

# Doing what God really wants

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 February 2022

Preacher: Nick Louw

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let me ask you, if you had the chance to ask God one question and it was a guarantee that he would answer this one question that you asked him. Any question you want.

What would it be? There was an internet poll that proposed this to people. And the answers, what people would ask God if they had a chance to ask him one question and get a sure answer.

The answers ranged from, why did you create humans knowing that they would sin? Now that's a very deep answer to a not so deep question.

Why on earth did you make mosquitoes? Maybe your question to God would be more personal.

Who am I going to marry one day? What job am I going to get?

What career am I going to do? When am I going to die? What date am I going to die? I imagine what you could do with that information. Or maybe it's more practical and short term.

[ 1 : 01 ] What will the winning lottery numbers be next week? What would you ask God? Well, as we come to Mark 12, Jesus is on his way to the cross.

He's in Jerusalem. We're in the last week before he dies. And what we realize in this important dialogue between him and the religious teachers is that all those questions that we want to ask God are the wrong questions.

In fact, there's only one right question to ask God. You know what it is? We will see soon enough. But before you do, before we look at the right question, let's look at some of the wrong questions Jesus was asked.

So here in Mark 12, have your Bibles open in front of you. The Jewish leaders get a chance to have an extended Q&A; session with Jesus. By the end, after his answers, there's no more Q&A.;

They don't ask him any more questions. But right as we begin this chapter, well, this part in chapter 12, we realize that the motives of these people coming to ask Jesus questions are not to learn things.

[ 2 : 15 ] They're twisted motives. Have a look at verse 13. Then they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Jesus to trap him in his words. That's why they're asking him these questions.

The motives are to trap Jesus. They're opponents of Jesus. They don't like the fact that he's undermining their authority to the crowds. And so they want to put him in a position where he will show himself false, where he will be trapped in his answer.

One way or the other, he's going to lose the support of the crowds. That's their plan. And so they come up with the best possible question to trap him.

And we see it in verse 14. They're all very flattering, all very deceptive. And then they say, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?

Ha! What are you going to say to that, Jesus? And then they wait. Now, we've got to understand the political situation of that time. That was a very controversial question.

[ 3 : 21 ] And either way Jesus answered it, there would be a problem. He would be in trouble. Kind of like, gentlemen, when your wife or girlfriend is walking with you in the mall and you pass the jewelry store and she says, Oh, don't you think this diamond bracelet would look so good on me?

You know you're trapped. Either way you answer, you're going to be in trouble. You say, yes, it looks great on you. Then you know there's an expectation, isn't there? There's an expectation that one day you buy that for her.

But if you say no, then you're saying that something doesn't look good on her. So either way, you're in trouble. Well, that's kind of what the Jews wanted to do with Jesus here. They wanted to put him in a trap where either way, he answered this question, should we pay taxes to the Romans, he would be in trouble.

If he answered yes, he would be seen as a Roman sympathizer and an enemy of the people. If he answered no, then he could get arrested by the Romans for sedition. And so they think they've got him.

But then we look how he answers. And he answers in such a way, not only to avoid their trap, but to actually turn their question back on them to expose their own hearts.

[ 4 : 39 ] Have a look from verse 15 to 17. Just look how he answers. Knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at.

They brought him a coin. Whose image and inscription is this? He asked them. Caesar's, they replied. Jesus told them, give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

And if we know where we are in Mark, we realize that's exactly what he's been telling the Jewish leaders is their problem. They are not giving themselves to God. And just like the coin with Caesar's image should be given to Caesar, so human beings, us especially, the Jews and the leaders who have God's image should be given to God.

And that's the one thing they're not doing. So you see what he does. He not only avoids the trap, but he points out the real problem in the Jewish leaders' hearts. Then they have round two.

You would have thought they learned by now, but no, they send him some Sadducees. This is another group of religious scholars who had certain beliefs. One of the main beliefs they held was that they didn't believe in the physical resurrection from the dead.

[ 5 : 51 ] And so they come along. You know, the previous group is like whipped their tail between their legs and then they send the Sadducees. You go, you go try, you go try, get him. And then they come up with a very clever question.

Because they want to show, they want to trap Jesus as well. They want to show that Jesus' teaching about the resurrection from the dead is actually false. It can't possibly be true. And so they come up with a hypothetical situation.

They say, you know, Moses' law says that if there's a married man and a woman and they haven't yet had a child and the husband dies, then the brother must take that wife on, marry her and give her a child to continue the brother's name.

That's the law of Israel. And they say, okay, so what if he dies and there's a third brother and he marries her and he dies? And there's a fourth brother and he marries her.

Now, I don't know why a fourth man would marry this woman after the last three husbands died. I would steer clear. But they come up with a scenario and seven brothers all marry her.

[ 6 : 54 ] And then they say, so whose wife will she be in your resurrection? And so they think they've got him. And so again, Jesus does more than just answer their question, but he turns it back on them.

Look at what he says from verse 24. He says, isn't this the reason why you're mistaken? You don't know the scriptures or the power of God.

For when they rise from the dead, they're neither married or given in marriage, but like angels in heaven. Okay, so what Jesus is saying is you don't even get the resurrection.

The resurrection is going to be totally different. The new creation is going to be totally different. Relationships will be completely different. And so marriage won't be needed. He doesn't elaborate. We want him to elaborate. We want him to tell us all the technicalities of how things will work in the new creation. And he doesn't because that's not what he wants to concentrate on. He goes on instead to say this from verse 26.

[ 7 : 59 ] And as for the dead being raised, haven't you read in the book of Moses in the passage about the burning bush how God said to him, I am the father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

And so he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken. Now, what he's saying here is quite important to get when he refers to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And what he's saying to these Sadducees is, guys, if you don't believe in a physical resurrection from the dead, you've missed the whole point of God's covenant with human beings.

The whole point of God covenanting himself with human beings and making a way for sins to be forgiven is so that we can live the new lives and the new creation that God always intended for us to live in our physical bodies.

And so if you don't believe in the resurrection, you've not just missed the point of God's covenant, but you've missed the whole point of the scriptures you claim to know so well.

[ 9 : 03 ] And so just like he answered the first question and with it showed the failure that these people have to give God what is his, so his answer to the second question exposes their failure to actually even listen to God's word at all.

And so you see what he's doing here. Jesus, in answering these questions designed to trap him, is expertly answering them, but then pointing out that the real problems in Israel are not Roman taxes and who's married to who in the resurrection.

In other words, they're asking the wrong questions. But then someone else comes along.

And this is not a group of people who are out to trap Jesus. This is an individual. And he comes and he asks Jesus a different question for a different reason.

He actually wants to know the answer. And for this question, Jesus says to him at the end, you are not far from the kingdom of God. So this man is different to the crowds that have asked him the previous question.

[ 10 : 20 ] And the reason he's different and the reason he's set apart and the reason that Mark records this for us is because he asks the right question. In fact, he asks the only right question to ask God.

What do you really want? The way he puts it, of course, in verse 28 is, which command is the most important of all?

That is the right question to ask God. And really the only right question to ask God. Because what God wants is the only thing that really matters.

I mean, think about it. The God who thought you into being. Who decided who you would be. Who thought up your personality. Who decided you would live and you would be born.

Who knit you together in your mother's womb. The God who holds your life in his hand and is deciding whether you should keep breathing in the next 30 seconds. If there is a God, if you believe in a God who is deciding whether you keep breathing in the next 30 seconds, who cares what you think.

[ 11 : 33 ] Who cares what anyone else thinks. The only thing that matters is what he thinks. Right? The only thing that matters is what that God wants from me.

Because my life is in his hands. I'm owned by him. I owe my every breath to him. And so the only thing that matters should be what he wants.

Right? And that's why this is the right question to ask. And so Jesus answers it. By quoting from the Jewish scriptures.

From quoting from Deuteronomy. In fact, one of the books that the Sadducees upheld as God's word. And he quoted the Shema. It's called the Shema.

Which is Hebrew for hear or listen. And he quoted this. It became a Jewish mantra or Jewish prayer. It still is today. And he quotes this because the people listening to him would have been so familiar with it.

[ 12 : 36 ] And the Jews would have known this well. He says this. Verse 29. The most important command is listen, O Israel. The Lord our God. The Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God. With all your heart. With all your soul. With all your mind. And with all your strength. That's what God really wants.

That's what Jesus is saying here. He's already said it in his word. And he says to them in no uncertain terms. And he says to us today who should be asking that question. He says, you know what God really wants?

Is you to love him. And to know him. And it's not new. He's been saying that throughout history to human beings.

To his own people Israel. Back in Hosea which we read earlier. Hosea 6 verse 6. God says, for I desire faithful love and not sacrifice. The knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

[ 13 : 34 ] Not all this religious stuff. That's not what it's about people. I desire love and the knowledge of me. God is saying. That's what God really wants above all other things.

For us to know him and love him. Not because he's desperate for love. He's existed in eternity past. In a perfect community of love.

The reason he wants us to love him is because that is the best thing for us. That is what he created us for. If you make something, don't you want that thing to fulfill the purpose for which you made it?

Well the purpose for which God made each of us was to love. And to love him. That. And that alone is where we find our flourishing as human beings.

Is when we love God who made us for that purpose. Just like a bee was made to love honey. You know, a bee.

[ 14 : 32 ] A bee's whole life. And they are hard workers, right? Bees are hard workers. Much harder than us. And they are focused little creatures. And they are focused on one thing.

Honey. The production and the distribution of honey. That's their entire purpose for being. That's their entire purpose for living. That is what takes up all their attention.

And I imagine those bees are really happy because they are doing the thing that they were made for. What Jesus is saying here. The thing that we were made for is to love God. For him to take up all our attention.

And when we do, that is the only time we will experience true joy and happiness and pleasure. Because that is what we were made for. That and that alone is when we will be in our element.

And that's when we will experience the greatest joy that it is possible for a human being to experience. But it requires for us to experience that joy and to actually believe that.

[ 15 : 33 ] It requires us to love God completely. No half measures. Anything less than complete love for God. We won't know that that is what we're made for.

We won't experience that greatest joy. And that's why Jesus says, Let's go through each of those. Your heart. Love God with all your heart. What does it mean to love God with all your heart? Well, it means to love him genuinely. Not superficially. Not going through the motions. And coming to church and singing.

Praise the Father. Praise the Son. Praise. You know? It's actually, your heart must be in it when you love God.

With all your soul. The soul is the center of our being. Which means, to love God with all our soul means to love him undividedly.

[ 16 : 34 ] With not any competition for our affection with other things in life. To love him with all our mind. Which means to give our full thought. To knowing and understanding God before any other subject in the world.

And to love him with all our strength. You know, the Hebrew word from the Shema where Jesus is quoting. For strength. Is actually, better translated, all our muchness.

All our fullness. All that we have in us. All the abilities we have to do things in the world. And to do things in our life. We should use all of that. Whether it's our physical strength.

Or our money. Or our time. Do you love God with all your time? With every spare minute. Is it focused on what God wants? And loving him. And doing what he wants with it.

Are you loving God with all your muchness? That's what Jesus says is necessary. If you're going to experience the true joy of doing the thing you were made to do.

[ 17 : 42 ] But that's not all. He goes on. Verse 31. And quotes from a different part of the Old Testament. And they didn't ask him for the second greatest commandment.

Just for the first. But he has to add this. Verse 31. The second is love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these.

Love God. Love your neighbor. That's what God wants. That's what God made you for. In other words. What Jesus is saying is that love. Both vertical. Between us and God.

And horizontal. Between us and people. Love. Is our entire purpose for existing. Paul reiterates this in Romans.

He says in Romans 13. Verse 10. Love. Is. The fulfillment. Of all. The law. You know what he means by that.

[ 18 : 39 ] Is if you're doing this. The one thing God wants. Then no other laws matter. In fact. All the laws in the Bible. All the instructions. All the rules.

The ten commandments. All of it. Was only ever given to help you to do this. To love God. With all your heart. Soul, mind and strength. And to love your neighbor. As yourself.

But the problem is. We don't. We don't. I haven't.

Loved God. With all my heart. Genuinely. Every. Minute of every day. I haven't loved. God. With all my soul. Undivided.

And not in competition. With other things. That take my attention. I haven't. Loved God. With all my mind. Giving him all my thoughts. First. Before anything else. I haven't loved him.

[ 19 : 32 ] With all my strength. My fullness. My time. My money. My efforts. Have you? We haven't. Have we? If we're honest with ourselves. And that's why we get fixated. On a whole bunch of other things. Just like. These Jewish leaders are. Here.

Getting fixated on all the. Wrong questions. Christians. And we argue. About the finer points. Of biblical doctrine. About what we're. Allowed to do as Christians.

And what we're not allowed to do. And we. We go through the motions. And we're very religious. And we ask. All of the questions. About what God. Wants. And. Well. Not so much what God wants. But kind of.

How I'm supposed to live. To toe the line. As a good Christian. And we. We debate. Around all of those. Little points. All. So that we can avoid.

[ 20 : 28 ] Asking ourselves. The one question. That actually matters. Am I doing. What God. Really. Wants. In my life. It's amazing.

How much. We. Duck and dodge. From that one question. And ask all the others. You know. It's all. Good and well. Coming to Bible study.

And coming to church. But am I loving my neighbor. Like God wants me to. When they're in. In need. Am I actually going out of my way. To do. For that person. In need. What I would do.

For myself. In that situation. Because that's what it means. To love your neighbor. As yourself. Whatever extent. You would go to. To get yourself. Out of that situation.

You do. For your neighbor as well. Who's in that situation. Am I. Seeking to love God. With. All. Of my. Muchness. Is my heart.

[ 21 : 22 ] Really. In it. And is it. Undivided. Am I giving God. The fullness. Of my life. Do we ask those. Questions of ourselves. No.

Because we know. What the answer is. Already. No. I don't. We don't do it. And so. We fill our minds. With a whole bunch. Of other things.

To avoid the fact. That we fail to do. The one thing. That God actually wants. That's what these Jewish leaders. Were doing here. But there's another.

Option. Besides avoiding. The question. What does God. Really want. And you know what it is. It's to look.

To the one. Who did. The one human. Who did. Do. What God. Really wants. His son. Jesus.

[ 22 : 20 ] Christ. Who. Loved. His father. With all his heart. All his soul. Not in competition.

With anything else. In his life. Who loved. His father. With all. His mind. And he gave his full thought. And attention. To his father's will. And he loved his father. With all his fullness.

And all his strength. And resources. And. Who loved. His neighbor. So much. That he died. For his neighbor.

You and me. To take. On the cross. Which we're going to remember. In a few minutes. To take on himself. Even though he was the one human.

Who loved God. Perfectly. He. Took. All of the penalty. For our failures. To love God. Like he did. And yet he took that on himself. That's how much he loved.

[ 23 : 16 ] His neighbor. And then. He rose again. To give us new life. New life in us. To change our hearts. So that we can.

Do what we were made to do. And love God. You see. When we're reading Hosea. Which was our Old Testament reading. Hosea 6. It's in the situation.

Where Israel know. That they failed God. But then. Through the prophet Hosea. Their hope is expressed. And I don't think it's a coincidence.

That it's expressed in this way. Even though it's hundreds of years. Before Jesus ever came. Listen to what. Hosea 6. The first two verses. Say. Come. Let us return to the Lord.

For he has torn us. And he will heal us. He has wounded us. And he will bind up our wounds. He will revive us. After two days. And on the third day.

[ 24 : 10 ] He will raise us up. When Jesus. Rose. From the dead.

On the third day. All who believe in him. For. All time. Even. Thousands of years into the future. Of that moment. All who believe in him.

You and me. If we believe in Christ. At that moment. When he rose. We. Rose. With him. Into new. Life. A new life.

Where. Not only do we know. That his death. Has paid for. Every single time. That we failed. To do what God wants. But. A new life. That is infused. With God's spirit.

Who gives us. Hearts. That are now. Capable. Of loving. God. And loving each other.  
[ 25 : 07 ] And so. We can begin. In these new lives. As we practice. Together. As we learn. Better.  
To love God.

And love each other. Because we are now. Capable. Of doing those things. By his Holy Spirit. We.  
Together. Begin to be. The people. God made us to be. And saved us to be.  
And so. Will you. Ask yourself. The right question. Am I doing. What God really wants. Let's pray.  
Lord.

We do admit. That. We do not. In our own strength. Do what you really want. But Lord Jesus. We  
are. Blown away.

When we think. How you. Came. To earth. To do. What we couldn't. To love. Your father. So much.  
[ 26 : 03 ] That you obeyed him. Perfectly. All the way. To the cross. And then to love. Your  
neighbor. Us. So much. So that you took. All our failures. On yourself.

That we can be. In right relationship. With God. That we can be. In the relationship. That we were.  
Designed. To be in. Lord. Help us. To realize. That what you've done.

Allows us. To now love God. Like we could never before. And help us. To draw strength. And  
power. From your Holy Spirit. To do the thing. That you want us to do. To love.

God. With all our heart. All our soul. All our mind. All our strength. Help us. To do that. With each  
other. Lord. As we come together. As Christians. Help us. To. Each.

Point. Our minds. And help each other. To point our. Hearts. To you. And to love you. And help us.  
To love each other. As we love ourselves.

[ 27 : 00 ] So that we can start. To be the people. You made us to be. And we pray this. In Jesus  
name. Amen.