

## **“The King’s Law” based on Mark 12:28-34 and Psalm 24**

**Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione on November 3, 2024, at Shelby Presbyterian Church**

Today is All Saints Day, when we remember our dearly beloved members of this church who have died this past year in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life. This is an important day because it reminds us that the church is not just us today here in this place, but it includes a great cloud of witnesses who share a common faith. This faith is rooted in the life, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and the promise of life in the age to come, or as it is often translated eternal life.

Yet, as much as I love this day, there is a danger in focusing on heaven as a final destination. You see, for most of the history of the church, a separated heaven as its own location was never the goal. By this, I mean that heaven was seen as the realm in which God lives, and that this realm would at the end of time come down to creation.

This is as the vision of Revelation reveals when the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, would descend down into creation. God would dwell there, with the people, and there would be no more sorrow, no more pain, and no more tears. The goal had always been what we pray every Sunday, for God’s Kingdom to come to earth, and God’s will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Our calling then is not to punch our ticket into heaven and convince others to do so as well. No, our calling is to live as members of God’s kingdom and work for the Kingdom, inviting others to become as we are, joining us as naturalized citizens of God’s kingdom. We are the adopted children of God, through the brotherhood of Jesus, and fueled by the Holy Spirit as the downpayment of our inheritance, which is that life in the age to come, life eternal.

We do this by loving God with all that we have and loving our neighbor as ourselves. This is why Jesus says to the scribe that he is not far from the Kingdom of God. The scribe in our scripture this morning understands the core commandments. He understands the King’s Law – the law of the King of Glory – even if, based on how he questions, and how he patronizes Jesus, he believes himself able to arbitrate whether Jesus is legitimate. He knows the law, but not the King. He’s close to the Kingdom, but not there yet.

Indeed, our Psalmist today points to God’s sovereignty over all the world. The land or often translated “earth” is the Lord’s and all that fills it, the world and all who dwell therein. And yet, there is also the specific “hill of the Lord” and the “Lord’s holy place.” These are often interpreted as Zion, or Jerusalem, and the Holy Temple. This then means this place would be the meeting place of heaven and earth. Yet, only the perfect – with clean hands and a pure heart – seem eligible to enter this holy place.

But then comes the King of Glory to enter, so lift up the gates and everlasting doors, the Lord who is strong and mighty in battle, the Lord of hosts who is the King of Glory. The true King, the King of Glory, then is no mere human, but the Lord himself. This is what Jesus proclaims of himself when he proclaims that the Kingdom of God is near. Indeed, the scribe is not far, but he has not yet grasped it in full.

Beloved, our passage in Mark and the similar passages in the three other gospels, point to the foundation of what it means to participate in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom we pray will come,

to establish God's will on earth as in heaven. This is why God sent the eternal Son, the Word to bear our flesh, being born in our human limits, living and teaching the Kingdom way. He then died for us, rose for us, and ascended for us so that we might be temples of the Holy Spirit – little meeting places of heaven and earth – revealing the Kingdom of God for all.

Indeed, we are God's beloved, not simply so that we can feel good about ourselves, but because when we know we are loved, we become capable of love ourselves. When we love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, we are able to love our neighbor as ourself building for the Kingdom.

There is a strange thing in this passage from Mark that caught my attention in translation. What's interesting is that Jesus uses the word "hoti," in Greek, meaning "because." Many translations leave it out because it's not in Matthew's or Luke's accounts of these commands. If it is included, the translations try to make it "that" which is another meaning acceptable for "hoti."

But I find it interesting to translate Jesus in Mark literally or woodenly, where he says, "Because the first is, 'Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, 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.' No other commandment is greater than these."

In Matthew, Jesus says loving the neighbor is "equal to" or "the same" and in Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul says that loving the neighbor is on its own the summation of the whole law. The way we love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength is by truly loving our neighbors as ourselves.

I know someone I wake up every morning. I brush his teeth. I wash his body. He is someone I feed and take to the bathroom. I take this person to work and feed again. I'm not talking about my son, I'm talking about me. I do all these things for me. This is how I love myself. If we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, we do for them, what we want done to us. Matthew and Luke duplicate this command in recording Jesus saying, "Do unto others as you would have done to you." John renders it, "Love one another as I have loved you." Loving our neighbors is loving anyone God puts in our lives with kindness – not niceness – but kindness in doing what is useful and helpful to others.

The King of Glory came as a human being to share in our humanity, and to give us himself also as the object of our worship, so that in all we do in service to one another as he served us, we do this for the Kingdom, faithful to our king.

Beloved, we celebrate those who died in the hope of the resurrection, and we believe them to be in the arms of God, waiting for the completion of the reconciliation of all things in Christ. This will be when all that we do for the Kingdom will be revealed, as refined and preserved in the Kingdom yet to come.

Beloved, the Kingdom of God is now, and, yet it is also not yet. Eternal life is not the reward for a life well lived, as if that is our goal. No, eternal life is the promise that God has our back no matter what. We can choose to do what is right even when it is difficult – loving God and loving neighbor. This means knowing that if the world that hates God or the world pits us against neighbor, there is nothing the opposition can do that God cannot undo through love. Our rejection of the world is to

love God and love neighbor because we don't have to fear anything the world can do to us – not even death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The Christian life is not about rewards and the benefits we hope to receive. No, the Christian life is about the confidence we have that our God is so great, we do not need to protect God because God protects us, even to the point of restoring us to new life in the age to come.

Committing ourselves to loving God with all we have – our heart, soul, mind and strength – and loving our neighbor in the same way we love ourselves – is not easy. But when we take seriously our role as citizens in the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven, all the same thing, then we do it, praying for God's help. We pray that God's Kingdom come, and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Our hope is not in escaping this world, and our hope is not in the things of this world either. Rather, our hope is in the God who is making all things new, and is doing so with us, in us, and among us, through the King's law. This law is enacted by us in the world around us, so that in the end, the new creation will reveal the fullness of God's love, God's mercy, and God's glory. Amen.