



Some Great Questions

Mark 12:28-37

1. What commandment is the foremost? (verses 28-34)

2. In what sense is He his son? (verses 35-37)

I invite you to open your Bibles to Mark, chapter 12. Since January, we have been working our way through the gospel of Mark. In light of the brevity of the gospel, and in light of the way that Mark seems to move us along, using the word, "immediately" nearly 40 times, [\[1\]](#) I have tried to keep up a good pace through these texts. It took about four years to work through the gospel of Matthew. But, I think that we'll finish Mark sometime just after the New Year. It's been good for us to keep such a pace.

In recent weeks, we have seen Jesus on the hot-seat, being on the brunt end of questions from the religious leaders that have been asked to try to destroy Him (3:6; 11:18; 12:13). We read in Mark 11, "...the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, and began saying to Him, 'By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?'" (Mark 11:27-28). They were questioning the authority of Jesus.

What right did Jesus have to come into the temple and "overturn the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves"? (Mark 11:15). Who gave Him the right to prevent anyone "to carry merchandise through the temple"? (Mark 11:16). They were calling Him to account.

Jesus flipped the statement and asked them about John the Baptist. But, they refused to answer. And so did Jesus refuse to answer their question.

When that first question didn't work, they brought in the Herodians, who tried to "trap Him in a statement" (Mark 12:13). These were the ones who had the political power to put Him away if He spoke publically against Rome. They said to Him, ...

Mark 12:14-15

"Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay or shall we not pay?"

The trap was set. If Jesus said that we shouldn't pay the tax, the political authorities were poised and ready to arrest him. If Jesus said that we should pay the tax, the people would revolt against Him. But, Jesus evaded the trap, saying, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).

When that question didn't work, the Sadducees tried their hand at a question. The Sadducees, of course, didn't believe in the resurrection. And so, they tried to show how ridiculous the resurrection is. They told the story of a woman who married seven brothers, each of whom died. Then they asked,

Mark 12:23

In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her?

This question was poised to make Jesus look foolish. This was a question that nobody was able to answer to the satisfaction of the Sadducees. And yet, Jesus answered the questions masterfully by saying that there is no marriage in heaven, and by quoting the LORD, who said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the god of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6), which implies that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive and well. They have been raised from the dead. So, Jesus affirmed that the resurrection is true!

When that question didn't work, another barrage comes. This is where we pick up our text. Mark 12:28-37, ...

Mark 12:28-37

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 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." The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"

David himself said in the Holy Spirit,

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet."

David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

Unlike in our previous sections, where the questions were more trivial in nature, here we see some really good questions. In fact, they are great questions. The title of my message this morning is this: "Some Great Questions."

The questions that come up in our text have to do with the core things of our faith. They have to do with the person of Christ. They have to do with our duties toward Him. They have to do with the essence of our faith. They have to do with how we ought to live. So, listen up. The first question we see comes in verse 28, ...

Mark 12:28

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"

1. What commandment is the foremost? (verses 28-34)

Perhaps, there can be no greater question that we can ever ask. When you boil things down, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" What commandment is the first of all commandments? What commandment is the top priority? What is the most important commandment of them all?

Knowing the most important thing is very helpful to know. Take sports. The most important thing is to get the football across the goal line. The most important thing is to put the basketball in the hoop. The most important thing is to put the soccer ball in the net. You may not know all of the rules or the penalties. You may not have all of the technique down just right. But, if you know the most important thing, you are on the right track to success.

Knowing the most important thing is helpful for business. The most important thing in business is to make a profit: bring in more money than you spend. You may not know everything that there is about how your product is made, or how the sales force obtains their contacts, or how shipping and receiving is doing their job, or how accounting is doing their job; but if you know that you need to turn a profit in your business, you are on the right track to ask the right questions to help your business be successful.

And so it is with the foremost commandment. When you know which commandment is at the top of the list, in regards to importance, it helps to put all things in perspective. We can focus, then. We can concentrate on this one thing to do. Successful people are always focused people. They do only a few things, but they do them very well.

Now, remember, this question was a trap. The Jews had carefully gone through the law and had cataloged every command. They found 613 commands. A little less than half of them (248) of them were positive commands, such as, "honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12), and "if you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him" (Exodus 23:4). The other half (365) were negative commands, such as, "do not steal" (Exodus 20:15), and, "You shall not take a bribe" (E Exodus. 23:8).

But now, the question is: Which one of them was the foremost? Which one of them had the most importance? Which one of them carried the most weight?

Perhaps Jesus would choose a lesser command. Perhaps this scribe would be able to demonstrate how the command that Jesus put forth as the foremost was actually inferior to another command. Let's see. Let us listen to Jesus answer this question, ...

Mark 12:29-31

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 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."

What a wonderful response! Jesus didn't signal out one command. Rather, He mentions two commands. The first comes from Deuteronomy 6. The second comes from Leviticus 19. The first is the famous "Shema" passage. "Shema" in Hebrew means, "listen" or "hear." That's where we get, "Hear, O Israel."

The Jews knew this command very well. They recited it twice each day -- every morning and every evening. Even today, if you would go to a worship service in a synagogue, there is a good chance that these words will be repeated in your hearing.

In Israel, these words played the same role as the "our father" plays in many churches. They were repeated often. In fact, this passage is so famous that even I have memorized it in Hebrew. There aren't many verses that I have memorized in Hebrew, but it's repeated so often, that I have come to know it. It begins with a call to Israel, "Hear, O Israel." -- Listen up! This is important! It continues by talking about the covenant relationship that God had with Israel. He is "our God." It speaks about the unity of God. "The LORD is one."

And then comes the command: "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" (verse 30). In other words, with every fiber of your being, you are called to love the Lord! With all of your heart. That is, with every inner impulse that you have. With every thought and emotion and feeling and desire. With all of your soul. That is, with the inner being. With every ounce of spiritual energy that you have. With all of your mind. That is, with every thought of your mind. Every synapse of your brain should be motivated by a love for the Lord. With all of your strength. That is, with the outer being, the flesh. With all your work and effort and labor, it should be directed toward the Lord in love.

In other words, our love for God should be entire and complete. Nothing should hold us back from loving God entirely. Our love for God should be 100% --- 24/7/365. All day! Every day! All out! We should love God completely. We should love God continually. We should love God absolutely.

A 50% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. A 70% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. A 95% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. A 99.9% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. Nothing but entire, full, total, complete love for God fulfills this command.

Such is the greatest of all commandments. You can easily see why this is the greatest -- because it is all-encompassing.

Worship to the Lord is an expression of this command. Praying to the Lord is an expression of this command. Studying and memorizing and meditating upon God's word is an expression of this command. Giving to the Lord is an expression of this command. Spreading the fame of His name is an expression of this command.

You will observe the first four commands of the ten commandments if you do this. You will not worship any other gods, because the Lord, your God, is supreme in your heart. You will not make any idols, because the Lord, your God, is your sole affection. You will not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain, because you love the Lord. You will keep the Sabbath holy, because your heart will be to serve Him all of your days.

You say, "How can I live this way?" Let me give you a bit of counsel. It all begins with the Word of God. The very next verse in Deuteronomy 6 says this, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deut 6:6-7). In other words, let the word of God dwell in you. Think on it. Meditate upon it. Talk about it. Saturate your life with the Word of God.

Well, Jesus gave two commands in His answer to this scribe. The second comes from Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Where the first commandment Jesus gave was focused vertically, this second commandment is focused horizontally. In other words, it tells us how to act toward others. We ought to love others as we love ourselves.

Like the first command that Jesus gave, this command is equally exhaustive. Our love for our neighbor is to go to the nth degree. But, rather than using superlatives, like "all your heart ... all your soul ... all your mind," Leviticus 19:18 uses a comparison. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The assumption here is that you love yourself a lot! And indeed all of you are lovers of yourself. You take great pains to care for yourself. When you hunger, you eat. When you thirst, you drink. When you itch, you scratch. When you are tired, you sleep. When you are cold, you put your coat on. When you are hot, you shed your clothes or turn on a fan. When you are injured, you care for your injury. When you desire, you pursue what you desire. When you want, you work hard to get what you want. When you can't have, you fight and quarrel to obtain (James 4:2). Ephesians 5:29 says it well, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it."

The comparison of the command comes down to this: to the extent that you seek to satisfy your own wants and desires, so are you to seek to satisfy the desires of others. Any lack is a violation of this command. If your neighbor is hungry, this love will fix and serve some food. If your neighbor is thirsty, this love will get up and prepare a drink. If your neighbor is cold, this love will give a coat. If your neighbor is hot, this love will chase down a fan. If your neighbor is hurt, this love will tend to his wounds and help. That's the extent of this command to "love your neighbor as yourself." Nothing but entire, full, total, complete love for your neighbor fulfills this command.

And like the first command, it works itself out in every other command given regarding our duty toward one another. In other words, show me a commandment regarding our duty toward another, and I'll show you how it is an expression of Leviticus 19:18.

For instance, regarding the Ten Commandments, the last six of them can be explained as manifestations of this love.

5 - **Honor your father and your mother.** You will honor those whom you love. Your parents will be at the top of the list.

6 - **Do not murder.** Of course, you will not murder those whom you love.

7 - **Do not commit adultery.** Love will remain faithful to your marriage vows.

8 - **Do not steal.** Love will respect the private property of others.

9 - **Do not bear false witness.** You want others to speak the truth about you. Love will speak the truth.

10 - **Do not covet anything.** Coveting is wanting what another has, and will lead to stealing. Love will rejoice with others in what the Lord has blessed them with.

What's the greatest commandment?

Mark 12:30, 31

"... 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." ... "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Both of these commands, to love the Lord your God with all your being, and to love your neighbor as yourself, are superlative commands. They take the arena of love and push your obligation to love to its maximum. That's why Jesus says, ...

Mark 12:31

... There is no other commandment greater than these."

In Matthew's account of this same story, Jesus says, "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:40). In other words, every other command in the entire Old Testament (and we could equally include the entire Bible), in some way can be traced back to one (or both) of these two commands. They either manifest your love for God, or they manifest your love for others.

Such was the answer that Jesus gave to this question. Let's look at the response of this scribe in verse 32, ...

Mark 12:32-33

The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Apparently, Jesus had passed the test. This scribe affirmed Jesus in His answer. Now, this answer that Jesus gave wasn't anything new for the Jewish people. They knew of the priority of these commands. This is the reason why, in part, that the Shema was repeated so often in Jewish circles and the command to love your neighbor was known as well.

About a decade before this question was asked to Jesus, a Gentile had come to the famous Rabbi Hillel and mockingly challenged him to teach him all of the various laws that the Jewish religion taught while standing on one leg. Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary." [\[2\]](#) Such a summarization gets at the spirit of Leviticus 19:18 correct, even if it casts a negative spin on the command.

However, we see this scribe adding something at the end of verse 33, loving God and your neighbor in this way "is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

This scribe was a student of the Bible. There are places in the Scripture where love and mercy are lifted above sacrifice. For instance, Hosea 6:6, "I delight in lovingkindness rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burn offerings." Or, 1 Samuel 15:22, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams." After David sinned with Bathsheba, he confessed his sin, even saying, ...

Psalms 51:16-17

For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Regarding sacrifices, there are times in the Old Testament, when heart religion was lifted up above sacrifices. Loyalty, lovingkindness, obedience, broken hearts -- these things are better than sacrifices. These things are expressions of love to God and love to others. Thus, it makes sense that loving God and your neighbor in this way "is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (verse 33).

This thought has helped the Jews for two thousand years. With the destruction of Jerusalem came the destruction of the temple. And with the destruction of the temple, there was no place for sacrifices to be offered. Early on, the Jews struggled with God's requirement of a sacrifice. But, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakai, helped persuade the Jews that there was something else better than sacrifice, by quoting Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" [\[3\]](#) If you would ask a Jewish person today why the Jews no longer sacrifice, you may well hear Rabbi Johanan's words being quoted.

Jesus then comments on this man's statement. Look at verse 34, ...

Mark 12:34

When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

On the one hand, this statement is encouraging. "You answered well. Good job. I approve of your answer." Yet, on the other hand, if you think about it for a bit, it's a rebuke as well. "You did good. But, you are not there yet. You are not far from the kingdom of God. You aren't quite there. But, keep going. I'm sure that you will arrive at some point."

Here's the deal. As great as this question is, and as great as this answer is, it's not the way to get into the kingdom of God. Because, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself, isn't good news. In fact, these commands are somewhat depressing and discouraging. Because, the greatest sin is sin against the greatest command. And the greatest command tells us to love with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength for all of our days. And the second command is just like it. It tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Whenever we fall short of either of these commands, we sin. No, we commit the greatest sin. We sin against the Lord whenever we don't love Him with our whole heart. We sin against our neighbor whenever we don't love him or her as much as ourselves. I hope that you see that there is no way that we will ever be able to live like this.

You say, "How, then, do you get into the kingdom of God?" Let me answer this question by way of contrast.

In light of a potential Mormon president, I have been reading on Mormonism. David Rowe has written an excellent book entitled, "I Love Mormons: A New Way to Share Christ with Latter-Day Saints." In the book, he describes a scenario that happens all too often in the Mormon church. Its people try and try and try to live perfectly--after all, didn't Jesus say, "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"? (Matt. 5:48). But, many times, people crumble under the weight of its demands.

Hear now the gospel of the Mormon church. And I quote from David Rowe, ...

Once [a man's] daughter wanted to buy a bicycle, but it was far too pricey for her to afford. He had told his daughter that if she diligently saved all the money she could and put it toward the purchase, he would pay the rest. In other words, if she did all she could do, he would do what she couldn't do. Similarly, the Mormon "gospel" claims Christ's atonement covers what we can't if we cover what we can. The "what we can" part means, in Mormon spirituality, trying to keep all the commandments as much as possible and with a good attitude. The classic LDS support for this view comes from the Book of Mormon statement, "It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23).

This give-your-all-to-get-God's-grace message really amounts to a 'gospel' of conditional grace. God's grace in Jesus Christ only comes to us on the condition that we try our hardest. In the end, this 'gospel' makes God's acceptance contingent on our performance. While it may sound nice and comforting up front and on the surface, it simply boils down to another performance-driven system.

Frankly, while promising ... the moon (or at least a shiny new bicycle), it only delivers more bricks to her back!" [\[4\]](#)

But, the good news isn't "try harder!" The good news isn't "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." The good news isn't "Love your neighbor as yourself." The good news is that "the work is done!" The good news is that "Jesus accomplished it all for us." Jesus loved the Lord our God with all of His heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus loved His neighbor as Himself.

Although Jesus lived perfectly and never sinned, He was put to death as a criminal. The good news is this: He died in our place. He died, so that we might live. And as we believe and trust in His work on the cross, we are made holy. This is grace. When we believe, God reckons our faith as righteousness. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3). In other words, God receives our faith and regards it as righteousness because of what Jesus did on the cross.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "We can stand before the Lord in full confidence, knowing that there is no condemnation for we who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). That's the gospel we believe! This is real grace!

And when God gives that forgiveness, our heart is bent toward Him in love. Love to God. Love for others. Love, not in any way as meritorious for our acceptance before God, but as an expression of our faith in Him!

I believe that this is what Jesus was telling this scribe who had "answered intelligently" (Mark 12:34). "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (verse 34).

What about you? Are you far from the kingdom of God? Perhaps you are on the "performance treadmill," trying to do whatever you can to please the Lord, in hopes that He will be gracious. Your life might look good on the outside. You might be doing many good and helpful things -- Bible study, prayer, church attendance, fellowship. But if you are trying to earn God's grace through your performance, you are merely stacking more and more burdens upon your shoulders. You aren't quite into the kingdom of God yet. You may be close, because you have an affection and love for God.

But, you need to get grace right. You need to get the work of Christ right.

"Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). By faith we believe this. And our response is love -- love to God, love to neighbors. These are fruits of faith, not merits for approval.

Our new fighter verse for this week is 1 Peter 2:24: "and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." He bore our sins first, so that we might live to righteousness in response. Not the other way around. We don't earn our righteousness!

Let's move on. We see at the end of verse 34 that Jesus silenced His critics.

Mark 12:34

... After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

And so, Jesus turns the tables by asking some questions of His own. Let's pick it up in verse 35, ...

Mark 12:35-37

And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself said in the Holy Spirit,

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet."

David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

Here in these verses we see two questions. One question comes in verse 35. Then, there is an Old Testament quote. And then there is another question in verse 37. As you dig into it, the first question is really the same as the second question. "How is the Christ the son of David?" (verse 35) "In what sense is the Messiah his son?" (verse 37)

Here's how Jesus framed it. He asked His question. And then, He put forth some pertinent Biblical data about His question. And then, He asked his question again, ...

2. In what sense is He his son? (verses 35-37)

OK, so let's work through these verses to understand what Jesus is getting at. First of all, Jesus asks this question, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"

There was no doubt that the scribes said this. There was no doubt that the Scriptures taught this. The Messiah would come from the line of David.

2 Samuel 7:12-16, ...

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

The exact identity of this person is difficult to understand. In many ways, it appears to be speaking about Solomon, for it was he who built a house for His name (verse 13). Additionally, it was Solomon who committed iniquity and received the rod of God's anger (verse 14). However, it wasn't Solomon's throne that lasted forever. In fact, his throne was quickly broken after he left it. It must be speaking about one greater than Solomon. Much of prophecy works like this. There is often a person described in the near future who appears to be the fulfillment of the prophesy and yet, the ultimate fulfillment of the prophesy often awaits a later day.

At any rate, it is an incredible promise given to David in the Old Testament, promising that His kingdom would endure forever. And the Jews rightly understood that the Messiah would be of the line of David. Of course, the Christ is the son of David.

We read in Psalm 89, ...

"I have made a covenant with My chosen;
I have sworn to David My servant.
I will establish your seed forever, And build up your throne to all generations. ...
My lovingkindness I will keep for him [i.e. David] forever, And My covenant shall be confirmed to him.
So I will establish his descendants forever, And his throne as the days of heaven. ...
Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.
His descendants shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me. ...
It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful" [\[5\]](#)

There are two ways for this prophesy to be fulfilled. Either, the earthly throne of David will last forever through an endless succession of kings, or there will be one king to sit upon the throne forever. We know from history that the throne of David lost its power. Shortly after Solomon, the kingdom split in two. Assyria destroyed Israel a few hundred years later. Babylon captured Judah a hundred and twenty years after that. So, in order for this prophecy to be fulfilled, there needs to be one coming, who would sit upon the throne of David forever. Of course, the Christ is the son of David.

Isaiah 9:6-7

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

The message is clear. The Old Testament identifies that the Messiah would come from the line of David. The scribes and Pharisees knew it well.

Do you remember the days surrounding the birth of Jesus? The Magi came from Persia, following this miraculous star. After months of travel, they arrived in Jerusalem, in their search for the "King of the Jews." They arrived asking, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." (Matt. 2:2). So, Herod gathered together all of the chief priests and scribes and inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet," and then they quoted from Micah 5:2 which prophesied of this.

Bethlehem was well-known as "the city of David." In fact, in Luke's narrative of the birth of Jesus, it is so identified twice (Luke 2:4, 11).

We have buildings named after people. We have streets named after people. Rarely do we name cities after people. If there's a city named after someone, then you can usually conclude that either the city is very small or the person was very great (or both). With the case of David and Bethlehem, both of these were the case. Bethlehem was a small and insignificant town. But, one of its residents became the king.

In this sense, Bethlehem is like Dixon, Illinois. Dixon is a small, obscure town in northern Illinois. Yet it is the hometown of former president Ronald Reagan. Dixon is proud of this fact and won't let you forget it. As you drive into Dixon, you can see a sign that say, "Welcome to Dixon, hometown of Ronald Reagan." The town of Dixon has preserved the home in which he grew up. You can visit it today. The church in which Ronald Reagan grew up is very proud of the fact that he was a member there. Each August, there is a city-wide celebration honoring Ronald Reagan, called, "Reagan Trail Days."

Bethlehem had similar sentiment. This obscure, little town had produced the greatest king that every reigned in Israel, King David. And they certainly were proud of their king.

That's all fine and good, but where's the rub? Why did Jesus ask the question, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" (verse 35). The rub comes in verse 36, (which is a quote from Psalm 110:1). In order to understand this question, we need to look at the passage a bit. So, I invite you to turn back to Psalm 110.

This Psalm is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage. The reason for this is pretty simple. Of all passages in the Bible, this Psalm puts forth the kingly and priestly office of Jesus in clear and unmistakable terms. Look at verse 1: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" (Psalm 110:1)

In this verse, you have several people of whom you need to keep track of. First of all, there is the author of this Psalm. The superscription of the Psalm assigns this Psalm as written by David. We will see in a few moments, this is crucial, because if someone else wrote it, the question that Jesus put forth doesn't make any sense at all.

The second person in this Psalm that you need to keep track of is "The LORD." This is the one who is speaking, "The LORD says." In fact, all of the quotations in this Psalm (verses 1, 2, 4) are spoken by Him.

The third person in this Psalm is "my Lord." The identify of this person might be a bit confusing to you, but hang on for a few moments and I hope that all will become clear.

Look closely at how "LORD" (or "Lord") is spelled here in verse 1. The first instance of this word is spelled with all capital letters: Capital, "L" followed by capital "O" followed by capital "R" followed by capital "D." The second instance of this word is spelled differently. Capital, "L" followed by lower case "o" followed by lower case "r" followed by lower case "d." This wasn't an accident. This is very intentional. The reason this was done this way is because of a difficulty in translation.

The word, "Lord" is spelled differently, because there are two different words that we translate as Lord in our English. The first word in Hebrew is the word, "Yahweh." It is the personal name of God. It is somewhat like the name "Steve." God has a name, and that name is "Yahweh." Now, some use the word "Jehovah," here, and that's fine, but a better translation is "Yahweh." The word comes from the verb, "To be." When God has assigned a name to Himself, His name is something like this, "Being" or "Am" (like "I am.") That's the first word.

The second word in Hebrew is the word, "Adonai." It is the word that means, "Lord, master, sovereign." So, we read the Hebrew of this text and we get this: "Yahweh said to my Adonai." The American Standard Version says it well, "Jehovah saith unto my Lord."

And so, in this first verse, you have three people here. You have David writing. You have "the LORD" (i.e. Yahweh) who is speaking. You have Him speaking to another person identified as "my Lord."

We know who David is. He is the shepherd-boy who became the king of Israel. He is the writer of many Psalms. We know who Yahweh is. He is God. He is the sovereign one. He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. But, who is this "Adonai"? Let's look and see what types of clues we might be able to glean from the context.

First, we see in verse 1 that He will take a place of prominence. "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." The right hand of a throne is a place of honor. It is a place of prominence.

Second, we see in verse 2 that He will take a place of power. "The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the

midst of Your enemies." This is a clear declaration of the power that this one will have. He will rule over enemies.

We see in verse 3 that He will be leading a people. "Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew."

You read these things and quickly get a sense that this is talking about the Messiah, the one who is going to come and rule and set His people free! And this is what almost all of the Rabbis taught during the times of Jesus. You have the LORD speaking with the Messiah, promising Him a place of honor, a power to rule, and a people who willingly follow.

Notice also how David describes the Messiah? He calls Him, "My Lord." "Lord" is a title of superiority. You bow down to lords. You do what lords tell you to do. This is exactly the point that Jesus wants for us to see: David calls the Messiah, "My Lord."

And now, we can understand the question that Jesus put before the people. So, let's turn back to Mark 12 and see what the big deal is. The big question comes in verse 37, ...

Mark 12:37

"David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?"

Obviously, the Messiah is greater than David, as He is called, "Lord." And yet, the curious thing is that everybody knows that the Messiah will be a son of David. But, sons aren't superior to their fathers. It is the fathers who have authority over their sons and their grandsons. So now, we finally come to the question, "How can the same person be both at one time; both above and below; both Son and Lord; both subject and sovereign; both under another man and on a level with God?" [\[6\]](#)

The only way that you can explain these passages in the Bible is to believe in Christmas. I'm not talking about mistletoes, presents, and Christmas trees. I'm talking about Bethlehem, Mary, Joseph, a virgin birth, and angelic announcements. I'm talking about the incarnation. I'm talking about "Emmanuel" -- God with us.

The only way that you can harmonize Psalm 110 and the indisputable fact that Messiah would come from the line of David is to believe the incarnation. It means believing that God took on human form. God Himself, David's Lord, became the Messiah, being born in the line of David. When David wrote, "The LORD said to my Lord," it was two of the three persons of the Trinity in conversation with each other. The Father was speaking with the Son, and explaining what His Messianic kingdom would be like. He would sit in a place of prominence with power to rule over his enemies, with people to reign over. But, in order to get that kingdom, He had to be the Messiah. In order to be the Messiah, He had to be born a son of David. He had to come down to earth in the form of a man. He had to come down in the form of a baby.

In verse 37 we read that "the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him." They found it enjoyable to think about these things. They found it enjoyable to think of all of the implications of the Scriptures. And though the crowds enjoyed listening to Jesus, the religious leaders did not. They felt threatened. They wanted to trap Him. Eventually, they killed him. We'll see this take place in the next few chapters of the gospel of Mark. And yet, in an ironic way, His death became our life.

This was the point that Jesus made when he instituted the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 11:24 says, "This is my body, which is for you." To be saved from our sins, an animal sacrifice could never do; nor could an angel; nor could a mere human sacrifice. God, Himself, had to pay the debt to satisfy His righteous requirements of the law.

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For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Mark 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 42, 43; 2:8, 12; 3:6; 4:5, 15, 16, 17, 29; 5:2, 29, 30, 42; 6:25, 27, 45, 50, 54; 7:25; 8:10; 9:15, 20, 24; 10:52; 11:2, 3, 14-43, 45, 72; 15:1

[2] D. A. Carson, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8, p. 187.

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johanan_ben_Zakai

[4] David Rowe, I Love Mormons, chapter 7

[5] Psalm 89:3, 4, 28, 29, 35, 36, 39

[6] The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary, Vol. 21, p. 527