his people Israel's mission. But the Pharisees did not accept it. Then the Sadducees came to Jesus to defeat him verbally and put him in deep trouble. They did not believe the resurrection. Jesus told them that those who believe in the resurrection will be like the angels in heaven (25). They will be like Jesus. Today's passage is mainly Jesus' conversation with one of the teachers of the law. This teacher of the law was one who was right in the sight of God. Let's see what kind of teacher of the law he was, why Jesus admired him, and what Jesus taught him.

I. Love the Lord your God (28-30)

First, a genuine teacher of the law (28). Look at verse 28. "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'" For the most part, the teachers of the law, the

Pharisees and Sadducees, were in character political and not spiritual at all. They were earthbound. But one of the teachers of the law was genuine and truth-seeking. He had the power of discernment between good and evil. He had not contracted the cultural diseases. He was not floating downstream according to the trend of the world. Most of all, he was a great scholar who could understand the word of truth from the mouth of Jesus, on hearing Jesus' debating with the Pharisees and Sadducees. He heard the debating between the Pharisees and Jesus and between the Sadducees and Jesus. He learned that Jesus was right by giving them the word of God. It is indeed surprising that this teacher of the law kept himself pure in the sight of God in that darkest generation in history. Jesus, who was supported by one of the teachers of the law, was pleased after two violent attacks by the enemies of God. How could this teacher of the law keep himself pure? This young teacher reminds us of Psalm 119:9-12. It says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees." He was not born to be good. As we studied in Romans, all human beings are both good and evil. In order to keep himself pure in the sight of God, the young teacher must have struggled hard to have the word of God in his heart. Psalm 119:15-16 says, "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." This young teacher was like a tree planted by the streams of water (Ps 1:3).

From time to time, we despair when we look at men and women of per-

version. We despair when we look at men and women with no sense of honor or sense of shame. They are directed by their sinful feelings. They are ruled and overruled by their selfishness. They are ashamed of Jesus who gives eternal salvation to those who believe in him. But that is not all. There are many who are like the young teacher who are happy to listen to the words of Jesus. There was an American young man whose family is crowded with many sisters. So he was a very precious son to his family. His parents loved him more than anybody else because he was always an all-A student and he was an upright person before men and God. But he was also a human being. When he grew up he had to overcome American peer pressure, the great temptation creeping into his heart. Then he came to UBF and studied the Bible with one who did not understand his own English. But the American young man understood his teachings because he had a burning desire to know the truth. While he was in the Ph.D. program in statistics he went from Boston to New York UBF regularly for two-and-a-half years, driving 500 miles round trip. He accomplished this mission in order to keep himself pure in the sight of God at Harvard and to help American students in New York UBF learn basic gospel faith. We know how he struggled to drive such a long distance every weekend. We know how he struggled to have the word of God in his heart in the midst of Ph.D. study. His life of faith had been hard. But God blessed him to finish his Ph.D. and to marry a most beautiful woman of God and to get a position as a professor at a university. It is indeed amazing to see such a person. This American young man is as pure as the young teacher whom Jesus admired.

At the time of the prophet Elijah the people of Israel all bowed down to the god Baal. The prophet Elijah worked hard preaching and terminating the prophets of Baal in the Kishon Valley (1Ki 18:40). The prophet did not see his people turning their hearts to God. He completely despaired and cried out, "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life..." (1Ki 19:4). When he saw his people's ungodly lifestyle and their acts as enemies against God, the prophet Elijah completely despaired and wanted to die, saying, "I have had enough, Lord," which meant, "I have suffered enough for your flock of sheep." But God said to the prophet Elijah sternly, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (1Ki 19:18). Sometimes we despair, thinking that there is no one who is pure or righteous before God. Sometimes we despair, saying, "I have suffered and had enough hardships to take care of God's sheep under my care. But no one seems to get better." Many a servant of God says, "I despair and I want to give up on God's sheep under my care." But we must believe that there are many pure people before God like the young teacher and the seven thousand who did not bow down to Baal. This young teacher greatly pleased Jesus. Likewise, we must please Jesus by keeping ourselves pure before God. We firmly believe there are many who are pleasing to God with their pure hearts.

The young teacher asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (28) It is indeed amazing that he studied the Bible until he could have a question to know the core of the entire Bible. He was not a mere student who wanted to get good scores for the credit. But he wanted to

grasp the whole truth of the Bible in one word. He wanted to obtain the spiritual enlightenment of the Bible. He wanted to know the secret of the Bible truth. One professor said to his associates, "You have to love your wife dearly. When I was young I was crazy for physics study. I had no time to love my wife." The young teacher must have been like the physics professor. The young teacher studied the Bible to the degree that he could ask, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" May God bless each of us to study the Bible like this young teacher of the law.

Second, the Lord is one (29). Look at verse 29. "'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" Jesus' answer to the young teacher was very short. "The Lord is one." But this short phrase answers all the questions the teacher had had. First and last of all, we must know that our God is the one and only God and there are no other gods. There are ample reasons for this. But we want to think about a few things.

In the first place, man-made gods do not talk about creation faith. Only our God, the Father of Jesus, says in Genesis 1:1, "God created the heavens and the earth." Our God tells us the first cause, who made man and the world and where man and the world came from and how the starry host keeps its course exactly. To the Creator God, the whole world is nothing but a drop in the bucket, and like dust on the scales (Isa 40:15).

In the second place, all other gods do not talk about where man came from and where man goes back to. In other words, they did not explain the

way and the life and the truth (Jn 14:6). But our God gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ so that man can find the way and the truth and the life in Jesus. All other gods do not talk about man's eternal salvation. But our God made his one and only Son a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world. Our God gave eternal salvation to those who believe in the Son.

In the third place, our God is the only God because he gave a living hope in the kingdom of God to those who believe in Jesus. In this world there is nothing which does not perish, spoil or fade away. No man can live forever. Everybody dies at the appointed time. In view of history, many kings and queens felt they were unlucky to become kings and queens and they were very fatalistic that they were kings and queens and not ordinary people. They thought that they did not become ordinary people because God punished them. In this world, even kings and queens feel great limitation of their lifetimes and become very fatalistic. But our God gave us living hope in the kingdom of God. Therefore our God is the only God. All other gods are no more than antique philosophers who talked about their own ideas which gave no solution to man's fundamental problems.

In the fourth place, our God is the only God because he gives us the grace of forgiveness of sin. It is a very familiar story to all of us. Prince Buddha lived in a palace. But he had no peace in his heart. Prince Buddha was under the power of sin. The power of sin drove him out of the palace. The power of sin made him shave his head. As a result, Prince Buddha adopted as his philosophy that the best life is begging and suffering, and doing no

wrong to others. But our God gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Our God gives us the grace of forgiveness of sin through his Son's death and resurrection. Our God gives us the peace of God in our hearts. Our God gives us a living hope, eternal salvation and the kingdom of God.

Third, love the Lord your God with all your heart (30). Look at verse 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." It is easy to eat a Big Mac. It is not so difficult to get a Ph.D. But it is not easy to love God, who is Spirit and who is invisible. In order to love God we must have a pure heart through which we can see the living God and the kingdom of God. God made man and he wanted to be Father to all men and have all men be his precious children. It is a Biblical constant that children obey their parents and are the object of parents' joy. The children love their father and the father will provide all the necessary things for them. It is the same with God. When we love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds and with all our strength, we can grow in the image of God. We come to know the love of God. We come to know God, that he is our Everlasting Father. When we love God with all our hearts we become godly people. Otherwise we become ungodly and merciless people.

When we love God, God blesses us and our descendants forever. This is the reason Exodus 20:5,6 says, "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the

children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." On the other hand, when we love money more than God we must live by our own effort, like communists. They have no blessing of God. One young man loved a girl more than God. When he did not grab the girl he left his church and became an agent of anti-Christians (CAN). We cannot say that he loves God with all his heart. We cannot say that God would bless him.

II. Love your neighbor as yourself (31-34)

First, love your neighbor as yourself (31). Look at verse 31a. "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" When we study this part, love God and love your neighbor are not pieces of advice but they are precisely the commandments of God. To love God is our ultimate duty and the key to happiness and universal truth. To love the Lord your God with all your heart basically means to love our God. It also means that our basic principle of life and standard of life and solution of life should be the love of God. So Jesus said, "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

God himself showed us how to love his children absolutely. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This verse is a comfort to our souls. God crucified his Son while we were still sinners. It is easy for us to love our own children or influential servants of God. It is easy to love those who look pretty

like a cutie-pie, Angie Fitzpatrick and Amy Orlando. But it is not easy for anyone to love sinners whose meditation is how to make use of others or how to get some benefit from others. It is not easy for us to love those who are very rebellious and those who mastered in selfishness. But God sent his one and only Son to die for our sins while we were still 'sinners' in order to show us his divine love. "Love your neighbor" means to love the one lost in the sight of God.

In many magazines last week, June 19-25, 1994, there were many articles about physical abuse. Those who abuse others are mostly philosophers who think, "I am my own man." A husband thinks, "I am my own man." The problem is his wife also thinks, "I am my own woman." Then in a family there are two masters. There are two savings accounts. One husband, according to one of the magazine articles, wanted to set the order of the family. He thought that the husband should be first and the wife should be next. But his wife did not think so. Then the husband beat her almost to death. But the wife never yielded to his demand. This happens when there is no God who is love in a family.

Second, the happiness of the young teacher of the law (32-33). When Jesus taught him the core of the Bible and the heart of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus by saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," and "love your neighbor as yourself," it was the exact answer he wanted to hear. So he said in verses 32-33, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 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." When we read the young teacher of the law's reply repeatedly, we can experience how happy he was to know the universal truth which makes the world a paradise. In his answer happiness is overflowing.

Third, "you are not far from the kingdom of God" (34). When Jesus saw the young teacher of the law, that he was most happy and his soul was dancing a Russian dance, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (34). When Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," it does not mean that he drove the circumference of the earth and is near the kingdom of God. It does not mean that he was launched by a space rocket and he is near the kingdom of God. It means that he has already seen the kingdom of God even while on earth. It means that he deserves to enter the kingdom of God. It means that he experienced the kingdom of God living among fallen men. He is very different from Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus had everything. He was a member of the Jewish council. He had great wealth. He had great knowledge. He was a man of standing. But he was as miserable as Oscar the Grouch. Like Oscar the Grouch he came out during the night to visit Jesus. How could he overcome his miseries? He was miserable because he did not know God or the love of God or the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we thought about why our God is the only God. Our God is the only God because he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Our God is the only God because he saves us from our sins. Our God is the only God

11

because he gives us a living hope, eternal salvation and the kingdom of God through his Son's death and resurrection. May God bless you to know that our God is the only God in your deep heart. May God bless the young people of this nation to know that our God is the only God.