

The Last Lessons

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- [0 : 0 0] Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of Mark chapter 12. Mark chapter 12 and beginning in verse 35 to the end of the chapter.
- Mark 12, 35. And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself in the Holy Spirit declared, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.
- David himself calls him Lord, so how is he his son? And the great throng heard him gladly. And in his teaching, he said, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts.
- Who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.
- Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 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.
- [1 : 2 8] For they all contributed out of their abundance. But she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had. All she has to live on. Amen.
- This is God's word. So the verses that we just read are Jesus' last public teachings. In the next section, Jesus will continue to teach.
- But at that point, he'll just be talking to the four disciples. So this is Jesus' last public appearance before he's arrested. And I think that gives weight to the things that Jesus says in this passage.
- And in a way, you could say that what Jesus does in this passage is he summarizes the two great questions that have followed him for all of the gospel of Mark. The first one is, who is Jesus?
- And the second one is, who are the true disciples? Those are the two questions of Mark. That's what Mark wants us to wrestle with. And these verses, they stand as Jesus' final answer to those two questions.
- [2 : 2 6] And so we're just going to look at how he answers those questions. Now, the first one is, who is Jesus? And in the gospel of Mark, we've already seen what you might call the definitive answer to that question.
- And it's in Mark chapter 8. You remember when Jesus looks at Peter and he says, Peter, who do you say that I am? And you remember Peter's answer. Peter said, you are the Christ. And the whole first half of Mark is building up to that moment, the realization that this person is the Christ.
- And here in verse 35, Jesus is building off of that fact, off the fact that he is the Christ. And he's asking the scribes a question about what the Bible actually says about who Christ is.

And you may have just listened to this whole interaction and you may have found it really confusing because it is it's an Old Testament question about how to interpret the Psalms.

But what Jesus is doing, if you really slow down and look, he's appealing to common sense. And we'll see that in just a second. But to get that, you have to understand just three quick points of context about the question that Jesus asks.

[3 : 32] And I'll list them off really quick because you have to know this to understand what Jesus means by his question. The first thing is this. The quote that Jesus brings up here in verse 36, it's a verse from Psalm 110.

And Psalm 110, if you read that Psalm, at the very beginning it says a Psalm of David. So the first thing you have to know is that this quote is a quote by David. It's written from David's perspective.

Mind you, David, who is the greatest king of Israel that Israel had ever known. The second thing you need to know is Jesus and everyone else in Jesus's day.

This is an assumption. Jesus and everyone else in his day, they believe that Psalm 110 was about the Christ. It's about God giving whoever the Christ is, God one day giving Christ the power that he needs to do what God has called him to do.

So people call this a messianic psalm or a Christ psalm. And it's written by David about Christ. And the last thing you need to know is in Jesus's day, people often referred to the Christ as the son of David.

[4 : 46] That was a shorthand way of saying who is the Christ? He's the son of David. So you remember a couple weeks ago when we looked at Jesus ascending to Jerusalem for the last time. Blind Bartimaeus knows Jesus is coming.

He calls out and he says, have mercy on me, son of David. And that's his way of saying, Jesus, I see you and I see that you are the Christ, son of David.

So that's all the context you need to understand. But here's Jesus's common sense question. If Christ is the son of David, like everyone agrees that he is, if Christ is the son of David, why in Psalm 110 did David call Christ my Lord?

In other words, why does David treat Christ, one of his future descendants, like Christ is greater than he is? And it's a common sense question because if you were walking around and you saw a 60-year-old man look at his 30-year-old son and call him sir, you would say that's weird.

You would say that's actually inappropriate because reverence is always due from the younger person to the older person, right? And everyone understands that. That's in all cultures.

[6 : 00] And Jesus is saying, well, then why would David call the Christ Lord? Why would he call him my Lord? And Jesus, and David's not just any elder, right? He is the greatest king Israel had ever known.

And, you know, Jesus doesn't give an answer to the question, but I think he doesn't give the answer to the question because he assumes that the answer is so obvious, that it's inescapable. David calls the Christ Lord because he is his son, but he also sees in Christ someone who is greater than himself.

And that's really significant because if you're a Jew, David is the greatest person you've ever known. He is the epitome of what it means to be a man of God in the Old Testament, a man after God's own heart.

And here he's looking at Christ and saying, he's greater than I am. What is Jesus trying to get at here? He's trying to say everyone agrees that Christ is the son of David.

But what he's implying is that if that's all you know Jesus to be, you actually haven't understood him at all. Because Christ is not just the son of David. He's greater than David.

[7 : 09] He's David's Lord. And what that means is, I mean, you just have to follow the trails. I mean, he's both human and he has to be something greater than human. He has to be divine as well. And Mark, you know, if you've been reading through the book of Mark, Mark tells you in the very first verse what his bias is.

He opens his gospel by saying, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God. And so everything that comes after that in this book is an apology, is an explanation, a proof for that fact that Jesus is the son of God.

And, you know, this is a very Jewish question that Jesus is presenting the scribes with because they accept that the Christ is the son of David, but they don't accept that the Christ is greater than David, that he's the son of God.

And it's a very Jewish problem. But I think what Jesus is putting his finger on here is a perennial problem. In every culture, in every age, in every century, there's always a temptation to see Jesus as great, to see him as a great teacher, to see him as a great prophet, to see him as a great political liberator, and yet not see what is true about him, the truest claim you can make about him.

And, you know, what these people were not prepared for was the fact that not only was Jesus a great teacher, but he was calling himself the great I am. You know, you can stand in the public square today.

[8 : 33] Is this not true? You can stand in the public square today and you can say, Jesus is an inspiration to me, and people will applaud you. But if you say, Jesus is my Lord, and I owe him my life, and he has a claim to make on every single one of us, you have no place in the public square anymore, right?

It's one thing to say he's great. It's another thing to say that he is divine, and he's the son of God, and that's what Christianity is claiming. And so that's a message that we bring to the world. Study this.

Who does Jesus say that he is? And wrestle with that claim. But there's also an application for people like us who are Christians. And that is, I think, that so easy it can be the case that we can believe, we can say that Jesus is Lord, and yet over time we lose any sense of how great that claim is.

I could put it like this. When was the last time, and I'll ask myself the same question, when was the last time you thought about Jesus, and the thought of him filled you with a word that you might describe as awe, and as wonder?

Two weeks ago, so every Wednesday morning, our preschool kids come down here, and we do a little worship service.

[9 : 47] I call it a worship service, a chapel. We sing some songs. We teach. We pray. And they sit on these first two rows. And two weeks ago, we brought in a new batch of three-year-olds.

So this was their first time in the sanctuary. And what you need to know about three-year-olds is three-year-olds, there's three things that are true of them. They are easily distracted. They cannot stop moving. And they are loud.

And so when they come that first week, you just know you're just trying to train them to sit still and to listen to maybe one thing that you say. But when they came in here two weeks ago for the first time, every single one of them, when they sat down for just a moment, 10 seconds, but they all stopped talking.

And all of them just did this. And they just looked around the room, and they looked at the stained glass. And it was maybe 10 seconds, but I know what I saw.

And what I saw was wonder. Because for a lot of them, this was literally the biggest room they had ever been inside of, aside from a Walmart. And a Walmart can't fill you with wonder. Not like this can.

[10 : 54] But this was the tallest room they'd ever been in. And they were filled with awe for just a second. And it was beautiful to see. And one of the questions that I've thought about since I saw that is, you know, on Sunday mornings, do I still have a wonder that's greater than that for my Savior when I worship Him?

Or do I have a tendency to grow cold? You know, if our wonder at our Savior is less than a child's wonder when He sees a big room, something's wrong, right? You know, in the New Testament, what you find is whenever people come face to face with the risen Christ after He was resurrected and ascended, they were all transformed by that experience.

not because they chose to be, but because when you see who Jesus is, you become transformed. You know, so when, in the book of Revelation, when John has a vision of Jesus, this is how he describes what he saw.

He says, when I saw Jesus, when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead, but Jesus laid His right hand on me saying, fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one.

I died and behold, I am alive forevermore. I have the keys to death and Hades. He fell at His feet as though dead. That was His instinctive response to seeing Jesus.

[12 : 19] And you could say Paul had a similar experience in his conversion, right? He saw Jesus and it transformed him. And, you know, we don't, we don't have that luxury.

I've never seen Jesus with my eyes and I would, I like to think that I would love to see the resurrected, I would love to see the resurrected Christ, even though it says here that when John first saw it, it fueled them with fear.

But you know what Jesus says. He says, blessed are those who don't, who haven't seen and yet who still believe. And so one of the calls for us is to say, here are the claims that Jesus makes in the gospel.

Let's think about them until the point where we're filled with awe. And when we're at that point, all we will be able to say is that we simply see what is true, that He's worthy of our praise, that He is greater than David, as great as David was.

So that's the first question that Jesus is answering here is who is Jesus? And it's kind of a strange way of answering it, but He says, if you think King David was great, the Christ is greater.

[13 : 23] David calls the Christ Lord. The second question Jesus answers here in these last few scenes is who are the true disciples? And what Jesus does is, in these last two scenes, He points to two very different visions of what discipleship is.

So on the one hand, He points to the scribes. And just in the way that Jesus describes the scribes, you can see how He feels about them. He says, beware of the scribes.

And that would have really shocked the people around Jesus because being a scribe was a job of importance. It was a job that mattered in the Jewish community.

A scribe was someone who devoted their whole lives to reading and to understanding the scriptures and to helping the community around them understand what the scriptures meant. Every single day, they had the privilege of studying God's Word and they had the privilege of contemplating God's glory.

That was the job of a scribe. Just understand the Bible and see the God that's behind it. You know, you could say they had careers devoted to wonder. And yet, here's the rub.

[14 : 37] When Jesus looks at the scribes, what does He see? He sees men for whom the most fulfilling part of their job is the wardrobe. Men for whom the most fulfilling part of their job is the handshakes and the community perks.

And that's the nicest thing that Jesus says about them because He says these are also people who come to widows and they exploit them. They take advantage of them. They steal from them. All for their own gain.

So for these men, for a scribe, really and truly what it means to be a disciple is to use religion for your own gains, to use it because you enjoy using it. And I think a question that's worth asking here is why does Jesus warn us about the scribes?

Why does He say beware? You know, because when you walk through our neighborhood and you see a sign that says, beware of dog, what that means is if you get too close to this dog, it will hurt you.

And you could say maybe that's what Jesus means here. He's saying don't get too close to these scribes because they will try to take advantage of you. And that was certainly true of widows, right? But I think that what Jesus is actually pointing to here is a much more dangerous danger with the scribes, which is that if we don't keep on our guard, you spend enough time around the scribes and you become like them.

[15 : 58] You become a scribe. You know, that you can go to church every Sunday, that you can read your Bible every day, that we can put on, as a church, we can put on a very dignified worship service and we can become experts in eloquent prayer.

And yet somewhere along the way, we lose sight of God. We lose sight of the one person that all this is about. You know, not too long ago, I heard of a minister who kind of ran in our Presbyterian circles and he had a series of moral failings in a row that led to his leaving the ministry and his family was left in ruins.

And he was a very gifted pastor. And one of his friends, who was also a pastor, asked him, he said, in love, he said, how could you do this?

How could you do this? And his friend's answer, the man's answer was, I stopped fearing God. That was how this happened. Little by little, I stopped fearing God.

And no one could have noticed. On the outside, he would have kept up a very religious life and he may have even still enjoyed being the pastor and working at the church.

[17 : 14] But in his heart, he had lost sight of God and he had lost himself. And no one even noticed until it was too late. He became a scribe. So, and that's not a problem for pastors.

That's a problem for all of us, that we can love to go through the motions and lose sight of the God for whom this is all about. For Jesus, the scribes are the epitome of false discipleship.

They're all about religion. And yet nothing they do is actually for God. Now, let me give a caveat here. You know, sometimes, I'll be honest, I get a little bit annoyed when I hear people who don't go to church say, I don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites.

Because my response is, you're absolutely right. The church is full of hypocrites. It's full of people who claim to love God and claim to love holiness.

And yet every single one of us falls short of who God has called us to be. That's not a reason not to go to church. That's a reason for all those people to be in church because we're all hypocrites in some way. None of us live up to who God has called us to be.

[18 : 19] And we come to church because we know that we need forgiveness. We are hypocrites, therefore we go to church. You know, I'll stop there. I can get off my soapbox there.

But before Jesus leaves the temple, he takes the disciples and shows them a vision of true discipleship. And what I love about this last story is that the main character has no idea that she's in the story.

She's totally unaware that Jesus is looking at her. And here is Jesus sitting across from the offering plate and he sees all these big amounts of money go in the plate.

And he just watches. And this widow comes up and she drops two coins in the plate. And Jesus is so astounded that he calls his disciples over to watch her.

And there's something beautiful about this because totally unbeknownst to this woman, the God of the universe is sitting right behind her, watching her.

[19 : 21] And she may be having the worst day in the world, but little does she know, God is literally in the room watching her, proud of her. Her father is in the room proud of her to see her devotion to him.

She may have no idea, but he's there and he's watching and he's loving her. Now, one of the themes in the book of Mark is that all of God's values are the opposite of our values.

So Jesus says, if you want to keep your life, you have to lose it. He says, if you want to be great, you've got to be a servant. And here he says, sometimes the smallest gift is the one that pleases God the most.

And we're humans. We know how the world works. And it's hard not to be impressed with big money. You know, if you want to, if you want to make sure that your name is on a building at a university, the surest way to do that is to give a lot of money.

We reward people who give big money. And yet Jesus in this scene shows that he's totally unimpressed by big money. He doesn't care about it at all.

[20 : 29] He doesn't care at all. And what matters to Jesus is not the size of the gift, but it's the heart of the giver. Did she give what she had? Did she give all that she had?

True discipleship. This is what true discipleship is. It's about giving yourself, giving ourselves to God, giving all of who we are to God. You know, we read in the Heidelberg Catechism, and we've got it on camera, and the security camera's in the back.

So we've got you on camera saying this, that you believe that you're not your own, but that you've been bought by Christ. We all confess today that we belong to Jesus Christ in body and soul.

And what Jesus is pointing out to these disciples is that this woman gave two pennies, and yet she embodied that fact, that she belongs to God, and everything she has belongs to God.

You know, when everyone was lined up on this day to give an offering, no one was impressed with the widow except for the one person that mattered. Jesus saw her gift and was pleased.

[21 : 35] So what do we do with that? I'm working to a close here. One thing we say is, God does not ask you and I for greatness. You know, all of us, and this isn't just about money.

He doesn't ask of us that we give big amounts of money. And He doesn't ask of us that we give, you know, excellent service, that we be the most talented in the ways that we serve the church.

What He asks is that we give us ourselves. You know, I think there's a lot of people who come to church, and maybe, for instance, they never volunteer, not because they're selfish, perhaps, but because they don't think that they have anything to contribute.

And I love Paul's imagery. We talk about this in our new members class, that Paul says, we are all the body of Christ. And that means that all of us have a role to play. And if one of us doesn't play our role, the church is lesser for it.

And so God doesn't ask you how much money you have, and He doesn't ask you, you know, to give Him perfect gifts and wisdom that you have to offer. He says, just give me who you are.

[22 : 37] Give me who you are. He knows our limitations. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our weaknesses. And let me close with this. True discipleship, the kind of discipleship Jesus is talking about here, there's no getting around the fact that it's costly.

This woman, she paid a dear price to give what she thought was worthy to her God. True discipleship is costly. And that means it's hard, and it's not easy.

And yet, what the Bible points us to over and over again is the way to measure, the way to measure what we owe to God is to remember what He has given to us.

That's Jesus' whole point. One of His whole points in the Gospel is, see how I have loved you and respond. Respond to my love for you. There was a great bishop in about the 2nd century named Polycarp.

He had a funny name, but he was a really serious man. And Polycarp was arrested by the Romans. He was taken to the Colosseum, and he was executed for refusing to...

[23 : 48] He professed Christ, and he wouldn't recant. And the story goes that as he was in the Colosseum, he was offered one last chance to recant. And Polycarp said this.

He said one sentence. He said, For 80 and 6 years, I have been Christ's servant, and He has done me no wrong. And how can I now blaspheme my King who saved me?

For Polycarp, it was even worth his life to serve his King to the very end. And we know this. We sing it. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all, not to earn the love of God, but in response to the love that He has shown us in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, let us never lose sight of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Forgive us for when we see Him as less than who He truly is. and we pray that the more we gaze on Christ, the more we gaze at Him, the more we will be transformed and the more naturally, the more easy it will be for us to give all of who we are to the Son of God who has given everything for us.

[25 : 10] Help us this day. In your Son's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.