

Sermon Series: "Avoiding Politically-correct Christianity"—Lord of Life Lutheran—3/18/2001

Title: "Obedience: Mission Impossible or Possible Reality?"

Text: Mark 12: 28-34

Introduction: **Illus.: LIVING ABOVE THE LEVEL OF MEDIOCRITY**

Theme: Jesus did not dumb-down standards to the level of our cultural mediocrity with a warm and fuzzy message but raises us up to a new standards which powerfully lives out the deliverance he came to give us.

Moving from 'aiming for the lowest common denominator' to 'living for excellence'

- **Living with a 'what is the least I have to do' -- brings no satisfaction**
 1. The scribe wanted Jesus to give him the bottom line for spirituality (*what is the most important commandment*)
 2. **ILLUS.: LETTER OF THE LAW vs. THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW**
 3. Sinful, human nature does not seek commitments and relationships but only wants quick fixes and isolated pleasure
 4. The problem with this type of living is that it is broken from the start.
 5. *"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5: 19*
- **Jesus rephrases the question not in terms of the 'obligations of an agreement' but in terms of a relationship**
 1. Love of God followed by love of his creation, my neighbor, fulfills God's requirement and my life
 - a. Moving from a series of religious obligations to transformed centeredness on others outside of ourselves
 - b. *"For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hos6:6*
 - c. The Scribe had it right, *"to love your neighbor as your love yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."*
 2. That kind of love requires a daily effort toward relationship
 - a. A constant relationship of confession and forgiveness with God in a less than perfect life— *inherited excellence*
 - b. A committed relationship of reconciliation and recovery with others around me— *cultivated excellence*
 - c. **ILLUS.: GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE**
 - d. Jesus comes to restore our relationship with the Father and to transform our relationships with each other
 - e. *"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace." Ephes. 2:14-15*

Understanding why it is an 'all or nothing' approach to accepting Jesus as THE WAY

- **Compartmentalized Christianity will get you near but not into the kingdom of heaven**
 1. Note the subtle but important difference between the spiritual world view of the Scribe and Jesus (**30, 34**)

<i>The Scribe's spiritual world view</i>	<i>Jesus' spiritual world view</i>
• heart —emotional, personal faith	• heart —personal faith of devotion/emotion
• intellect —something that challenges the mind	• soul —your very being/the essence of who you are
• strength —physically give your all to the cause	• will —willing to turn the final control over to God
	• strength —physically give of yourself
 2. Jesus commended the heightened spiritual awareness of the scribe, *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."(34)*
 3. But Jesus also said, *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:19-20*
 4. **ILLUS.: FLUNKED OUT**
- **Jesus and a disciple relationship of faith lived out in love is the only way to find THE WAY**
 1. To have a life which goes beyond death—to have a purpose which goes beyond running the paces of life—to have a hope that is not squashed by the next failure/tragedy--we need someone who can give what we can't find in the world
 2. Jesus quoted the Old Testament creed, *"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." 29*
 3. There are not many ways to accomplish true spirituality, righteous living—there is only one, proven WAY
 4. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Peter 1:3-5*

Living Above the Level of Mediocrity

Letter of the Law vs. the Spirit of the Law

A man walked up to the counter of a large discount department store, interested in purchasing a pair of binoculars in the case. As he walked up to the counter, he also noticed that he was the only customer in that department. Behind the counter were two salespersons. One was so preoccupied with talking to her friend on the phone that she refused to acknowledge that the man was standing there. At the other end of the counter, a second salesperson was unloading inventory from a box onto the shelves. Growing impatient, the man walked down to her end of the counter and just stood there. Finally, she looked up and said, "You got a number?" "I got a what?" asked the man, trying to control his astonishment at such an absurdity. "You got a number? You gotta have a number for service." The man replied, "Lady, I'm the only customer in this department! I don't need a number. Can't you see how ridiculous this is?" But she failed to see the absurdity and insisted that Robert take a number before agreeing to wait on him. By now it was obvious to the man that she was more interested in following procedures than helping the customer. So, he went to the take-a-number machine, pulled number 37 and walked back to the salesperson. With that, she promptly went to her number counter, which revealed that the last customer waited on had been holding number 34. So she screamed out, "35!...35!...36!...36!...37! "I'm number 37," said the man. "May I help you?" She asked, without cracking a smile. "No," replied Robert, and he turned around and walked out.

On Getting Along With People

The **SIX** most important words:

"I admit I made a mistake."

The **FIVE** most important words:

"You did a good job."

The **FOUR** most important words:

"What do you think?"

The **THREE** most important words:

"I forgive you."

The **TWO** most important words:

"Thank you."

The **ONE** most important word:

"We"

The LEAST important word:

"I"

Flunked Out

Grandmother and granddaughter, a very precocious ten-year-old, were spending the evening together when the little girl suddenly looked up and asked, "How old are you, Grandma?" The woman was bit startled at the question, but knowing her granddaughter's quick little mind, she wasn't completely shocked. "Well, honey, when you're my age you don't share your age with anybody." "Aw, go ahead, Grandma. . .you can trust me." "No, dear, I never tell anyone my age." Grandmother got busy fixing supper and then she suddenly realized the little darling had been absent for about twenty minutes—much too long. She checked around upstairs in her bedroom and found that her granddaughter had dumped the contents of her grandmother's purse on top of her bed and was sitting in the midst of the mess, holding her grandmother's driver's license. When their eyes met, the child announced: "Grandma, you're seventy-six." "Why, yes, I am. How did you know that?" "I found the date of your birthday here on your driver's license and subtracted that year from this year. . .so you're seventy-six!" "That's right, sweetheart. Your grandmother is seventy-six." The little girl continued staring at the driver's license and added, "You also made an **F** in sex, Grandma."

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes went to Jesus during the argument with the Sadducees. He saw how well Jesus answered them, so he asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of them all?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. ³⁰So love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your will, and with all your strength.' ³¹The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

³²The scribe said to Jesus, "Teacher, that was well said! You've told the truth that there is only one God and no other besides him! ³³To love him with all your heart, with all your intellect, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as you love yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴When Jesus heard how wisely the man answered, he told the man, "You're not too far from the kingdom of God."

After that, no one dared to ask him another question.