

Mark 12:35-40

³⁵ Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How *is it* that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?" ³⁶ For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: '*The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."*' ³⁷ Therefore David himself calls Him '*Lord*'; how is He *then* his Son?" And the common people heard Him gladly. ³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

The context we are in this morning is Jesus teaching in the gentile's courtyard of the temple at Jerusalem. It is Wednesday. He will be crucified on Friday.

Jesus has been asked several questions to trick Him into saying something the Jewish leaders could use to get him **either killed** by the Romans **or disowned** by the common man. They have accomplished neither. Two have stepped into their own tracks. One got a sincere answer to a sincere question.

Now Jesus poses His own question. And no one steps up to answer the question. We can rest assured that the religious leaders were still in the crowd. Oh they could posture being all knowing and expert, but they couldn't answer one simple question by Christ. Because they knew, if they followed the normal rules of interpretation they would be incriminated by the answer. So they remain silent.

³⁵ Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How *is it* that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"

Jesus answered. What Jesus is about to say is in response to what has already been said by the religious big shots. This is a response to them and their queries. It is as if Jesus is saying, you guys have had your turn. Now it is mine. You have tried to trap me in trickery. Now let me defend myself in truth. You guys say you know the truth. So give me an answer to this question.

"How *is it* that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"

Jesus is referring to Psalm 110. It was commonly understood as a Messianic psalm. Let's read the whole thing. It is short.

Psalm 110:1-7

¹ The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." ² The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! ³ Your people *shall be* volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. ⁴ The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You *are* a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." ⁵ The Lord *is* at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. ⁶ He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill *the places* with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of

many countries. ⁷ He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.

So David is speaking here of someone. David is told by God that this person He is sending out of Zion will execute kings in the day of his wrath. He will judge among the nations. He is going to kill a lot of enemies of Israel. It was understood as a Messianic prophesy about the son of David who is to arise. The whole passage paints a picture of a coming ruler.

But there is a real bind in the language.

It says **the LORD**

(Hebrew word in Psalms- Jehovah, this is the word for God that is too sacred to say for the Jews

Greek word in Mark- koo-ree-os he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has the power of deciding; master, lord),

said to my Lord

(Hebrew word in Psalms- Aw-done means to rule, lord, master, ruler

Greek word in Mark- koo-ree-os- same Greek word as the first Lord.)

Here is the problem. The person who is defined as being the son of David by the scribes, someone who is the Messiah from the lineage of David is being spoken of here. The problem is, why would David refer to an inferior as a superior? Why would he address his descendent as having more authority and status than himself? Why would he be submitting to his offspring?

Jesus asked it a little differently, but this is the point He is making. Christ said **how is He then his Son?** Or another way to ask this is how does this savior figure, this son of David, fit in with the idea that the Son is superior to the father? We know from other passages that Christ truly is the promised Son of David. So it isn't that Jesus is trying to disprove His lineage or His right to be king based on His lineage. What **is** being questioned is the **relationship of David to this heir**. How can the heir be superior?

Now how could the leaders answer it?

They could say "we have no idea". If they said that Jesus might tell them the answer and they didn't want the crowd to hear that.

They could say "he isn't the son of David". If they say that they are going against years of the scribes' teaching that he **IS** the son of David.

Or they could say "the son is, in some way, clearly superior to the father David" and Jesus could say that they have proven his point. First, this descendent is more than a man. Jesus could go on to prove that scripture points to a son of God that would show up as the son of David. This would be more than a simple human descendant. They didn't want to even allow that as a possibility. So their only option? Say nothing.

Here is the difference between a truth seeker and a hypocrite. A truth seeker goes where the truth goes. Answering Jesus question would have opened up new possibilities in God's word for these people that they had never investigated. The one question Christ asks would have led people to the possibility that truly the Messiah could be a lot more than what they were expecting. The Messiah could actually be the literal Son of God. But the leaders would not allow this truth because it was politically unattractive to them. So they blocked truth.

What do we do with truth? What truth is there that we don't like so we shut it down? We come up with some reason that it doesn't apply to us and then we do our best to silence the source. The leaders stonewalled Christ, but I have seen times where **fits of rage** or **tears** have been used for the same purpose. What truth are we afraid of? Do we resemble the Scribes in the crowd here?

Isn't it interesting that the leaders asked Christ 3 questions which Christ could easily answer. Christ asked them one question and they were silent. The listener should have gotten the clue that the only one **fit to be asking questions** in this crowd is Christ.

As for the title of **Son of David**, this was an accurate title. Here are a couple of scriptures that prophesy this future person.

2 Samuel 7:12-14

¹² **"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.**

¹³ **He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.**

Psalm 89:3-4

³ **"I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David:**

⁴ **'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.'**
"

Psalm 89:35-37

³⁵ **Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: ³⁶ His seed shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me; ³⁷ It shall be established forever like the moon, Even *like* the faithful witness in the sky."** Selah

The **crowds** also referred several times to Jesus as the Son of David. So there was a clear understanding of a Messiah to come that would be of David's lineage. The problem was their expectations were too limited. They had clues that this person would be a Son of David and even more. But they weren't pursuing those leads.

That didn't fit in their box. If they had, they may have been ready for a **Messiah of their souls** instead of a **Messiah of their real estate**.

We need to also look at the rest of the verse Jesus quoted.

"Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."

God was going to say to this other Lord, sit at my right hand. Who sits at God's right hand? Only the most important person. And it won't be David. It is reserved for Christ.

This is another clue that the Messiah will be greater than all that came before Him and all that will come after Him. But the leaders weren't following these clues.

And the common people heard Him gladly.

I am not sure what to make of this. It is difficult to know, with the crowd being so fickle, just how much of it could be trusted. And we already saw how the crowds reacted as soon as Jesus said something they didn't like. I am guessing at this point that the common people really liked seeing Christ put the religious and political leaders in their place. They probably felt like they had a voice when they saw Christ deal with them. **He** probably said some things **they wished they could say**. And they were probably tired of being taken advantage of by their rulers. I am prone to believe that the common people liked what they were hearing today, but they are likely to turn on Christ at the next sentence. That is normally how popularity works.

What we don't see is the reaction that is most revealing. We don't see this crowd, falling on their faces before the Son of God crying out "what can we do to be saved" or "Christ forgive us of our sins because they are many." We don't see a spiritual reaction. We see a sociological one. Any group theory scholar could explain what is going on in natural terms. And that is terribly sad. For the most part people are just acting like people.

Now Jesus goes on and really tells the crowd what they want to hear. He lambasts their current leadership on biblical understanding. He hones in on the scribes, the lawyers, the theology experts.

³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

We have to keep in mind who the scribes were. They were the people who were supposed to be speaking for God. The common people would have understood them as being the ones who were to protect the message of God to the people. They were to shepherd God's people with God's truth. They were to be spiritual leaders, leading people into a relationship with God.

This is a very high calling. It is one of the most important things that a human can do. To have that as your occupation is a colossal honor.

It only stands to reason then that if a person takes that position and then abuses it, if they don't deliver on the truth that will **help the people they are responsible for**, that this is the worst kind of evil. It is one thing for a sheep to decide that he or she wants to be lost. It is quite another for a shepherd to abandon his responsibility, or to abuse it.

I would like to quote MacArthur again.

In Israel in the time of Christ, the promoters of satanic falsehoods were the very ones charged with protecting God's truth and teaching it to the people—the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and other religious leaders. Though the people perceived them as devout, respected, responsible shepherds of God's people, they actually were seeking popularity, power, prestige, and above all, money ([Mic. 3:5](#); [Luke 16:14](#); [2 Peter 2:1-3, 14](#)). They claimed to worship and honor God, yet they were intent on murdering the Son of God. That goal united these diverse groups, who frequently differed with each other. Truly their father was the devil ([John 8:44](#)).

Jesus had no tolerance for false teachers. Why? Because teachers are given for people to learn how to get right with God. They are given to teach people how to rightly live. And when they teach or live falsely, it serves as an obstacle to people coming to Christ.

Now these listeners had probably grown up thinking that the scribes were the next thing to God. Many of them would have held these leaders in awe. So when Jesus began talking about them, it would have been shocking to some of them. They may have felt that Jesus was being completely disrespectful. Others, who had tasted the pain of their false teachers may have silently applauded the truth about those teachers when it was finally proclaimed.

Let's look carefully at what Christ said.

"Beware of the scribes,

Now we all know that we are not supposed to gossip or slander anyone. And here is Jesus speaking extremely negatively about other human beings. He is cutting down the likelihood that he will ever have any meaningful conversation with these guys. How can that be right?

Well, first Jesus knows the hearts of men. So he knows these men are unreachable. But more than that, there are always higher priorities. And **sheep being protected from wolves** is always a higher priority. We see that often in Paul's writing. If he perceives any of his flock are in danger from any influence, he is quick to tell the truth about that influence, no matter how devastating of an effect that would have on that influence's reputation. Because the safety of the sheep is a high priority to any true shepherd. So don't assume that just because

someone is being extremely negative toward another human that they are wrong to do so. You need to examine the motives and the situation. Jesus and Paul were both very very negative to certain false leaders. Christ called the Jewish leadership just about every name in the book. And it was very strong language that He used. Snakes, dogs, adulterers, white washed tombs, hypocrites, fools, wolves, and on and on.

So Jesus begins his warning- Beware of the scribes. The word “beware” means to **evaluate them with your eye** in light of their external circumstances. He is essentially saying add this stuff up and draw proper conclusions. And then Christ is going to begin laying out the evidence that they are to evaluate.

who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces,³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

First we see that they desire to go around in long robes.

The word for desire means they take delight in, they have pleasure doing this thing. Do you like to dress up? I know it isn't a virtue, but I have never liked dressing up. I especially don't like to dress up for church. Mike and I had very different ways of looking at this. And both, I think, were correct. His view was that when he took his team to a basketball game, he required them to look respectful. And if a basketball game was worth that, God was infinitely worth more. So dressing up was a sign of respect. He was an example to us on how he fleshed out that conviction. His ties sometimes distracted his wife from hearing his sermons, but that is another story.

I had grown up dressing up for church. And I always felt fake by doing so, like I was putting something on that wasn't true of me. I was dressing up the outside in an effort to cover up the inside. My thinking is that all of us come to Christ just as we are. So why can't we come to church that way, dressed in a way that best represents what we are? People don't need to pretend anything to come to church. They should come as they are. And they should **feel free** to come as they are.

Well these scribes liked dressing up. But I can't gloat here. Because their way of dressing up was truly in an effort to appear to be something that they were not. They would wear very expensive, very flowing robes. And on these robes would be sewn very tassels. And these wouldn't just be normal tassels. These would be supersized models. And this was all designed to portray the enormous piety of the wearer. They were intended to create an impression about the wearer that was not true. It would be similar to wearing a t-shirt that says “I am more spiritual than you.”

Second they **love greetings in the marketplaces,**

Because they were wearing their uniform, they expected to get the proper address. According to scripture they were used to being called **Rabbi** meaning they were teachers of God's truth, **Father**, meaning that they were the source of spiritual life for people, **Leader** as if they were the ones to give people direction in life. Carla encounters this in the educational world where some people require that you call them doctor just because they passed a few more tests than you did. It is the same idea. It is status. They love the status.

³⁹ **the best seats in the synagogues
and the best places at feasts,**

I assume we have all been to a wedding. The most important people in that wedding are seated up front. These religious leaders want to always be up there in the front row. They want to be seated in the best seats, the prominent seats, the power seats. In the synagogues there were elevated platforms in the front. That is the seat these guys wanted. Close to the host or up in front.

What we see are people with a lot of style but no substance. People who want to **look** a certain way but don't want to **be** a certain way.

All these things display the scribe's pride. But what comes next is much more sinister.

⁴⁰ **who devour widows' houses,**

We looked at the protection of the widows and fatherless several weeks ago. God has a special place in His heart for people who are vulnerable. And the widows and fatherless were the most vulnerable in this Jewish culture. The leaders were to **look out for them, protect them**. But because they were vulnerable with no one to protect them, the leaders would show their true colors. Their fangs would come out and they would act like the wolves they truly were. These men were greedy. They loved money. And wherever they could exploit someone to get it they would.

Darrell L. Bock studied what was done back then and he says,

The scribes consumed the limited resources of those who had the least. They abused their hospitality, defrauded them of their estates, mismanaged their property, and took their houses as pledges for debts that they could never repay
MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Mark 9-16.

That is amazing. They acted horribly, satanically, to those who were weakest. We can never be content to evaluate people on just what they say. We have got to watch what they do. And especially what they do to those who have the least recourse. For us it is often what we do to those in our families. How do we treat the weakest members? Do we exploit our authority and demand their service to us, buying us out of things we are responsible to do? Do we take advantage of the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters or parents? Do we exploit those who

give us the opportunity to exploit them? Always be watchful of your wolf-like reflexes and responses. They reveal things that need dealt with. God has a special heart for the powerless.

and for a pretense make long prayers.

It is very odd how people can come up with the most spiritual reasons for doing the most fleshly things. Our hearts are the trickiest people we know.

These scribes would have the audacity to pray long prayers while knowing that their hearts were full of horrible sin. They just refused to evaluate their sin. They would look at the tax collectors and thank God that they weren't a sinner like that. They focused on the sin that they didn't do.

Some days I wish I could get away with that. Don't you? I wish I could pick all the sins I am not even tempted to commit and focus on them. How I could avoid God's conviction then. I might be able to work up a beefy sense of pride and self righteousness. But the mirror of the word doesn't allow that. The problem with true spirituality is that we see ourselves **as we truly are**. And the beauty of true spirituality is that we are driven to receive and appropriate God's forgiveness for that very thing.

False spirituality is always made up of **spiritual actions** to mask **spiritual sins**. It consists in external posturing to cover internal hideousness. And the more effective it is, the more deadly it is. The more we can fool people and ourselves, the closer to hell we are. Very evil people do very religious things. We can't be too easily impressed. Sometimes it takes time to find out what is really driving a person's heart. But if you watch their time, their actions, and their bank account you will soon know. These things don't lie.

Now what does Jesus say about this?

These will receive greater condemnation."

I don't know what hell will be like. But I do know there are varying degrees of punishment. And the punishment seems associated with our degree of knowledge. The more we know, the more we will be responsible for. And those who pose as messengers of truth and don't come through seem to be the recipients of the greatest punishment.

Look at what Hebrews says

Hebrews 10:26-31

²⁶ For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the

Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. And again, "*The LORD will judge His people.*" ³¹ **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

This passage is talking about the extreme judgement a person will fall under who continues living in a sin that they are fully aware of. It explains that as long as this person chooses to continue in that sin there is no encouragement to give to a person in that state.

If we, who know the price that Christ paid for us, still choose to live for that which caused His death, we are trampling the Son of God underfoot. How we treat sin is a reflection on what we think of God. If we love God, we resist sin. If we love sin, we insult God. It is that simple.

So we are told in this passage that there is a greater punishment, a greater severity in hell, for those who have known about God's grace but refused to submit to it and live accordingly. Sin is a huge deal. We cannot play with it. We see here that we do not want to live against God like the religious leaders were doing.

All they have to look forward to is a **fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.**

What are you looking forward to? Are we putting off the old us daily and putting on Christ? Are we living obediently, looking for ways to love God better with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? Or are we clinging to sin, wanting to have our cake and eat it to? Nothing good can come of that, except that fearful expectation of judgment. Don't make the mistake that our Christian faith offers us solace while we are choosing to sin. Our sin may eventually prove we never really were a believer.

So we do well to avoid the example of the religious rulers. We would do well to love truth and pursue it where it goes. And to love God with everything we are.