

# Five Faces of Pride

Jesus' Last Days (Mark): Part 15

Mark 12:35-40 contd (Mt.22:41-46, 38-40, Lk.20:41-47) 4/11/2021

Summary: Jesus believed in inspiration of Scripture and in Davidic authorship of the psalms ascribed to David. And he looked to the psalms for serious doctrine.

Jesus described five forms of the earthly greatness we are to beware of.

- Pride of appearance
- Pride of importance
- Pride of place
- Pride of privilege
- Pride of pretense

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**Mark 12:35** While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? **36** David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: " 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' **37** David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

**38** As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, **39** and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. **40** They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

## Did David Write the Psalms of David?

Before quoting psalm 110, Jesus prefaces the quote with a very interesting comment.

**Mark 12:36** David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared ...

Those words are very important for two reasons. The first one has to do with the question of whether or not David wrote the psalms that have his name at the top. When you read a psalm, before you get to verse 1 in the psalm you often see a heading that says something like, "For the director of music. A psalm of David." Exactly half the psalms are attributed to David (73 in the

heading, and two more that aren't in the heading but the NT attributes them to David).<sup>1</sup> Most modern scholars will tell you, "Oh, don't pay any attention to those. That doesn't mean David wrote it. It was probably just added later to say that the psalm is associated with David." But in this passage, not only does Jesus attribute Psalm 110 to David, but if the psalm wasn't written by David, Jesus' entire argument falls apart. Jesus' whole argument is that the Messiah has to be greater than David because David calls him Lord. If someone else wrote the psalm and called the Messiah "my Lord," Jesus' argument doesn't hold. So did David actually write the psalms of David? If not, then we can't trust Jesus.

## Inspiration

The other important thing we need to notice is what Jesus says about the Holy Spirit.

### **Mark 12:36 David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared ...**

That tells us that Jesus believed in what we call the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Sometimes people will say things like, "That poem was really inspired," or, "He's an inspired preacher." That's not the kind of inspiration we're talking about in the phrase "inspiration of Scripture." The word comes from 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, "**All Scripture is inspired**" (or your Bible might say, "**All Scripture is God-breathed.**" "God-breathed" is a good translation. The Greek word is *theo-pneustos*. *Theo* means God and *pneustos* means breathed out. The words written in the Bible were breathed out of the mouth of God. They are the very words of God.

This is why I also believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. The original writings had no errors. I know that because God doesn't breathe out errors.

And just a quick word about how the process worked. God breathed out the words, but he breathed them into the writer's mind, and that writer said it in his own words. The Bible writers weren't taking dictation. God didn't just tell them, "Ok, get this down. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God..." In order to get the material they wrote down, they had to do normal human research. Luke 1:3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you The Holy Spirit didn't whisper it in his ear. The Spirit did teach it to them, but not through dictation. Luke had to do the same hard work of research as any other historian. He wrote from his own knowledge in a way that reflected his own thoughts and style and personality and vocabulary. That's why Luke's style is very different from Peter's, and Peter's is different from John. They did their research, they expressed the ideas in their own words, but the Spirit superintended the process to make sure what ended up on the paper was indeed the infallible, inerrant Word of God, breathed out of the very mouth of God.

And if all that is kind of hard to grasp, then welcome to the whole paradox of the sovereignty of God verses the free will of man. If you try too hard to reconcile it then you'll end up either destroying the divine side of it or the human side of it. Just let it be a paradox and don't expect God to have the same limitations we have.

## Doctrine in the Psalms

And one more quick observation about what Jesus did here. It shows us that the psalms are doctrinal. I make the huge mistake for many years of thinking the psalms were just songs and

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<sup>1</sup> Ps.2 in Acts 4:25 and Ps.95 in Heb.4:7.

poems that showed us how to relate emotionally with God. I never really thought of them as being sources of much doctrine.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Jesus quotes a psalm here to support a doctrine that's as heavy-hitting a doctrine as there is. The Psalms are loaded with theology. In fact, I would say the Psalms are more densely packed with truths about the nature of God (theologians call it "theology proper") than any other book in the Bible. No other book reveals more attributes of God than Psalms.

Sometimes you hear people dismiss Genesis 1 and 2 on the grounds that they are poetry, so we can't take them literally. That's wrong for a couple reasons. First, poetry is loaded with literal speech. It has a lot of figurative speech as well, but it's not all figurative. When a psalm says, "Praise the Lord," that's as literal as anything in the Bible.

And second, just because something is poetic doesn't diminish the doctrinal truth being taught. The poetic form is meant to strengthen it, not to weaken it.

## Forms of Seeking Earthly Wisdom

The other thing I didn't have time for last time was the description Jesus gives of the teachers of the law in vv.38-40. So let's look at these six forms of pride so we're clear on exactly what it is Jesus is warning us to watch out for.

### 1) Pride of Appearance

**38 As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes.**

This is pride of appearance. Seeking human greatness by having an impressive appearance. In this case, they were wearing clothing that was an indication of importance and status. Official people who were about to carry out official duties wore these robes. And the scribes loved putting those on and parading around in them.

Robes don't normally have that same effect today, but the practice is still alive and well. These are people who dress to impress. Or they work out to impress, or get surgery to impress. Not really an issue in our day, right? No one is out there trying to impress people with their appearance. This is as relevant as it's ever been.

And keep in mind, the issue isn't that these men wore the robes; it's that they *loved* walking around in them. It's an issue of the heart, not just about how you dress. There are people who aren't really all that impressive to look at, they don't buy expensive clothes or get cosmetic surgery or anything like that, but they have the same value system in their heart as the people who do that. They judge themselves by their appearance. No one is blown away by their amazing appearance, but that fact depresses them. Rather than being happy to look the way God wants them to look, they are sad that they don't outshine other people in the way this world measures good looks.

And the word "outshine" is important. Remember, human greatness is always greatness is always about rising above others. It requires putting others below you because that's how it is defined—being greater than others. The only way to have an amazing appearance in the world's system is to make the people around you feel bad about their appearance, because it's not as amazing as yours. And whether or not you take any steps to impress people with your appearance isn't the issue. The issue is in what you love. If you're depressed about your unimpressive appearance, you've been infected with this pride of appearance mindset.

## 2) **Pride of Importance**

### **38 ... They like to ... be greeted in the marketplaces**

This isn't talking about people saying, "Hi" to them. It's talking about being greeted with titles of honor, like rabi, teacher, father, etc. This is pride of importance.

In the first impeachment hearings last year a congressman asked Alexander Vindman a question and addressed him as "Mr. Vindman." At that point Vindman flinched, like someone had pricked him with a needle, and said, "It's Lt. Col. Vindman please." His whole reason for testifying was that he was upset because the President didn't follow his advice, which, to him was an impeachable offense. Pride of importance.

That's a really extreme example, and most people cringe when they see such a blatant display of this kind of arrogance, but again, the seed of that can be hidden in our hearts in more subtle forms. You may not have any military rank or academic credentials or any titles of special honor, but what happens when someone speaks to you in a way that falls below the threshold of respect that you believe you're due? They address you in a disrespectful way, or in a way that makes it seem like you're lower on the social totem pole than you really are. Does something inside you flinch like Lt. Col. Vindman? Watch out, Jesus says. That's deadly.

## 3) **Pride of Place**

### **39 [they like to] have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.**

This is pride of place or position. There were benches on a raised platform in the synagogue that faced the congregation. It was an honor to get to sit there, and so they loved those benches—sitting in front of everyone in reserved seating where others weren't allowed. Everyone could see how important they were. At banquets, they would have seats at the head table, and everyone would see it.

Both those phrases, **most important seats** and **places of honor** come from Greek word for *first*—literally, first-seats and first-places. That's significant because it's the word Jesus has been using ever since ch.9 when he said the first will be last and the last first. These men are the epitome of exactly what Jesus spent the last several months teaching his disciples not to be.

In the military, there is a very explicit ranking system. In the rest of society, the exact same ranking system exists, but it's not explicit. Some places it is. If you work for a big company, you fit in somewhere in the ranking system. But in other places, like at church, all the rankings are unspoken and unofficial. Some people's opinions hold great sway, others don't. Some people get a lot of attention, others don't. Some are treated with greater honor. None of it is on paper, but in many cases it's every bit as real as rankings in the military.

And we all long to rise in the ranks of those people whose opinions we value. This is one reason why Facebook exists. On a Facebook page you can create your own little shrine to yourself. Anyone who isn't an adoring fan gets unfriended, so you create a little world where you're a celebrity. And you can check you're celebrity status every morning. If you put up a post that gets 50 likes—you're famous. It's so tempting to become like these scribes and fall in love with that affirmation. It's like a drug. The first thing you do in the morning is check how many likes they got and read the affirming comments and bask in your own earthly greatness.

## 4) Pride of Privilege

### 40 They devour widows' houses

We don't have any historical record of how the scribes exploited the widows, but it's not hard to imagine given the fact that they were lawyers. In their system, there wasn't a big distinction between the law of God and the civil law. So a scribe back then was a cross between a modern seminary professor and lawyer. They were the ones who handled legal matters. If you can imagine a lawyer that comes to a grieving widow and says, "Oh, here, let me help you plan your estate." And the next thing you know, the lawyer owns most of the estate. That's the kind of men these guys were.

How did they justify that? Because of how important they were. I'll call this one pride of privilege. These men are so important in their own eyes, that they would look at a widow's household left by her husband, her savings, and think, "That should belong to me." Because of my ministry, because of the services I provide, because of my importance to the community, I deserve that.

When I say it's not hard to guess—it's not hard because it had been going on for hundreds of years. Go all the way back to Isaiah's time.

**Isaiah 10:1 Woe to those who . . . 2 deprive the poor of their rights . . . making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. 3 What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar?**

Evil men in positions of both political leadership and spiritual leadership have always oppressed the most vulnerable and helpless, and widows are at the top of that list.

Judging from the very next paragraph, where a widow puts her last two pennies into the Temple treasury, you get the feeling that was an example of what Jesus is talking about here. I'm guessing those two pennies found their way into the pockets of the scribes one way or another.

When we get infected with the disease of earthly greatness and self-importance, we start to feel entitled. Throughout the centuries there have been religious leaders who live in opulent luxury by bilking money from poor widows and people who don't even have enough to live on. They fly on private jets and surround themselves with gold in massive mansions and go on TV and use the Bible to convince people in poverty that if they send in their last little bit of money to the evangelist, God will bless them with wealth.

Not long ago Kenneth Copland was talking about why he had to fly on private jets. It was because sometimes a revelation will come to him in mid-flight and he has to stand up and shout praises to God, and you can't do that flying commercial. You see, he's so important, he's got such a privileged position with God, he needs a private jet.

This is yet another example of how failure to love God first results in a failure to love neighbor. We should seek our honor from God. But when you seek it from men instead, that always results in stepping on others and exploiting others. You can't be elevated higher than the other guy unless the other guy is lower than you. And when you have people stepping on others to get to the highest spot, guess who gets stepped on the most? The weak and vulnerable.

## 5) Pride of Pretense

**40 ... and for a show make lengthy prayers.**

Pride of pretense. These are people who do what they do around fellow Christians to impress them with how spiritual they are. In this case, it was long prayers.

And the fact that it's mentioned right after the widows has led many to wonder if this isn't how they got the widow's money—charging for their prayers. The word translated “for a show” could be translated “with an ulterior motive.” They might have been using their prayers not just to impress people, which is bad enough, but also to manipulate the widows. Again, the modern televangelists do that exact thing when they say, send in \$1000 and I'll pray over a handkerchief and send it to you and it will heal you. They're selling their prayers.

Most of us don't take it to those extremes. In fact, for some of us, this same sin might manifest itself in the opposite behavior. Instead of long prayers, no public prayers. A lot of Christians refuse to ever pray out loud because they are afraid people won't be impressed. Either way, it's exactly the same sin—longing for earthly greatness.

For others, it might not be prayers. It might be singing on the praise team or serving in this or that ministry or even doing evangelism or missions—all for the purpose of impressing people. Or impressing themselves—just taking pride in the fact that they served or they did this or that, which affirms their greatness in their own eyes.

The quest for earthly greatness can take so many forms:

- Pride of appearance
- Pride of importance
- Pride of place
- Pride of privilege
- Pride of pretense

Whatever form it takes, let's remember Jesus' words: “Watch out!”