

## “Wisdom and blessing” Mark 12:28-34

**And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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.” And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other 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 oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.**

What is the main message of the Bible? The Gospel, the Good News, that's right. The message that reveals us what kind of God the Triune God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is, and what His attitude towards us is.

In the narrow sense the Gospel is the message of forgiveness. That we all are born as captives to sin, ignorant about the true God, and even more, rebellious against Him and capable of more evil than good.

But the Triune God by His grace alone has chosen to rescue us from our miserable state. Though Jesus Christ alone He delivers to us His salvation and eternal life as undeserved and unmerited gifts.

And we are simply to receive these most precious gifts by ... yes, by faith alone. And rejoice, rejoice and praise our God for His grace and mercy. This is how we understand the Gospel in the narrow sense.

However, once we know what our God is like, that He is gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in His steadfast love, we begin to see His goodness and His gracious and loving attitude in everything He does for us.

Today our Gospel reading invites us to reflect on the Commandments. And I wish to reflect on them together with you and I wish that we could learn how to see them as wonderful gifts of our loving God and Father.

So, one of the scribes, by all account honest and upright man came to Jesus and asked: “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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.” As Jesus explains these two contain all the other Commandments.

This is important to get this right. It is not either these two, or, let's say, the Ten Commandments. Some have this misunderstanding. They would say that if you love your God and your neighbor, you don't need to keep the Ten Commandments.

False! It is the very opposite. You can't love your God and your neighbor if you don't keep the Commandments. Leading your life according to the Commandments is how you love your God and your neighbor. That simple.

Let me ask you this, – how do people today think about the Commandments? How do they understand what they are? Some would think that they are some ancient and obsolete rules that by no means apply to anyone in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Even Christians often have rather vague and even spiteful view on what the Commandments are. Especially in those churches that have turned their backs to the Word of God and instead have embraced different 'gospel', they prefer to dismiss the Commandments all together.

Oversimplifying we could summarize their views this way, – the Commandments are the Law, and the Law accuses and restricts us, so – the Law is bad, and now Jesus has brought us the Gospel and we are no longer under the Law, so ... we can just ditch the Commandments and live in freedom, meaning – to do whatever our hearts desire.

And many others despise God's Commandments because they have this strange idea that if God forgives me anyway, then why would I care to know what He expects from me or bother to live that way?! Sadly, but this is too common, for at least from time to time we all want to do things our way.

Okay, but how do we understand what the Commandments are? What does the Bible teach about them? And how knowing that our God is gracious and merciful and good in everything He does for us, how does that help us to understand the Commandments?

Tell me this, how does our God reveal Himself in the Bible? What is His first identity, so to speak? He is the Creator, that's right. The Creator of the heavens and the earth, and, of course, of the New Heavens and the New Earth as well.

He also is the One who "opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing". Or we can say together with Luther that "He has made me, He has given me my body and soul and all my members and still cares for them.

He also gives me my daily bread, spouse and children, land, and all I have. He richly and daily provides for me and He defends me against all danger and protect me from all evil."

Or we can say that He is the Giver of every good gift. Of every good gift. And this is how we can think about God's Commandments. Our God gives us everything, every good gift needed for us, and then He protects these gifts ...

... with ... yes, with His Commandments. He gives a gift, and then He gives a commandment to protect that gift from misusing it and thus destroying His blessings and hurting ourselves and our neighbors.

Let's take a quick look at those gifts that our Father gives us and that are protected by the Commandments. So, what gift is protected by the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment? Yes, the Triune God Himself.

The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit comes to you and says, – “I want to be your God, and want to bless you, redeem you, enlighten you, protect you, be with you, now and forever, and I want you to know that I am your God.”

This is the greatest gift that our God gives us. Himself. And the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment protects this gift. So that we don't trust created things to give us what only the Creator can give.

What about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment? What gift does it protect? The gift of God's name. God's name gives us access to Him, we can call upon Him, pray and praise Him, and we as Christians also have received the authority that comes with God's name. We can act in His name. Calling people to repentance, forgiving them their sins, baptizing them, blessing them. This is what the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment protects.

What about the 3<sup>rd</sup>? It protects the gift of rest and the gift of God's presence. Or we can say the rest in God's presence. The Triune God wants to be with us, to give us rest, to bless us, to restore us and to nourish us, with His Word and Spirit and with His Sacrament, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment protects these gifts.

4<sup>th</sup> protects God's gifts of order and the office of parents. 5<sup>th</sup> protects God's gifts of life and well-being. 6<sup>th</sup> protects God's gifts of marriage and sexual intimacy. 7<sup>th</sup> protects God's gift of material good needed for our lives. 8<sup>th</sup> protects God's gift of truth and good name for our lives in community.

9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> protect our spiritual wellbeing, our contentment, gratitude and joy. As we can see, every one of the Commandments protect gifts of our loving and generous Creator.

If you want to enjoy God's blessings, you need to learn what His gifts are and how to receive them properly. Thus, we can see that the Commandments are not just good and helpful rules and guidelines, they are so much more. We can say that they are God's wisdom for our lives revealed.

If you want to know how to lead blessed life, if you want to understand who we are as human beings, how God has ordered our life in community, if you want to tap deep into God's wisdom, you are most welcome, here it is, – summarized for you in the 10 Commandments. And this is what we are exploring right now in our Bible studies, and everyone is welcome to join in.

We can also say that the 10C are the best summary of what it means to be a human. To be a human is to live according to God's Commandments. And the more fully we can do that, the more fully we can enjoy our humanity.

And the less we lead our lives guided by this wisdom, the more miserable and fuller of problems and pain our lives are. You can see that the Commandments are not just good, they are very good, precious.

They are a part of God's good creation. And we can't lead blessed lives unless they are structured by the Commandments. We can read this message in the Old Testament and we can see it again and again affirmed in the New, by Jesus Himself and also by His apostles.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is very specific. He tells us: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." (1John 5:3) "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (John 14:21)

That's Jesus speaking. Do you hear what He is saying? If you want to love your God, learn how to receive and enjoy His gifts, so that you can be blessed and be a blessing to your neighbor, – learn and strive to live according to the Commandments.

Isn't this wonderful, that our gracious and loving God has made it so perfectly clear for us, how we can respond to His love, and what we should do if we want to love our neighbours. And don't forget about the wonderful promise.

"And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (John 14:21) If the Holy Spirit has kindled in your heart the desire to respond to God's love by keeping His Commandments, then by doing that you are embarking in a never-ending joyful adventure.

For as you try to respond to God's love by keeping His Commandments, you will be loved by the Father, you will experience more of God's love, and Jesus Himself will manifest Him to you. You will experience His presence and the joy that has no equal in this age. This is Jesus' promise to you.

Remember the words of the psalm we said earlier: "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart."

May our gracious God help that this is what our lives are like.

Amen.