

March 15, 2015 - 11:00 a.m.

Pastor Jonathan Falwell

The Road to the Cross: Walking the Road

Scripture: Mark 12

Summary: In this sermon, based on Mark 12, Pastor Jonathan Falwell focuses on what it takes to really be “all in” as we are commanded to be as Christ-followers.

Today I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Mark. We’re going to look at Mark chapter 12. It’s a passage that as we begin this journey, a journey that we start today and as we walk over the next few weeks leading up to Easter Sunday where we celebrate Christ’s resurrection we are kind of walking through a miniseries that we’ve entitled *Walking The Road*. Walking the road of hope, walking the road of truth, walking the road that leads to life. And so what we’re going to do over the next few weeks is we’re going to spend some time looking at people along the way, along the road that Jesus took.

We all know that in the days leading up to the cross, in the days leading up to that moment when Christ gave His life for us, that He had some interactions, He had some conversations, that He said some things and He did some things that can bring great clarity to what we face today, of talking and helping us see what it means to live for Christ in all.

And before we move into the passage that we’re going to look at today, I want to point us to Mark chapter 12 and verses 30 and 31, and this is our memory verse for this week. It’s a passage that I think you are familiar with. We’ve been memorizing scripture throughout this year. Some of the verses have been familiar to you; some of them have been new. This one, I hope and believe with all my heart, is pretty familiar, because we’ve actually talked about it a lot and used it a lot here at Thomas Road.

So what I want to do is put these verses on the screen, and together I want us to read this out loud, all of us read these verses together, because not only is it our memory verse passage for this week, but it sets the stage for where we’re going over the next few weeks. And so let’s read this together from Mark 12:30-31, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Now I know you are familiar with this passage. In fact, this passage is where we get part of our mission statement here at Thomas Road. You know our mission statement is “to change our world by developing Christ-followers who love God and who love people.” Well, that last phrase, that last statement, “who love God and who love people,” comes directly from this passage where Jesus commanded us, where He told us—not an option, not a possibility, not hey, if you have time, not on your free time. No, He said this, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” It should guide everything that we do. It should lead us in every step that we take.

It’s kind of the idea—and there’s an important word in this passage that’s used over and over again. It’s the word *all*. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all.” And we could stop right there, because all is a pretty easy word to understand. It’s a word that everybody in this room gets. You understand the definition. It means everything, right? So Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all.”

The problem with today’s Church, the problem with today’s Christian in so many settings is this: We love the Lord our God a whole bunch, but not all. We love the Lord our God a great, great deal, but not all. It’s like we have our foot in, but we’re keeping one foot out just for the days when we don’t feel like it.

You know, we come to church and it’s easy to come to church, right? It’s easy to come to church and worship together—well, unless there’s snow outside or unless it’s raining or unless our kids have a ballgame or unless it’s 70 degrees outside and the golf course is open and there’s a special deal today. It’s easy to come to church. And isn’t that kind of a picture of the way that we, in our faith walk, how we leave things. We kind of say, “Yeah, I’m all in—mostly. I love God pretty much with everything I got.”

Jesus didn’t say that. Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all.” Now we talked about this a few weeks ago and I’ll just bring this up again and remind us of this concept that when Jesus tells us to do something, when He commands us to do something, and we don’t do it, what is that? Say it out loud. It’s sin. So when we are not loving God with all, it’s not like we’re almost there and things are 99 percent good. It means we are living in sin.

And as we walk this road over the next few weeks leading up to Easter, leading up to that moment when we celebrate Christ’s resurrection, I want to talk about what it means to love God with all, about all in. Because let’s be honest, when Jesus went to the cross, would you say that His sacrifice that day that He was all in? I mean He died for us, right?

I heard somebody say not long ago—it really bothered me; it made me mad—I read this article and it made me mad because they said, “We understand Christians all the talk about how Jesus gave His all and how He suffered and died for us and He bled for us, but let’s be honest, Jesus is God and Jesus knew that He was going to rise again, so He knew that in a couple of days He was going to be good again, so it really wasn’t that much of a sacrifice when He knew what the outcome was going to be.”

And I say to that, baloney. Because when we read the scriptures and we see what Jesus went through, when we hear Jesus cry out with a pained voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When we hear Jesus say in the garden, “Let this cup pass from me,” those aren’t words that come from somebody who knows, “Eh, it’s a couple of days, it’s an inconvenience, it’s not that big a deal.” We hear these words from somebody who realizes and understands that what He is about to go through is horrific, and that’s what Jesus did.

And I know that’s true because what He did—and the Bible bears this out, it tells us this—is that the reason He had to go to the cross was to pay the debt that we owed. And we know this, Romans tells us this, that we are all sinners; that we have all fallen short of the glory of God; that we all deserve death; that we all deserve eternal separation from God; that we deserve pain; that we deserve sorrow; that we deserve suffering; that we deserve to die on the cross; that we should have gone through all that pain; but Jesus did it in our stead.

So when somebody says it’s really not that big of a deal because Jesus knew what was going to happen in a couple of days, baloney. Jesus suffered a horrific death, and He did it for us. He was all in. And so in Mark 12 when it says, “Love the Lord your God with all,” I would submit to you today that the only way that we can truly be Christ-followers—and I love that phrase. The word *Christian* is important. I love the word Christian. It’s a word that we use and it means so much, but a lot of times what we do is we use that word as a label rather than as a description. It’s a label; it’s a statement. It’s “Oh, I’m a Christian.”

I like the word *Christ-follower* because it talks about what we do. It talks about how every day I’m following after Him. And so if we’re going to be the Christ-followers that God has called us to be, if we are going to be that type of a person, we’ve got to be all in. So today I want to talk about how we can be all in. And I want to skip towards the end of this passage in Mark 12 to read about somebody who was all in. It’s a great place to start as we lead up to Easter, as we walk over these next few weeks.

In Mark 12 I want to read verses 41 and following. In this passage we read a story about somebody who was all in. Let’s read this together. Mark 12:41, “Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.’”

Now let me set the stage for you, what this passage is about. This is about Jesus one day sitting at the temple watching people “show up to church,” so to speak, show up to go through the motions, show up and do the right thing, do the honorable thing, to honor God with some. And so Jesus was sitting there watching people show up at the temple, watching them come and give their gifts into the temple that day. And as He watched, He saw a lot of people show up and He saw a lot of people who were obviously wealthy; obviously Jesus talked about their wealth.

And so they showed up and they would put money into the treasury, and probably—because if you read around this passage and other verses around Mark 12 that we read today—there is a

very clear picture that there were a lot of people here who were showing off, a lot of people who prayed in a certain way trying to make everybody look at what a great Christian they are, so they are trying to put on a great front and trying to be obvious about, “Look who I am. Look what I do. Look how I follow God,” and others would want to be like them.

So there is no doubt in my mind that a lot of these people showed up to give their gifts to the treasury at the temple that day and they showed up and they probably did it in a pretty grandiose way. They probably did it in a way to make sure that everybody saw, “I’m putting this gift into the temple.” And so these people would show up, maybe they’re very, very wealthy and they would drop in a lot of money and make sure that people watched them do it so they could see what a great person of faith that they were, a person following God that they were.

But then Jesus saw this little lady, this little old lady. The Scripture doesn’t say this, but in my mind’s eye I can see a little old lady barely able to walk, slowly making her way through the crowd, fighting against all of the commotion and all of the people moving about, and all of the people that are gathered at the temple and the people that are doing their big displays and their big show, and yet she’s just slowly moving through the crowd unnoticed—maybe not only unnoticed but maybe even kind of shunned because this person obviously is not important. This person obviously doesn’t have a lot. This person is not wealthy. This person is not somebody that you need to know. This is not somebody who’s going to help you in your career.

No, it’s just a little old lady, a little widow slowly making her way through the crowd. And she walks up to the temple and she drops in two mites. Now I know you know this story. The passage says that she dropped in two mites, which makes up a quadrans. How many people here know what a quadrans is? Raise your hand. Nobody. I didn’t know what a quadrans was. I’m your preacher. I admit I don’t have a clue. I had to look it up to see what it was.

I looked it up, and you know what historians tell us that is? The King James says it’s a farthing, which doesn’t help us much either, does it? Oh, it’s a farthing, of course! That doesn’t help you, so I had to look it up. And you know what I found out? It’s a fraction of a penny. A fraction of a penny. Not much. No big deal.

And in fact we think of pennies, pennies are not a big deal. You get in your car and maybe you go through a drive-thru, I’ve done that a couple times, and you go through the drive-thru and they give you the change and you get the change and there are some quarters in there and there’s some dimes and nickels and some pennies, and we put it in the cup holder; we put it somewhere in the car, and ashtray or whatever. They don’t call them ashtrays anymore; I don’t know, but you put them in there, and if it’s a quarter and you drop a quarter down in between the seats of your car you’re probably going to go fish it out, right?

If you drop a dime or nickel, you might when you get home make sure you pull it out. Why? Because a quarter you can use again. A dime and a nickel? Yeah, it’s important; you can use that some time again. Penny? We don’t care. You drop a penny down between your seats, it’s going to be there when you sell your car. It’s going to be there for the next owner. It’s a contribution to the next owner of your car, because we don’t really care.

How many of you have ever gone home because you dropped some pennies in the seat of your car and you can't get to them and you got a wrench and a screwdriver and you took the seat out to get to that penny? Anybody done that? Oh, come on! You need to kneel here and confess that's a lie. Nobody's done that. Drop a \$100 bill down into your seat and you can't get to it? You're going to find a way to get that \$100 bill. Am I right? Of course you will. Penny's no big deal. This was a fraction of a penny, and Jesus said that she had given more than all the rest because it was all that she had.

This lady gave her all. She didn't do it for fanfare; she didn't do it for a show; she didn't do it for status; she didn't do it to be elevated on some pedestal in the temple; she didn't do it to be honored. She probably was a lady that at some time was hanging out near the temple begging for bread and food to eat because she didn't have anything because this is all she had. She was certainly not someone of substance.

Yet, Jesus honored her, and it's a story that thousands of years later we still talk about. Why? Because she gave her all. And I'm going to tell you today that the only way that we can really be the Christ-followers that God has commanded us to be, as we read a few moments ago in Mark 12:30-31, is for us to be all in.

So for today and over the next few weeks let's talk about how we can make sure that we're living our faith, that we as followers of Christ are living all in. And the first thing we get from this pass is this: following Christ, being all in requires discipline. It requires discipline. *Discipline* is not a word that we all like to hear; it's not something we like. In fact, in a lot of situations discipline is a bad word. We don't like it.

When we're kids, discipline, we don't want to hear about discipline. We do something wrong and our parents are going to discipline us, we hide, right? That old statement your Mom says, "Wait till your daddy gets home!" We don't like that. We don't like discipline. We go to school, we get in trouble, something happens, the teacher is going to discipline us. We're going to have—I don't know what they call it. What do they call it when you have to stay after school? What is it? I know you know this. What is it? Detention, there you go.

We don't like discipline. We don't like those kinds of things because discipline is a bad word. And we think when we get to be adults discipline isn't that big a deal anymore and we don't have to worry about it anymore. Discipline is still bad, because discipline is now a little bit different. It's like when you gain a little bit of weight and you start packing on the pounds. In order to take pounds off, in order to lose weight, what does it take? It takes discipline. It takes discipline to live by a budget. It takes discipline to do good work at your job. It takes discipline to live our lives the right way. Discipline's a bad word.

But following Christ in the right way takes discipline. Look what it says here in verse 42, "Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites." This lady had to have discipline to do what didn't make sense. It didn't make sense to drop her two mites, her fraction of a penny, into the temple treasury. It didn't make sense. I mean let's be honest. What could the temple do with it? It didn't make sense. But it took discipline for her to do it. Why? Because she wanted to honor God with all.

And so she took the steps, she made her way through the crowd, she fought through the mass of people and got to the temple and did what exactly she came to do. And she did it because she was disciplined, because she knew that for her to honor her God, she had to do what was required of her to do.

And today following Christ is no different. We talk about following Christ most of the way. We talk about one foot in and one foot out. We talk about making sure that we live for God on a Sunday morning, but during the week we take a little time off. This weekend in our family we have three birthdays—Jonathan Jr. turned 19 years old yesterday and Nicholas and Natalie, our twins, turned 15 years old today. I still can't believe my wife's that old. And so we've got lots of birthdays this weekend.

It's birthday week in our household, so last night we got together as a family and we gave gifts to the kids. They opened gifts. We sat down and they were all lined up on the couch and we gave them all our gifts and they started opening the gifts and looking at them and liking them and excited about this, not so excited about that. All that kind of stuff.

And obviously when the kids are a little bit older it's a little bit harder for us to find things to buy for kids. It used to be easy. You take them to Toys R Us and just walk them down any aisle and they're going to fill up a shopping cart. It's easy. Now it's a little bit more difficult, asking them over and over, "What do you want for your birthday? What would you like for your birthday?" They can't come up with anything. "I don't know. I don't know."

So last night we gave them some gifts, but we also just gave them some money, gave each of the kids some money so that they can maybe go buy something that they really like that they want on their own. Now think about this a moment. What if last night with Jonathan or Nicholas or Natalie I gave them money and said, "We love you so much. You are awesome. You are our kid. We love you more than anything in the world. Here's some money for your birthday," and they get that money, they're like, "Thank you so much. This is exciting," and they take the money and start to put it in their pocket and I said, "Whoa! No. I want that back. I'm going to give it to you, but I'm not going to let you keep it," and I took that money back from them?

That wouldn't be giving my all, right? That would be giving and making a good show and making a good display, but when it came right down to it, I didn't give them anything at all. There are people in this room that in your faith walk are doing the exact same thing. In your walk with Christ, you're doing the exact same thing. I'm showing up at church. I've got my Bible. I might even be in a life group and maybe I'm singing in the choir. I'm singing and lifting my voice to the top of the roof. But when I go out and live my life, I want it back. I'm not giving my all. I want it back. And so we live in a totally different way. We will never be able to follow Christ the right way without discipline of saying, "God, I am all in," and giving our all.

Not only does it require discipline, but this passage bears it out that following Christ and giving our all, walking the road with all, it also requires respect. Do you think this little old lady, this widow lady, do you think she had respect for God that she was willing to give everything that she had? Do you think she respected God in any way, shape or form, to the point where she was literally willing to give everything to God?

Do you think she had respect for God? I think the answer is yes. I think she respected God because she knew who God was. There are people in today's society and people even in the Church today that like God, that love God, but man, they don't have respect for a holy God. I remember a few years ago they came out with that T-shirt, "Jesus is my Homeboy," and "Jesus is my friend." He's my buddy. He's kind of hanging out. He's right by my side.

All of that's true, but let me just tell you something: Jesus is not our homeboy. God is a holy God who requires holiness from us, too. God calls us to a level of obedience and a level of holiness and God requires that of us. And we understand this concept. I mean there are certain things—let's be honest—there are certain things that if you're older, there are certain things that in your days growing up there were things that you would not do in the presence of your parents. Am I right about that?

I remember one time years ago when VHS tapes came out. I hate that I can actually say that. But I remember when VHS came out and they had VHS stores, video stores, and young people, you have no idea, no concept of what a video store is, but let me tell you what it was basically like. It was a store, just like all the other stores down the street, and you'd walk in and they'd have lines and lines and walls and walls of video tapes, VHS video cassettes, that you could go in, and for \$15 you could rent a video cassette for a couple of days. That's true. And you could rent that video cassette, you could go home and watch it and then you had to bring it back. If you didn't bring it back they were going to charge you \$5 a day until you returned it. That's the way things used to be.

Now I remember one time in high school I was having some friends over; we were going to have a party at the house and I was excited about it, so I had the kids come over, and right after VHSs came out, right after video stores opened, there was one on Timberlake Road—which by the way now is in the exact same place where the Starbucks is now on Timberlake Road. That used to be a video store. And so I went in and I rented a video tape. I can't remember what the movie was, but I got the movie and brought it home and had the friends over. We ordered some Pizza Hut pizza and we were sitting there. We had the pizza, we had the movie, and we were all sitting around. My parents were out to dinner.

So we were watching the movie, and as we're watching the movie, you know what happened? Right in the middle of the movie, some guy started cussing up a storm, I mean it was horrible language. And you know what's amazing, incredible? Right when that cussing started, right when that language started, guess who walked in the door of the family room to say "hi"? Yeah, Mom and Dad.

At that moment I was like, "Kids, why don't you all leave? It was nice knowing you." That's the way I felt. I thought I was a dead man. I was horrified that my parents walked in while I was watching that when I was with other people. There are things that you will not do in the presence of your parents because you think, "I shouldn't do that. What will they think? I don't want to embarrass them and I don't want to make them mad."

But every single day in our lives we do things in our lives that dishonor the presence of God in our lives and we think nothing of it. You watch things, you listen to things, you visit websites,

you say things, you laugh about things, you go to places, you do things you would never do in the presence of someone else. But it's not hurting anybody and nobody knows. It's a secret. Nobody's aware that I'm doing this.

The Bible says that He will never leave us and He will never forsake us. The Bible tells us in Psalm 23, He is with us every step of the way. God knows. What's happened is there is a lack of respect for the holiness of God in the Church today, and I'm telling you today there is no way that we are going to be the Christ-followers that God's called us to be without having respect for who God is. This lady had immense respect for God where she was willing to literally give it all because that's what God told her to do.

Last thing. It obviously requires discipline. It obviously requires respect. But following God also requires obedience. It requires obedience. It requires understanding that God has called me to do something, and no matter what I'm going to do it.

I'm going to read another passage. It's not in Mark 12 and you don't need to turn to it, but it's found over in Luke 5:4. This is Jesus and Peter and it says that "When He [Jesus] had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, 'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.' But Simon [Peter] answered and said to Him, 'Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.' And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking."

Now here's the back story here. Jesus one day was speaking to the crowds, speaking from a boat. It was in the morning, because it says that all night long Peter and the other fishermen had been out on the water trying to catch fish and they had caught nothing. They'd been out there working, trying to catch something. That was their livelihood. It was how they made their money, how they ate, and they couldn't catch anything.

So they were out there all night long, and the nightshift was tough. It was hard work, and they did it every day, trying to make what they needed to make to live and be able to provide for their families and put food on the table. And they did it over and over again. And on this night they were out there and they caught absolutely nothing, and now they are tired. Now they want to go home and rest. Now they want to take a break. They've worked all night long. It's time to take a rest here and relax a little bit; kick your feet up and turn on *ESPN SportsCenter* and see what's happening in the world of Jewish sports back in the day.

That's what they wanted to do, but Jesus said, "You know, listen, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go right back out there, get the boats and go right back out there and go fishing." Peter said, "Wait, wait, wait. Okay, we were out there all night Jesus. There ain't no fish out there. This is not a good fishing hole today. We couldn't catch anything. We found nothing, but hey, if you say to do it..."

Now it doesn't say this, and again I'm adding a little bit of color here and I may be wrong. I'm just setting this up. But I kind of sense a little bit of sarcasm in Peter. I may be wrong about that. Peter obviously loved God and loved Christ and followed him, but Peter also had a little bit of sass in him. We've read some of the passages about Peter. And I can see Peter saying, "Oh Jesus,

we've been out there all night long and there's no fish, but hey, if you say to do it, well I'll go do it!"

You know what happened? When Peter obeyed, he went out there (as the passage tells us) and they actually had to call in reinforcements just to get the nets into the boat there were so many fish. And you know what that tells us? It tells us this: that when we obey God against all odds, against everything that makes sense, when we obey Him, that is when we begin to win. That's when we will win. Remember back in Mark 12:30? "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your strength."

This is a commandment of God, and I think there are probably some people here today that are kind of hanging onto the fraction of the penny. Maybe you're like 99 percent in with serving God and walking with God and loving God—and listen, I'm not talking about giving; this is a passage I know that is used in stewardship, and I'm not talking about that today, although there are some of you out there having a problem with that, too, but we'll go there another day. There are people who are hanging onto something, and you said, "You know what? I'm 99 percent in." Ninety-nine percent in is 100 percent sin. Only 100 percent in is obeying the command of Christ.

And so there are some people here today that are hanging on. You're like that little old lady. Maybe you're in the masses of people, you're in the crowd, you're honoring God, you're following the Scripture. You're here at church, you're listening to the Word, you're singing the songs. Maybe you're involved in life group, maybe even serving. You're doing all the things you think are important. Ninety-nine percent you're there, but that fraction of the penny you're hanging onto. You're hanging onto it, not ready, not willing, not ready to drop it and say, "God, I'm all in."

I'm telling you today, you will never be the Christ-follower that God intends for you to be until you can say with all of your heart, "I love the Lord my God with all." And until you're not only ready to say it but do it, you're missing the boat. Let's pray together.

Keywords: Mark 12:30-31, widow's mite, all in for Jesus, following God, being Christ-followers, discipline, respect, obedience