

Mark 12 (Part 2) - Jesus Talks About the Scribes

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When we left off last time in our study of Mark, you'll remember that Jesus was having a conversation with a particular scribe who queried Him about the greatest of all of the commandments in the Old Testament. And the response of Jesus was, the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord your God with your heart and soul and mind but also to love your neighbor as yourself.

The man responded by saying, yeah I totally agree. Basically Jesus and this particular scribe agreed with one another and in fact this scribe even commended Jesus for his response. And Jesus said to him, you're not far from the kingdom of God.

Now that wasn't the case with every scribe and scribes, by the way, were teachers. It wasn't always that way. Scribes originally simply meant they were copyists. They would copy down the scriptures so that they could be available. But over time and over the years, scribe became synonymous with teachers. And they were the instructors and the experts in the law and that sort of a thing. And many of them Jesus wasn't terribly impressed with.

And we're going to see how He confronts the scribes in these next couple of sections in Mark chapter 12. First, he confronts them about how they're interpreting the word of God. And then he's going to talk to them about their lifestyle, how they live.

Beginning in verse 35, read along with me there. It says, *“And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?’³⁶ David himself, in the Holy Spirit (or 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. So how is he his son?’ And the great throng heard him gladly.” (ESV)*

Let's talk about what's going on here because this can be a confusing thing. Essentially, the scribes referred to the Messiah as the son of David. And the reason they did that is because God promised David that one of his descendants would ascend the throne forever. And the Jews came to understand that promise as pertaining to the Messiah, and David believed it as well. And everybody knew and understood that the Messiah would be born in the lineage of David.

Now, let me just explain a little something about how the Jews considered lineage, or descendants, if you will. A descendant was always considered to be lesser than their predecessor. If David is the one through whom this lineage comes, and there are, of course, many generations between David and Jesus, it would be a natural idea in the Jewish mind to think of David as the greater and the Messiah as the lesser, or, if you will, the descendant to be the lesser.

Anyway, that's the connection that essentially the scribes made. The Messiah is coming. He will be born as a descendant of David. They made that connection, but there was another connection that they didn't make. And Jesus reveals it here by quoting one of the Psalms; Psalm 110, where, according to Jesus, David spoke what he spoke by the Holy Spirit, or by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And what did David say? David said this, My Lord, or "*The LORD says to my Lord:*" In other words, David is recording a statement where God the Father is speaking to the Messiah, but the Messiah here is mentioned by David, or described by David as, "*my LORD.*" So my Lord God speaks to my Lord Messiah.

Now, you see, that would have tweaked the Jewish mind because, as I said, a descendant is always lesser than the one who came before. So this presents a situation for the Jewish mind that is just out of whack, and I believe that's one of the reasons why the scribes just ignored this kind of stuff.

The question that Jesus is posing again to the crowd is, how can the Messiah be merely the Son of David, which, by the way, He is, when David himself calls Him, my Lord? What is Jesus saying here? Well, it's very simple. He's opening their heart to understand that the scriptures reveal more about the Messiah than just his human ancestry.

According to His human ancestry, He's the son of David, but it goes beyond just His human ancestry. There's also the divine side. There's His deity to talk about. Well, they didn't deal with that. They didn't deal with that whole situation, and I have to wonder why. Again, beyond the explanation, and it's probably—maybe I shouldn't say beyond me—that is just the explanation.

It's just weird. It just doesn't fit, see? And I really believe that's the reason today why you still run into people who struggle with the idea that Jesus and God the Father are one. And because it just doesn't make sense.

This all came home to me fairly early on in my walk with the Lord. And I'm talking about my walk. When I talk about my walk with the Lord, it started when I was about in my mid-twenties. I met Jesus, and I heard the Gospel when I was about 15, and I embraced it, but I never ever made him Lord.

But there was a point when I was about in my mid-twenties where I really bowed the knee and said, I'm an idiot. You're God. Let's just do it from here. And very early on in that relationship, I had these Jehovah's Witnesses come to my door.

Actually, it was just, it was one adult and a child. And they often do that, or at least they did. I'm not sure if they still do, but I didn't know very much at all about the Bible or the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society that the Jehovah's Witnesses are a part of. And I didn't really even know what this guy believed differently than me.

I told him I was a Christian, and I said, so what is it exactly you guys believe? And he was doing all this fancy dance around this and that. I said, no. What I want to know is what do you believe different than what I believe? He said, well, it really centers around the person of Jesus.

And I said, okay, what do you believe? He said, well, we believe He is a God. There is God the Father, and then there is God the Son, but He is a God. He is not one with the God. And I said, oh, well, that's too bad, because that's actually what the Bible teaches. Interestingly enough, he said, he pointed to this little boy that he came to my door with.

And he said, this little boy is my son. And he said, he's the son, I'm the father, we are not one in the same. I said, yeah, you're also not God. And so what you're doing is you're comparing your nature and your relationship with your son to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. And you're saying they got a match or I kick it out. In other words, it's got to make sense to me, or I'm going to reject it.

This is very common. I think the scribes were essentially doing this. They were just ignoring all the biblical passages related to Messiah's deity because it just didn't make sense. How in the world can Messiah be the son of David and his Lord at the same time? It's not possible, right? Or at least as far as they were concerned, it didn't make sense.

And I can't tell you how often I run into this when I'm talking to people about various things in the Bible. You deal with the subject of the Trinity, for example. Somebody says, Pastor Paul, can you explain the Trinity to me? I'm like, no, and I wouldn't even try. I can tell you what the Bible says related to the Trinity, but explain how God is one God in three persons? Forget it. I'm not even going there because it's beyond our comprehension.

Well, that's a problem. That's a problem with some people. Beyond my comprehension means I drop-kick it to the door because I have no place for it if it will not submit itself to my reason. But I want you to understand, people, how

dangerous that is. Because when you and I place our reason as the final judge as to whether something is true or untrue, we are essentially saying this: my brain is equal to God.

That is what you're saying. Whether you've actually verbalized it or not, if you demand that the very nature of God submit to your level of comprehension, then you are saying my comprehension and God must be equal. They must be on the same plane, or I reject it. And that, people, is an arrogant assumption on our part that only expresses the height of human sinful folly.

Listen, if your God can be comprehended by that gray matter between your ears, then your God is pretty small. But if your God is beyond your comprehension, if there are things about His nature that He has communicated to you and I without explaining the details because we can't comprehend them, then your God is above you, beyond you, greater than you, in fact. And that is exactly what the Bible teaches.

Now, I'm sure if Jesus would have come right out and said, listen, here's the deal, all right? For all you scribes, yes, Messiah is the son of David, but he is also one with the eternal God. Well, what would they have done? They'd have picked up stones, which they often did, as a matter of fact, whenever He made some kind of an allusion to the fact that He was one with the Father. Because they had no room for it. Right?

Christians, I want to really encourage you today. Do you have room for mystery? Do you have room for mystery in your heart? Or does everything have to make sense according to your ability to reason it through and figure it out and dial it in and that sort of thing? Or do you leave room for mystery?

I'm here to tell you, if you don't leave room for mystery, you're going to be in trouble. Because there are so many things. Oh, merciful heaven. I'm on my third time teaching through the Bible here in 26 and a half years. And if I could just mark how many things in my Bible I just don't get, there'd be a lot of marks in my Bible. There's a lot I don't understand.

And when I come to those passages, you've heard me over the years say, okay, here we go. It's your guess as good as mine on this one. Or I'll just say, here is something that the word of God reveals, but it doesn't explain. It just simply reveals it, like the Trinity. Like the reality of the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.

And that's what Jesus is—that's the point He's making here. Messiah is fully human, and He is fully God. And people go, that doesn't make sense. I'm with you! I am with you. I mean, you name it, good grief, the virgin birth, figure that one out. I mean, oh yeah, right down the line.

That's why the Bible says it's too wonderful for us to know from the standpoint of the knowledge of the insights of the glory and majesty of God. We can know something is true without knowing how it's true, right? Did you know that? I can know that there is such a thing as a trinity, that God's nature is described in the scriptures using this.

And people will say all the time, well, find me the word trinity in the Bible, and then I'll believe it. Come off it. You're being unreasonable. Listen, we come up with all kinds of terms to describe concepts that are beyond our ability to understand. But the term is just simply to help us to define what is revealed in the scripture.

I can show you in the Bible where it speaks of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit as individual persons. But they are declared as one God. I can show you that easily. So let's not pick nits over whether the word trinity is there.

The word Christmas isn't in the Bible either, but it talks about His birth. The word Easter isn't in the Bible, but it talks about His resurrection. These are just words we've applied to biblical truths. What you have to ask is, is the truth in the Bible? Is the truth—oh, it doesn't matter what you call it—is the truth there? Is it revealed in the scripture?

Psalm 110 reveals Messiah will not only be human but also divine. *"The Lord says to my Lord..."* And that's the point of what David is—or excuse me, Jesus is—saying in this passage as He speaks of David's writing here. Let's move on. Excuse me. Jesus has more to say to the scribes, and it's not too good.

Verse 38: *"And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and (they) like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues (best parking spot) and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers...' "*

You ever heard somebody giving a long prayer, and you're just like, get done? We always, before dinner, we always pick the person who prays the shortest prayer because we want to get to eating.

But He says—now look what Jesus says here at the end of this verse, verse 40—He says, *"They will receive the greater condemnation."*

Why? Well, because the scribes were men who loved the trappings of all that they had as scribes. But it says in verse 40, what's going on really is they're devouring widows' houses. But they loved everything about what it meant to be that religious leader.

The first thing He mentions is they love walking around in long robes. What that means is they were wearing something that distinguished them from the common person, and that clothing gave them what they considered to be an exalted appearance.

Wouldn't you think that after reading this passage, we as Christians would say, let's not do long robes for church leaders, okay? And yet, what have we done? Oh, we put them in long robes. It's like we just didn't get it.

I grew up in a church where the minister, on Sunday morning, was in a long robe. For that matter, all the choir members were too. But of course, the pastor—the minister—we didn't call him a pastor back when I was growing up. He was the minister. And I'm not sure what we were. But his robe was different, and everybody knew. He had things on it, and it set him apart.

The thing about what Jesus is saying here is that it appeals to something in our nature that wants to be set apart. I like being special. I like looking different. That's in my flesh. I like to do that. And so do you. At least—well, let me put it this way—we want to look different as long as people appreciate the way we look. And as long as they look at how we look and they go, whoa, and when we walk by, they're like... That appeals to us, right?

Well, it appealed to them too. He says they love to be greeted in the marketplaces, no doubt with high-sounding titles. Good thing we haven't done that in the body of Christ. Hey, how about that reverend? Where did we come up with that? Who thought up reverend for a pastor or a leader? Who came up with that? I want to know. Stand up if you came up with that. I'm just kidding.

We came up with it, which means basically this person is to be revered. That's what the title means. This is a revered individual. Why did we come up with that, along with long robes?

We were giving people positions that set them apart from the rest of the crowd, weren't we? I say we in that larger sense of the body of Christ, but that's what we were doing. Even though Jesus told us, this is wrong. This appeals simply to the flesh of man that wants to be exalted above other people.

He says they also love the places of honor in the synagogues. There's a place in the synagogue where the scribe gets to sit, and it's that special place, and everybody knows it. And, oh my, if you sit down in that place by accident, you're going to hear about it because that's just for these special people, the exalted people. Why do we do that? Why have we done that?

Jesus also said they loved getting those special places of distinction at things like feasts and dinners and weddings and so forth. This is a special place just for the scribe or the Pharisee or whatever.

They loved to look and feel superior. But Jesus goes on to say they actually cared nothing for the people of God, and they even took advantage of widows.

And again, His statement is, "*They will receive the greater condemnation.*" Why? Because they are setting themselves up as those who teach, and yet they're not living what they teach.

Listen, the same thing is true in the New Testament. You guys know that, right? James wrote the very same thing. He wrote in his letter, don't many of you presume to be teachers, because we who teach are going to be judged more harshly than the rest. (James 3:1)

That's a verse I've heard, thought about sometimes at three in the morning, and gotten cold sweats over, to be honest with you. Because I understand that God holds accountability—a greater accountability—to those who are teaching the Word. And the basic idea is, are you also living the Word of God?

But lest you think you're off the hook, there's an element of responsibility that we all have to address as it relates to simply knowing the Word of God.

I mean, here you are in church. You're hearing me teach week after week from the Scriptures. You think God's going to just look past everything you've learned? Let me show you a passage in Luke. This is from Luke chapter 12. Look what it says:

Luke 2:48b (NIV84)

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

And that includes information and understanding from God's Word. So you see, none of us are ultimately off the hook as it relates to this kind of responsibility because we've heard the Scriptures. We've heard the Word of God.

I got to tell you something. I shudder sometimes when I think about family members who sit in church week after week and they come because my wife wants me to come or my husband wants me to come or my parents want me to come, and they sit and they listen and they hear and they never respond. There's a responsibility that goes along with hearing the Word of God.

Finally, look at verse 41. It says, *"And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums."* By the way, this money was a collection for the poor. It was to feed the poor.

Verse 42: *"And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. (Excuse me)"*⁴³ *And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box."*⁴⁴ *For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

It's interesting, isn't it? Just a few days—I mean, we're in Passion Week. We've already actually read that passage on Jesus's entrance into the city, which happened on Palm Sunday. And now we're in that one-week period between Him coming into the city in what we call the triumphal entry and His death on a cross. And He knows.

He's just days away from bearing the sin of the world, and yet He chooses an opportunity to talk to His disciples about giving. And it seems to me like this isn't super important. I mean, just on a cursory sort of a view of this thing, it's like, really, Jesus? You only got a few days before the cross, and you're going to talk to these guys about giving? He calls His disciples together after watching all of these people come to the offering box.

And then this woman comes, and you're thinking, why are you making such a big deal about this? And the reason is because it's very important, and it provides such an incredible contrast to what He just got done saying. He just finished castigating the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. And now He begins to speak of this woman who is living it.

And He calls his disciples together, and He says, I tell you the truth, which is the statement that... which is a phrase, I should say that Jesus puts at the beginning of a statement He wants to emphasize. This is the old *"...Verily, I say unto you..."* right? *"...Truly, I say to you..."* Boom, this is like, this is comments. So pay attention.

See that lady right there? I just watched her put in two copper coins. They're the equivalent of about a penny, but I want you guys to know something—she gave more than all of them put together.

And that must have produced one or two eye rolls, or at least eyebrows probably going up among the disciples. And then Jesus explains the statement at the end of verse 44 when he says, here's why. They contributed out of their abundance. She, however, gave all she had out of her poverty.

And so we're made aware in this story of how God—because remember, Jesus is God in human flesh—we're suddenly made aware of how God views giving. You ready? He doesn't care about the amount. That's not what's important to God. If the amount was the big thing, then He would have called attention to all those rich people coming along, putting all their large amounts of money into the offering box. He would have gone, whoa, hey, oh, look at this guy! Wow! This is great! Cha-ching! I just heard his stock up in heaven go up, or whatever. He didn't say any of that stuff.

In fact, the only person He speaks of is this woman who gave these two copper coins. And He's basically telling us this: the value of your gift is determined by what it costs the giver.

I'm going to say that again. The value of your gift, according to God, is not how much you give. It's how much it costs you. That's an important thing to remember, and this is all about the subject of sacrificial giving, which is a theme pretty high on the list of biblical themes.

I mean, if we're going to talk about sacrificial giving, the greatest example, of course, is what God has given to you and I in the person of His Son to die for our sins. We can't top that one. He bore the sin of the world and died bearing that penalty.

We sing that song, I'll never know how much it costs to see my sin upon the cross. That's a great line because I think it's very true. I don't think we have a clue how much it cost Him. But there are all sorts of other biblical stories about sacrificial giving, and that means where it really costs somebody.

You guys remember the story of Abraham? He couldn't have babies with his wife because Sarah couldn't conceive. The Lord comes along at some particular point in Abraham's life, and he says, hey, Abe, buddy, I'm going to give you a son.

Well, that kind of confused Abraham and Sarah for a while until the Lord came and gave some clarity and said, actually, what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you a son through Sarah. Oh, okay. And eventually, here comes Isaac. We're not sure, but we guess that between the time when God first promised Abraham that he would have a son to the birth of Isaac was somewhere around 25 years.

That's a long time to wait for a promise to be fulfilled, as you can well imagine. Abraham adored this little boy. And at some point in the growth of this little boy, God spoke to Abraham and He said, Abraham, I want you to take your son, your only son, whom you love, and I want you to take him to a mountain that

I'm going to tell you about, and there I want you to offer him as a burnt offering to me. (Genesis 17:15-16, Genesis 18:10, Genesis 21:1-3, and Genesis 22:2)

You guys know the story. God had no intention of Abraham taking the life of his son. In fact, human sacrifice is abhorrent to God, but he was asking Abraham as a test to see if he was willing to give to the point that it hurt, to give sacrificially. And Abraham, bless his heart, got to the point, didn't argue. I would have argued, seeing if I'm tuning in here right.

But Abraham got to the point of lifting the knife over his son when the Lord called out and said, Abraham, I never intended you to take the life of your son. But now I see that you are willing to even offer your son. And then, of course, came incredible promises added on to what Abraham had received previously.

It's a beautiful story, but it teaches us something very significant about giving from a sacrificial position, right? Giving sacrificially as men, as husbands rather. All of the husbands in this room, we're all told to love our wives. Husbands, love your wives. Guess how we're supposed to love our wives?

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. What does that mean? Sacrificially. See, it's one thing for me to love my wife because I'm going to get something out of it. It's a different thing altogether to love my wife when it costs me something, right? It's a whole different level of love—sacrificial love.

Do you remember the story of David? David, toward the end of his reign, made a pretty big blunder by counting the fighting men. Even Joab was against doing it and tried to talk him out of it. When you have somebody in your life like Joab, and he tries to talk you out of something, you're really going, this is really bad. Joab was a very fleshly, carnal man. But David, of course, being the king, overruled Joab and said, go count the fighting men. And it grieved the Lord so much, God sent a plague upon all of Israel. People began to die because of David's blunder.

David cried out to the Lord, and the Lord instructed him to go and build an altar at a very specific location. It belonged to a particular man; it was his land. And David was to build an altar on that land, on a threshing floor. And there he was to offer sacrifices so that this plague might be abated. (1 Chronicles 21:1-17 and 2 Samuel 24:1-17)

So David went to this man and asked him for the ability to buy the land so that he could build this altar to the Lord. And the man, whose name was Ornan, said, forget it. You can have it, which I can understand. He wanted the plague to end. He said, just take it, just take the land, and I'll give you the oxen and everything you need to do your sacrifice.

You guys remember this story. Let me put up David's response from 1 Chronicles 21.

1 Chronicles 21:24 (ESV)

But King David said to Ornan, “No, but I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

But King David said to Ornan, “No, but I will buy them for the full price. (Look at David's statement here.) I will not take for the LORD what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

David understood the principle of sacrificial giving. He knew that if it didn't cost something, it minimized what was being offered. Right? And I love that story. I love this story here in Mark of this widow, because it reminds us God doesn't need your money. God cares more about your heart and how you give.

The other thing I find very fascinating about this story is the fact that it was an offering being taken for the poor. Did you notice how the woman is described? A poor widow. So here's a woman, and again, this offering is being made for the poor. She could have very easily said, that's me. I am poor. So obviously, this offering is to help people like me.

She could have even, I suppose, had an entitled attitude related to this offering—this is for me. But that's not what she did. This woman, instead of seeing herself as poor, she saw herself as having something to give. She saw herself as being able to help others. And toward that end, she was even willing to give everything she had. She had nothing beyond these two copper coins, and she gave them to help other people.

Wow! That is crazy. Especially in our culture today that is so entitled. You owe me. Uncle Sam owes me. Where's my check? I'm not saying that any of those things are wrong necessarily. I'm saying our attitude toward those things is that you owe me, and you shorted me this much money. We're even talking about money that's given for benevolence—you shorted me a few bucks. You owe me that money.

Wow. I love the attitude of this lady. As poor as she is, you'd say dirt poor, just these two copper coins to rub together. And she gives it all away thinking what? I am someone who can give.

And I think this is really important for us to think about as we consider our own lives and what we have. Because in Christ, you have something to give. We all

have something. I don't care how much money you have or don't have—that's not the issue. In Christ, we all have something to give.

I hope that when you come to church and when you leave church and see other people in other circumstances and situations, you think to yourself, I have something to give rather than just take. This lady could have reasonably said, this is for me, but instead, she said, what I have is for you.

And that's something to admire. That's why Jesus pointed this woman out. He took the trouble before his crucifixion to point this lady out. He said, I want you to pay attention here, guys, to what this lady did. She gave more than all the rest. And God noticed. And God always notices. Even though your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing, God knows.