

The Gospel of Mark – The Heart of Christ

Mark 12:35-44

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Turning our eyes to the closing section in chapter twelve, we find ourselves on Tuesday and the end of a long day of questions. But now, it is Jesus' turn to ask a question, and he does so to bring clarity to who he is. We can't forget the setting for this longer dialogue, the Temple. By the first century, this was the third and largest Temple Israel had. Built by Herod the Great, it was sprawling and significant in every way. It was also a reminder of the best years in Israel's history when David ruled as king. Now, Jesus standing in the Temple will cite Psalm 110 to raise a question about "David's son and David's Lord." In this question, Jesus is teaching that he is indeed the long-promised Messiah, just as the OT has predicted. The people will cheer, and the leaders will, well, they will stay the course on their mission to destroy Jesus (cf. 3:6). After posing his question, Jesus continued his teaching, and he drew his disciples' attention to a widow, giving an insignificant amount of money to most, but to her, she gave her all. See, it is through the pairing of Jesus' question and the contrasting of the scribes and the widow's offering that we see a brilliant truth come into focus. Mark is once again bringing Jesus into focus for us. He shows us who Jesus is and then paints the picture of the values that are to follow. Or, as we've said before, we are to see Jesus clearly and follow him accordingly. What clarifying truth should we focus on? Here is how one theologian explains it, "This passage is therefore pointing towards something which again has been bubbling up under the surface ever since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, and will come to its head when Jesus confronts Caiaphas in chapter 14. Jesus is claiming authority over the Temple—claiming, indeed, the right to declare God's judgment on it—not simply as a prophet, but as the King; not simply as the King, but as the true priest; not simply as the priest-King, but as the living embodiment of Israel's God. This is complex, and perhaps difficult for us to grasp all at once. But these are the themes that make sense of the whole of Mark's gospel, and in a measure of Jesus himself. ... One might have thought she was 'merely' putting in two copper coins, but in fact she was putting in everything she had. **One might have thought the Messiah was 'merely' David's son—a human king among other human kings. But in fact, in the Messiah, Israel's God has given himself totally, given all that he had and was.**"¹ There it is, Jesus the Messiah, has come to give his life as a ransom for many. Do you hear Mark 10:45 ringing in your ears? Jesus is the servant Messiah. And as he once again teaches this to his disciples, he teaches it to us also. We are reminded that **an apprentice is to become like their master.**

¹ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 175–176. (Emphasis added.)

1. Seeing Jesus Clearly (vv.35-37)

- a. Jesus now poses a question after the questions of the Sanhedrin.
 - i. This comes at the end of a day of questions posed by the religious leaders.
 - 1. Mark's timeline can be tough to follow at times. In chapter 11, we see Jesus enter Jerusalem, leave Jerusalem, and then come back. If we don't pay attention, we can miss the flow of events thinking it is all one day.
 - ii. Let's review the timeline since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem.
 - 1. 11:11 – **Sunday** – Triumphant Entry
 - 2. 11:12 – **Monday** – Back to Jerusalem
 - 3. 11:20 – **Tuesday** – The day of questions
 - 4. 14:1 – **Wednesday** – “Two days before the Passover.”
 - 5. 14:12 – **Thursday** – “First day of the Passover.”
 - 6. 15:1 – **Friday** – “Soon it was morning.” – Trial and crucifixion
 - 7. 16:1 – **Sunday** – “When the Sabbath was passed.” – Resurrection
- b. **Mark's primary purpose – See Jesus clearly and follow him accordingly.**
 - i. “David's son” – Asserting that he is the rightful Messianic King
 - 1. “The episode with the scribe is one of the few times that Jesus answers a question and then someone openly acknowledges that he is right. How will Jesus respond? Notice that he does not say, *You are in the kingdom*, but “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (v 34). This comment raises the question: What is the scribe missing? What does he need to see in order to enter the kingdom? The scribe still does not understand the identity of Jesus. He says, “You are right, Teacher” (v 32). **But it is not enough to call Jesus “right”; one must call him “Lord.” Jesus makes this point in the next story.**”²
 - ii. The “Widow's mite” – True righteousness contrasted with self-righteousness.
 - 1. These two moments flow together for Mark. Jesus is offering truth to once again teach who he truly is, and then he is pointing to the faith of a devoted servant to give the disciples an example of what life in the kingdom is supposed to look like.
- c. **“David's son & David's Lord”** – How are we to understand what Jesus is saying?
 - i. **Genealogy matters** – “David's Son”
 - 1. **Legitimate heir from the legitimate family line.**
 - a. Matthew and Luke both devote a significant section of the openings to their Gospel accounts to the genealogy of Jesus.
 - b. Matthew, writing to a primarily Hebrew audience, traces Jesus' line through Joseph showing the “royal line” in connection through David.
 - c. Luke, writing to a primarily Greek audience, traces through Mary, and then to Nathan (David's son), then to David, and finally to Adam. Luke demonstrates that Jesus is savior of all humanity.
 - 2. **Mark writing to a Roman audience (in Rome) helps his audience to see that Jesus is the rightful successor as the ruling king.**
 - a. The rightful heir from the rightful line. And, the heir that transcends all as Lord.

² Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 191.

- b. Don't forget the Roman context... "Caesar is Lord" → They would have understood the significance of a rightful heir and a divine ruler even if they weren't in on the whole OT history and lineage of the kings.
 - i. Augustus was the first Roman Caesar to be considered divine. His son, Tiberius was considered the semi-divine son of god.
 - ii. Remember back to the taxes question in 12:13-17? → They understand what Jesus is talking about even if they do not get all of the specifics of Hebrew royal succession.
- 3. All of this fits with OT prophecy, which would have connected with the Hebrew audience that Jesus is speaking to in the Temple.
 - a. Remember back to 11:8-12 → They are proclaiming the coming king, "of our father David." They were shouting, "Hosanna" which means save us.
 - b. The people were connecting the dots, the OT promised that the Messiah would come from David's line and here he was to save them!
 - c. The Old Testament made it very clear that the Messiah was to be born in David's royal line (2 Samuel 7). Jesus has already been confessed as "the Son of David" by Bartimaeus (Mark 10:47-48). So, here in Mark 12, Jesus is not questioning the accuracy of the scribes' understanding on this point but the adequacy of it. In other words, the question is not whether the Messiah *is* the son of David but whether he is *only* the son of David.³
- ii. **Sovereignty matters** – More than an heir. → "David's Lord"
 - 1. Jesus is quoting **Psalm 110** and this very Psalm would be a key passage for early believers to point to Jesus' divine nature.
 - 2. When looking at Ps. 110, it's important to note that David is not speaking on his own. He is speaking "in the Holy Spirit" (Mark **12:36**). **This is a doctrine called "concursus." We say that Scripture has a human author and a divine author.** They work together concurrently or simultaneously. The human author is carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The Spirit ensures that what the human author says is exactly what God wants him to say.⁴
 - a. **And what does God say to David's Lord?** "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." In the New Testament, this text is the most-referenced Old Testament text to demonstrate the exaltation and enthronement of Jesus after his resurrection (Acts 2:33-35; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:3, 13).⁵
 - i. **These passages are helpful because they show us that we are not working outside the scope of interpretation.**
 - ii. That Son of David and Messiah were correlated in the first century is strongly suggested by the fact that every early Christian writer who mentions Psalm 110 interprets it messianically. Jesus' question in v. 36 indeed rests on such an assumption. Although Jesus and the early church did not accept the military-political connotations normally associated with Messiah, early Christianity

³ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 192.

⁴ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 191.

⁵ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 192.

certainly affirmed that the Messiah would come from the “house” (Luke 1:69) or “throne” (Luke 1:32) or “seed” (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8) of David.⁶

3. Why does Jesus’ sovereignty matter?

- a. Meyer notes, “It is not enough to say that Jesus is right—one must confess that he is Lord. We must come to grips with this reality. You can read the Bible or listen to preaching about the identity of Jesus and hear the truth gladly without ever surrendering to it fully. This world in which we live will test whether or not we really believe these truths by testing our commitment to them. So many people are raised in church and just accept this as a point of doctrine instead of a point of identity. But we cannot play fast and loose with this truth. It deserves all or nothing. Augustine is right when he says, “Christ is not valued at all, unless he is valued above all.”⁷
- b. The preceding section ended with a religious leader “being not far from” the kingdom. But it is not enough for Jesus to be a good teacher, a moral example, or even from the right family line. He is Lord or he isn’t. **This question lingers for us today.**

d. The key verse to the Gospel of Mark – 10:45

- i. As we look to Jesus’ words of being David’s son and Lord, we are reminded of what he said about himself back in chapter 10. If he is Lord, what kind of Lord is he?
 1. “Son of Man” – Again, Jesus is not being cute or coy, he is being clear about his sovereignty.
 2. “Did not come to be served.” – This stands in the face of the power dynamics of their day and ours. He is the rightful king who came with right and pure motives.
 3. “Came to serve... give his life as a ransom for many.” – This is how he came to serve, with his very life.
- ii. **The question for us: - Yes, Jesus calls you come and die to self, to serve him in worship, but he calls us to that after first serving us with his own life. Does anything else that you are serving offer that to you?**

2. Responding Generously (vv. 38-44)

a. What is happening in this scene?

- i. The scene now shifts to the temple treasury, where Jesus observes the crowd. The crowd has played a slightly more positive role in Jerusalem than it did in Galilee, where it often prevented people from approaching Jesus. In Jerusalem the crowd has delighted in Jesus’ teaching (11:18; 12:37), and its sympathy for Jesus has forced the Sanhedrin to temper the expression of its antagonism (11:32; 12:12). Even in the temple “the crowd

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 375–376.

⁷ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 192–193.

[was] putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.”⁸

- ii. **Jesus uses this moment to teach the disciples a powerful truth about God’s heart and life in the Kingdom.**

b. What is the Temple Treasury?

- i. In addition to worship, one of the most important functions of the **temple** in Jerusalem was as a depository for and the administration of vast amounts of wealth. In this respect the Jewish temple was no different from other temples in the ancient world. Unlike the other tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi possessed no land. In place of land, the Levites were responsible for superintending the temple, which accrued great quantities of wealth in the form of dues, taxes, and donations of valuable objects and money (2 Kgs 12:4). The vessels used for sacrificial worship were required by the Torah to be made of gold or silver. In addition, there were stocks of priceless curtains and priestly garments, and virtual warehouses of flour, oil, grain, wine, incense, and other valuable products. The temple could and also did function as a repository of the wealth of individuals who deposited money there in the belief that a sacred place was a safe place. Given the financial resources and treasures of the temple, it is not surprising that the officer in charge of its administration, the *gazophylax*, was, according to Josephus, second in importance only to the chief priest.⁹

c. What is Jesus’ point?

- i. God values radical generosity because it reflects his nature and character.
 - 1. As we walk with Mark towards the cross, 10:45 echo in our ears... “came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”
 - 2. What may look like a great gift, conversely, may in reality be little in comparison with what one *could* give. The widow’s giving “ ‘all she had’ ” is a true fulfillment of the call to discipleship to follow Jesus by losing one’s life (8:35). **The final Greek words of the chapter might be paraphrased, “she lay down her whole life.” That is what Jesus will do on Golgotha.**¹⁰
 - 3. One might have thought she was ‘merely’ putting in two copper coins, but in fact she was putting in everything she had. **One might have thought the Messiah was ‘merely’ David’s son—a human king among other human kings. But in fact, in the Messiah, Israel’s God has given himself totally, given all that he had and was.**¹¹
- ii. The widow’s actions revealed the reality of what was in her heart. → A wholehearted love for God and dependence on him.
 - 1. There is a magnificent genuineness that Jesus is pointing to in her that is considerably lacking in the others that are placing offerings in the box.

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 379–380.

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 380.

¹⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 382.

¹¹ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 175–176.

2. **How do we get to a place of such racial generosity? → The question of spiritual growth.**
- d. What is the pace of spiritual growth? → Two options. - **Crockpot vs Microwave.**
 - i. Dallas Willard wrote that **"the path of spiritual growth is a path of lifelong learning"** and that **"it is a slow and steady process that involves the transformation of our entire being."**¹²
 1. When we talk about following Jesus in a life-defining way, we are talking about the transformation of our entire being.
 2. This
 - ii. We live in a cultural moment that not only desires, but evaluates the success of something based on the quickness of its development or progress. → The faster, the better.
 1. **Examples:**
 - a. 24-hour news cycle – There is always something new to report and speed is more important than accuracy.
 - b. **Chic -Fil -A – Unreal efficiency- the average drive-thru time at Chick-fil-A was 284.85 seconds (or just under 5 minutes) which was the fastest among major fast food chains in the US.**¹³
 - c. Internet load times – 2008 average page loading time was 22 seconds. In 2021 it was 7.8 seconds. In 2023 it is 2.5 seconds!¹⁴
 2. What is the major factor for most of us replacing a digital device? → The speed of that device.
 - iii. All around us we are surrounded by messages that tell us speed and efficiency are the most important things and the markers of our ultimately value.
 1. The consequence from this is that we become wired for speed and think that everything should be microwaveable.
 - a. Have we considered how this is affected Gen Z and emerging young adults?
 2. **A study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology in 2019 found that people are experiencing more stress and negative emotions than they did 30 years ago.**¹⁵
 - iv. **The healthy reality is that our spiritual lives should not and ultimately cannot be microwaved. We are to embrace the spiritual pace of a crockpot.**
 1. Jn. 15 – Jesus talks about abiding with him.
 - a. This is such a helpful picture for us.
 2. Ps. 1 – Talks about the righteous person bearing fruit in season... that implies we go through seasons.
- e. **Pace matters and reframes our expectations.**
 - i. Consider how “conquer” is used in Rev. 2-3 – This is a repeated word through the seven churches section. This word is not picturing the finality of victory, but the process of fighting, working, soldering towards victory.
 - ii. **Microwave spiritual formation says:**

¹² Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988), 10.

¹³ <https://www.qsrmagazine.com/drive-thru/drive-thru-performance-study-2019>

¹⁴ <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-strategies/app-and-mobile/mobile-page-speed-new-industry-benchmarks/>

¹⁵ Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005-2017. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 118(2), 305-328.

1. "You're taking too long."
2. "You should know this already"
3. "Why are you growing faster?"
 - a. This leaves us empty, discouraged, frustrated, and burnt-out.
 - b. Ultimately, microwave spiritual formation is absent of grace.

iii. Crockpot spiritual formation says:

1. "This is a process and not instant, look at what has already happened."
2. "There is plenty of time left to keep growing."
3. "Don't underestimate what God can do through a long obedience."
 - a. This takes the pressure off and positions us to enjoy God and walk in righteousness through repentance.
 - b. This is bathed in grace.

f. A life of Radical Generosity and Purposeful Responsiveness.

- i. We **recognize** that faithfulness is about doing the next right and Godly thing.
 1. Faithfulness is not an activity of perfection, nor is it to be dismissed as something that does not matter.
 - a. We tend to go to one of these two extremes while the truth is in the middle.
 2. Faithful people are marked so by doing the next right Godly thing. → Don't get overwhelmed and waylaid by worrying about things that are days, weeks, or months ahead of you. → Do the next right Godly thing.
 3. **The quality of my outer life begins with the quality of my inner life.**
- ii. **Key Question: If I am saved and transformed by grace... What is my intentional next step to live out of my received identity of grace?**