



# CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

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## **The Meaning of Life – Part 1**

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How do you like that? Easter is coming, and we don't want you to come on Sunday, and we don't want you to park here. Welcome to Canyon Hills Community Church! If you can drop down out of heaven and just don't take up any space while you're here, that'd be great.

Those invitations in your bulletin... I want to encourage you just to pray that God would give you a sensitive heart to who he might use you to invite to come with you on Easter. It's true; people are a little more receptive to these sorts of things at these times of year. It just may be that God wants to use us to help a person take that next step, whatever that next step is in their journey toward him.

It might just be one person saying, "Why don't you come to church?" I tend to just assume that my neighbor or the person I know who doesn't know Jesus... I just assume they don't go to church and I always just say, "I'm not sure if you ever go on Easter, if that's typical for you, but if you don't, I'd love for you to come with us or to meet us there." Sometimes, it's that simple and that easy, and then you leave the rest up to God. So, I hope you'll take those home and be thinking about that in the next couple of weeks.

Let's get our Bibles open to Mark, chapter 12. Will we do that? Just in case you've been gone for a couple of weeks or you're new today, this is what we're doing. We're going through the gospel of Mark, verse by verse. I want to give you a little context for the passage we're in today in Mark, chapter 12.

It's about 48 hours before the cross, and the bandwagon crowds that are following Jesus are reaching mob-like capacity. More than anything else, the crowds want a military leader. They want a king who will mobilize the Jewish people so they can break free from the ruthless Roman kingdom's rule and reign over them.

The Jewish people so badly want Jesus to make their lives better, to make them happier, and to make them more prosperous, but the truth is, Jesus did not come to take sides. He came to declare a greater kingdom, one where he rules as Lord, Savior, and King in the hearts of all

believers from all nations and languages. Yet they weren't listening. They weren't having anything to do with that.

While that's going on, at the same time, the religious establishment's opposition to Jesus is also heating up. For almost three years now, Jesus has been consistently exposing their hypocrisy and confronting their stronghold of intimidation and spiritual abuse over God's people.

So, these religious leaders, with their control of the people being seriously threatened, have been trying to embarrass him, to trick him, to trip him up with trick questions about things like the Sabbath rules, marriage in heaven, paying taxes, and divorce, anything they could to get him in trouble, either with the Roman people, so they could get him arrested, or with his followers, so they would turn on him.

Now, in today's passage, one of these religious leaders kind of breaks loose from the gang-like piety of the Sadducees and the Pharisees and he asks Jesus what would turn out to be the last question Jesus would ever answer for any of them in his remaining time on earth.

You get the sense from Mark's gospel that this wasn't one of the religious leaders' tricks. There was nothing random about this question. In fact, it very well may be that this question he asks is the question to which every human being longs for an answer. I would be so bold to say the question he asks is a question that every single one of us, at some point, either needed or wanted an answer for.

With that introduction, let's stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to pick it up right where we left off. Last Sunday, we left off in verse 27, so we'll pick it up in verse 28. It says,

**"And one of the scribes came up and heard them [all of his buddies] disputing [arguing and debating] with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him [Jesus], '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."** Let's pray for a minute.

Father in heaven, in the power and the presence of your Holy Spirit right now, and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we ask, God, that you would bless the reading, hearing, and preaching

of your Word. We ask, God, that you would have your way in our hearts wherever we are right now spiritually and emotionally.

God, would you break through to our hearts and just teach us today? Draw us nearer to you, God. Give us greater peace and greater understanding of what we just read. God, I pray that when we leave here today we will be different, not because we came but because you were here. God, we surrender ourselves to the authority and power of your Word. Now teach us, God, we ask. In Christ's name, amen.

"Jesus, what is the greatest commandment?" The rabbis had counted 613 individual laws. Of those, 365 were negative. "Don't do this." Of the remaining, 248 were positive. "Do this." It was impossible to keep them all. These people were in a constant state of failure. They were always messing up the dos or the don'ts.

I can't prove this from the text, but I just wonder if this guy was just exhausted from his own search for happiness, success, fulfillment, or at the very least, just exhausted from his own efforts in trying to figure out what pleases God the most. I think the tone of the question is one of desperation.

His buddies have been trying to trip Jesus up and trick him with all of these questions about all their laws, and every time Jesus answered, he answered them in such an amazing, divine, supernatural, wise way that made more sense than anything they had ever heard from each other ever. He hears all this arguing and debating, trying to get Jesus to mess up, and he just steps forward and says, "Jesus, can you just clarify? What is the most important?"

I think this question is rooted in the heart of every person. In the end, what really matters? What is the meaning of life? If there is a God, what's most important to him? Not only does Jesus mercifully answer his question, but I believe Jesus' answer reveals the most meaningful and satisfying way for every person to live their life, because all other reasons to get up every day and live our lives leave us wanting, frustrated, and maybe even bored.

All other reasons we can think of that the world gives us to get up every day and to live... All of them feed our natural tendencies of selfishness and vanity. So, I'm calling this message *The Meaning of Life – Part 1*. I'm going to take the first part of his answer today and talk about why it's true and how we're supposed to do it, and then next week, I'll take the second part of his answer.

I have to confess. I had every intention this week of preaching this whole passage, and as I got deeper and deeper into the study of it I just thought it would do us serious injustice to try and take this most powerful response of Christ and pack it into just the few minutes we have on Sunday, so we're going to break it up into two pieces. Hopefully, we'll be able to apply it a little better.

Let's talk about *The Meaning of Life – Part 1*. The true meaning of life starts with this.

1. *Love God more than anyone or anything.* You see, this scribe was already an expert in Jewish and religious law. He's the equivalent of a religious attorney. So, when Jesus answers his question, he answers him by quoting a verse right out of the law of Moses, Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5.

Most Jewish people would have recited this passage every day of their lives. It's the summation of the first four of the Ten Commandments. It's priority number one for parents to teach and to model for their children. So, when Jesus gave this answer, it wasn't like something he had never heard before. He probably had already said these very words that day.

Why is it most important for us to have a life that's meaningful to love God? Why should we love God the most if we want to live our lives filled with purpose, satisfaction, and meaning? I'm going to word the reasons in the first person singular, because for those of you who are taking notes, I really want these points to be pointed at us, to be pointed at you personally. I don't want this to be impersonal.

A. *God is the most deserving and worthy of my love.* Jesus is not saying the meaning of life means we love God and only God. He's not saying you cannot love anything else in your life; you can only love God. He's not saying that at all. He's saying here that the meaning of life starts with loving God first and loving God most. Again, why is this infinitely important for us to understand? Isaiah helps us understand that in Isaiah, chapter 40, when he simply says,

**"To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? [...] Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable."**

Isaiah is saying, "Haven't you heard? Don't you know why loving God first and most is the most meaningful thing we could ever do with our lives? It's because he's all-powerful! It's because he's all-knowing! It's because God is all-seeing! He's everywhere all at once! There's no one like him!"

Isaiah really helps us to understand that the true meaning of life begins with loving God above all else because he *is* above all else. He's the only one worthy of giving our heart's whole love to. Every other object of our love will eventually disappoint, and maybe even eventually disappear, but not God. He's most deserving of your love. He's most worthy of your heart's greatest affection.

B. *God knows and loves me most.* This is amazing. God knows us on our best days and on our worst days, and his love never changes. In 1 John, chapter 3, it says he loves us so much that he calls us his very own children. We are the children of God! Psalm 139 says he knew us before we were ever conceived, that there's nowhere we can go from his presence, and that his thoughts of us outnumber the grains of sand.

God thinks about you so often every day that it is more thoughts than the grains of sand on the face of the earth. That's what Psalm 139 tells us. Why would we not want to love him who loves

us most? He never lies to us. He never abuses his power. He never abandons or betrays his love for us. He is the most compassionate. He is the most merciful. He is the most patient. He is the most fair. He is the most forgiving. He is the most loving. He knows me most and best.

C. *God can deliver my body and my soul from death.* Death is inescapable, but it's not final. Depending on your relationship with God, death is either the beginning of an eternity of torment and separation from the one who loves us most or death is the beginning of an eternity in the presence of the one who loves us most in perfect peace and perfect happiness. The psalmist, in Psalm 116, rejoices in this reality when he writes,

**"Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful... For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living."**

The psalmist just says, "O God, I love you because the day is coming when there's no more pain, hurt, disease, loss, or tears. The day is coming when there's no more temptation and sin in my heart. The day is coming when I'm going to walk with you forever." That's a good reason to love God first and most.

D. *God has made himself known to me.* You see, when we love God with all our hearts, we are not guessing. We're not loving him by blind faith. Christianity is not some walk of blind faith, in spite of what the critics like to accuse us of, not at all. Jesus took care of that when he said, in John 14:9, **"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."** Translation: "If you know me, you know God."

Hebrews tells us Jesus is **"...the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..."** He is God in the flesh, and so no one will be able to stand before God and say, "Well, God, I didn't know you were! I didn't know you existed! I didn't know what you were like!" I think, right at that moment, if anyone ever dared to say that to God at the judgment...

I don't think they would, but if they dared to, I think at that moment, Jesus would just step forward and say, "You knew about me. You heard about me." God has revealed himself to us, and that undeniable truth makes Psalm 14:1 pop off the page, doesn't it? Psalm 14:1 says, **"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"** No, God has revealed himself to us.

I think a legitimate question right now should arise in your minds. "What about all those people who've never heard about Jesus? They don't know anything about Jesus because of where they are in the world or circumstances." Just so there are no excuses and no exceptions, Romans 1:19 reminds us of this glorious truth.

**"For what can be known about God is plain to them [everyone], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."**

God is not unfair. God is not unjust. He has made it so every human being sees creation in all of its majesty and instinctively understands in their heart that there is an infinite, all-powerful God. God is not unfair. God has revealed himself to me that I might know him and love him first and most.

So, now let's answer the question. If loving God first and most is the first step to the most meaningful life, then...

2. *How do we love God?* Are we talking about just some kind of an emotion, some kind of warm, fuzzy feeling? What does it mean to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength? That pretty much covers it all, doesn't it?

Let's get really practical here, because this is where the rabbis made loving God such a burden that no one could really do it. The Jewish establishment of Jesus' day had made so many rules that God was buried beneath the burden of impossible religious demands. God wasn't someone to love. God was someone to keep off your back.

Let's boil it down to what the Bible teaches. Jesus says, "Here's the most important thing. Here's the most meaningful thing for your life. Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength." What does Scripture say that looks like, other than just an emotion or feeling?

A. *Fear him.* It starts with the mindset of understanding that there is a God and you are not him. I know that sounds simple, but that's exactly where loving God begins. I love Job's response when he realized he was wrong about God. He had it all wrong about God.

At the end of the book of Job, Job 42, Job says to God, "**I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted... Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.**" To me, that is so powerful.

You see, Job was one of those people who thought, even in the midst of his suffering, that he could question and confront God, and God was obligated to answer him. He thought that was how it was. When he realized God is not accountable to him (in fact, just the opposite), he says he repented. Everything changed for Job in that moment.

How many people in our day and age, maybe how many people do we know who are exactly where Job was? It's not that they don't believe in God; it's just that they don't agree with God. "There's probably some God out there," they would say. In fact, they probably would say, "I believe in God." They just don't like the way God deals with stuff. If God doesn't start changing his mind soon, then, "Enough of you, God. We'll deal with that when we get together at the judgment." Yeah, that's not going to go very well.

There are a lot of people just like that. Is it any wonder that the wisest man who ever lived wrote these words in his very first proverb? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom."

Loving God with all your heart begins with understanding that there is a God, we are not him, he is to be reverently, respectfully feared, and he is above all else.

B. *Worship him.* Our response to God's greatness and unfailing love for us is to lift our voices, our hands, and our prayers to him. We did a little of that today together. I wonder if you might agree. I firmly believe someone who refuses to worship God or who struggles to worship God doesn't really understand how much God loves them.

I really think worship is just a response to the magnitude of the reality that, "This God of the universe, who is above all, actually knows me and loves me on my best days and my worst days. He loves me most. I have to worship that God."

Psalms 95 says, "**Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.**" The psalmist is saying, "Let us worship God because we're his! He created us, and he knows us and loves us!"

C. *Obey him.* Perhaps the sincerest form of loving God is expressed in our willing obedience to his commands, because we know he would never demand that we do anything that is hateful or harmful to ourselves or to others. We know that about God. He desires that our behavior, our conduct, and our obedience actually reflect his goodness and his love, not his harshness or his hate.

God commands us to live in such a way that is a mighty reflection of his glory and goodness. First John 5:3 makes sense, then, when it says, "**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.**" This is the evidence of someone who loves God. Think about the testimonial power of this when we're living God's way instead of the world's way. That's a testament that we love God. "**And his commandments are not burdensome.**" Obedience to God is the powerful testimony of our trust in God.

I think that's why Jesus confronted the people when he said to them, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you don't do what I say?" In other words, Jesus says, "You don't get to call me Lord if you don't trust me enough to obey me." We don't get to call God our God if we don't love him and trust him enough to obey him. You see, this loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength has teeth to it. It has feet to it.

D. *Delight in him.* This is one I think we can overlook. It simply means to consider God our greatest treasure, our most valuable possession. His love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, comfort, compassion, promises, and power for all who believe... What else could possibly bring us the joy we're so desperately seeking?

Every time we experience pain, loss, disappointment, betrayal, or fear in this life... Every time those things come into our lives, they are reminders to us that this life was never, ever intended or meant to, and can never, give us the lasting happiness that only God can give us.

So, the psalmist writes, "**Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**" That's a very dangerous verse, because I think we can tend to misinterpret it. It's easy to look at that verse and say, "Hey, just get happy with God and you get everything your little heart desires."

No, that's not what it means. It's tempting to think that. It's the godly desires. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you those godly desires of peace, joy, love, intimacy, pleasure, worth, and significance, the meaning you long for. Treasure him above all else, and those things become yours.

E. *Believe in his Son, Jesus.* I saved this one for last. It has the power to cancel out the first four, really, because the first four we can kind of fake a little bit. We can fake worship a little bit. We can fake fearing him a little bit. We can fake delighting in him a little bit, but you can't fake believing in his Son, Jesus.

In 1 John, chapter 3, it says, "**And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ...**" Did you realize God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus? It is a command of God. It's not an option.

In 1 John, chapter 2, right before that, it says, "**Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.**" Translation: "There is nothing more hateful to God than to deny his Son." Translation: "There is no greater lie in the universe than to believe you can believe in God and even claim to love God and yet ignore, reject, or mock Jesus as though he doesn't even matter."

Scripture doesn't give us the option to claim belief in God and ignore Jesus Christ. The command of God (and keeping his commandments is what loving God is all about) is to believe and trust in his Son, Jesus Christ. If a person refuses to do that, they deny God as well, the one who loves them most.

What would our lives be like if we loved God first and most? I think we probably would agree there would be a lot less stress in our lives, a lot less worry and fear. Yet let me warn us. Everything about what we've just said, loving God first and most, is completely countercultural. Nothing about loving God first and most fits in in this world, nothing. That's why God's Word warns us, in 1 John, chapter 2,

**"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."**

That makes sense, doesn't it? God is saying, "Love me first and most." He's not saying everything in the world should be hated. He's saying, "If you're going to love all that stuff, those people and things or whatever, first and most, they're eventually going to pass away. If you're



going to get all your meaning first from that stuff, when it passes away, betrays you, or is gone, then there goes your meaning to live. There goes your meaning. You have to start searching for it again or somewhere else." The Bible warns us that it's not natural. It doesn't fit in.

What should we do to take some steps toward loving God a little bit more and a little bit more first? What do we have to do to fear, worship, obey, delight, and believe in God a little bit more, so we walk from here today a little closer? Let me give you just a few quick things.

First, I think we need to learn from Job and take his lead. We need to *repent*. There's grace for this. Let's just confess that some of our passions, desires, and pride come between us and loving God first and most. Not that all desires and passions are sinful. They can be, but they certainly are if they occupy more of our love than God does.

Let's be honest. Sometime before we put our head on the pillow tonight, let's get on our knees and say, "God, I confess there are some things I am hanging onto too tightly. God, there are some things I'm pursuing too intently and they're coming between me and you." Repent of that and find God's grace.

Secondly, *refresh*. I'm talking about our values here. Commit to values that move us to know and love God. It's not complicated. We're talking about time with God here. Reboot. Refresh the calendar of our life. Time with God in prayer, where we share our hearts with God. Time with God in his Word, where he shares his heart with us. Some of us just have to do a serious refresh or reboot on our calendar, on our day.

Thirdly, *reprioritize our possessions*, our money and our stuff, so part of it is used to fund and bless God's work. Jesus warned, over and over, you cannot love money. You cannot make that the main pursuit of your life (getting it, saving it, spending it, whatever it is) and love God at the same time. It's impossible to do both. You have to hold it loosely so you can hold onto God tightly. Again, for some, it may be the simple step of beginning to tithe faithfully to God, getting that priority right.

Fourthly, *retreat*. This may be the most difficult thing you're going to hear me say today. I'm going to challenge you to try to disconnect from allowing every headline, notification, and ringtone demand your attention. How about this? Turn your cell phone off when you go to dinner. Just turn it off. When you go the movies, for goodness' sake, turn off your phone. How about when you go to church? Just turn it off for an hour. Disconnect. Start with one day where you don't answer every personal text or email in under a minute. I know it's different at work.

Here's what I'm going to do. I told the first service this and I'm scaring myself, but I'm going to actually attempt to take one weekend off from TV and my phone. I'm going to be honest with you. I don't think I can do it, but I'm going to just attempt. Not every weekend. I'm just going to attempt to see if I can take one weekend.

I'll get home from work on Friday and not watch TV and not look at my phone, just turn it off. Why? Because it's going to make me a superhero? No, but it's going to allow me to retreat so I

can be quiet enough to listen to God and to commune with him without everything and everyone else wanting my attention.

If you're not born again, I can say this to you today. All of this is impossible. It's impossible to do. It's impossible to think. The reason is because none of it is natural to us. As sinners, our nature is to be afraid of God, even to hate God. We want God out of our lives so we can love ourselves first and most.

This is why Jesus came. He gave his life to save us from ourselves, from self-destructing and folding in with this self-love and self-centeredness, and to help us to see God for who he is and to see who we are in his sight. Only Jesus' shed blood on the cross can pay the price for our sins, satisfy the wrath and punishment of God, and bring us peace. **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I just ask in the name of Jesus that you would move in our hearts today to long for the meaning that comes from loving you first and most. I pray, God, that we would walk from here, not condemned, but excited to draw nearer to you, because you are the one who knows us most and knows us best.

You are the one who delivers our souls from death. You are the one, God, who is above all else. I pray, God, that we would be a church filled with people who have true meaning, lasting meaning, and lasting purpose every day we get out of bed. In Christ's name, amen.

If you want to talk to someone about what it means to surrender your heart to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, what it means to be born again, so some of this can make sense to you, these people standing up here right now are absolutely ready and excited to help you take that next step. I hope you'll do that. If there's anything else we can be praying with you about... Maybe there's something you're facing this week that you just would love someone to pray for you about, they would love to do that as well.

God bless you. We'll see you next Sunday.