

The Son of God

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[0 : 0 0] I wonder if you've ever been in a situation where you have been put on the spot, where you have been questioned or challenged or confronted in some way, because it can be a really uncomfortable experience being put on the spot. I heard the story of a student at a university entrance interview, and as the student walked through the door, the first question the admissions interviewer asked him was, who's your favorite author? He was caught off guard, and so he just blurted out, first name that came to you said, he said, oh Charles Dickens, who's my favorite author.

And then the interviewer said, oh great choice, isn't Oliver Twist the most wonderful of novels? Never having read Oliver Twist, the student then said, yes it is a most wonderful novel. And he remembered he'd seen the Oliver Twist musical, which is quite famous and popular, and he said, yeah it it's a great book, it's a great book. And so the interviewer said, well why don't you just tell us your favorite part of Oliver Twist? And he thought, and he said, well you know to be honest, I couldn't choose just one part, I mean it's all good, Charles Dickens, it's all brilliant, so I find it really hard to say one thing, because he's such a great storyteller. But the interviewer said, well just you know humorous, just tell us your favorite part. And so after a brief pause, the student thought, and he said, well I'd really have to go for the moment when everybody starts singing, you've got to pick a pocket or two from the musical. Now that's a silly example of being put on the spot and being challenged, questioned, and confronted. But sometimes being challenged, questioned, and confronted is no silly thing. It is necessary and is needed. And that's really what we see in the Bible reading from Mark chapter 12 that we looked at, that was read this afternoon.

Because this is a passage that really ends a series of confrontations between Jesus and the religious authorities. Now Jesus has been more than a match for them and he has stunned them into silence. So just in verse 34, the bit before we read, we're at the stage where we see no one dare ask him any more questions. So Jesus has been put on the spot countless times and now Jesus is the one who is putting the religious leaders on the spot, confronting them, challenging them. And of course we are not just here this afternoon listening from afar to what is going on here because Jesus also puts us on the spot.

He confronts us and he challenges us. In fact that's why Mark wrote this gospel because he wanted to confront his readers at the time but also the world with the claims, with the person, with the work of Jesus Christ. And so this is a challenge for us because we have got to make our minds up when it comes to Jesus. And so I'm going to look at this passage under three words this afternoon, simple words.

First, confrontation, verse 35 to 37. Condemnation, 38 to 40. And then commitment, verse 41 to 44. Confrontation, condemnation, and commitment. So first of all, confrontation. So Jesus is the one who's asking the questions here. He is the interviewer and they are the people who are being forced to answer. Now if we compared the conflict between the religious leaders and Jesus to say a boxing match, then Jesus has won every single round so far. And what Jesus does here is he goes for the knockout punch against those who oppose him.

[3 : 47] And so let's read verse 35 to 37. While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. David himself calls him Lord. How then can he be his son? The large crowd listened to him with delight. So what Jesus does is he confronts them with a question that gets right to the heart of his identity. So first he asked, why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?

Now it was understood that the Messiah would be the son of David. He would come from the family line, the family tree of David. He would be a descendant of his. But Jesus challenges the assumption that the Messiah is merely David's son. The teachers of the law were mistaken if this was all that they thought.

And so what Jesus does is he explains why he is more than just a human son, a human descendant of David, by quoting from Psalm 110. And it's a psalm that describes the Messiah. There's a Messiah being God's chosen king, the Christ. And so Jesus introduces it by saying, David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared.

Jesus is saying here, David's words are divinely inspired. They come from God. And so the teachers of the law had better believe them. What did David say? He said, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. So what's Jesus' point? Well, it comes from David saying, the Lord said to my Lord. And so the first Lord is God. And then David calls this second Lord in the passage, he's referring to the Messiah. So God, Lord, God, and then Jesus, Messiah. And that's why Jesus says, David himself calls him Lord. How then can he be his son? Why would David call one of his descendants Lord rather than son? He calls him my Lord instead of my son? So how can David's son also be David's Lord? The only answer is that the Messiah isn't simply David's son. He's much more because he is God's son. And so Jesus challenges their view that the Messiah was merely a human being, a human man, the son of David. He was the son of David, but he's much more because he is also the son of God. So Jesus is challenging this. Yes, he will be human, but David's words highlight the fact that he is more. And that's the only way David's words can be explained in the Psalm. So while everybody expected the Messiah to be expected the Messiah to be a human descendant of David, Jesus is proving that the Messiah will be divine because David calls him my Lord. So he'll be God's son and David's son.

And that's where Jesus is going with his question here. He's confronting his listeners with his identity. As to what is their response? Well, there's no answer given to Jesus' question. You see that in the passage, either by those who confronted Jesus, but there's no answer given by Jesus himself either.

[7 : 36] And yet when David says, my Lord, in Psalm 110, it is a reference to Jesus. Because Jesus is, yes, the biological descendant of King David and heir to his throne. He's the son of David. But Jesus is also Lord. He has authority over David because he is the son of God. And that's what Jesus is getting at.

He's pointing to himself as the son of David and the son of God. And that's the answer to the question Jesus asked these teachers of the law. And yet the answer somehow remains veiled to them. They don't seem to see it just yet. And yet what we're being told is that Jesus is Lord. He's the one with all power and with all authority. Yes, over David, but also over these religious leaders that Jesus confronts.

And yes, also over us today too. Now, of course, Jesus is confronting a particular group of people at a particular time. And he's challenging them about the identity of the Messiah from scriptures.

That's who he is. And so he puts them on the spot and he is forcing them to make up their minds on him. And they did. Eventually they killed him. But we also have to make up our minds on Jesus too.

So we've got to ask ourselves, will we see him as the son of God, as the Lord with all authority that we must submit to? Or will we see him as just a simple man that's in this book called the Bible and he may or may not have lived a long time ago? You see, because there could not be a more fundamental question or more serious question for all of us to answer than the question, who is Jesus? Because Jesus, as he walks off the pages of the gospel of Mark, is confronting us with his true identity. C.S. Lewis, the writer of the Chronicles of Narnia, popularized an argument about whether Jesus was Lord and God. And this is what he says. It comes from his book, Mere Christianity. He says, I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him.

[10:01] I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Now it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic nor a fiend.

And consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God. Long quotation, but a great one that lays out the options on the person of Jesus.

Because we are confronted by Jesus in God's word, in Mark's gospel, by who he is. Who do we say he is? A liar or a lunatic or Lord God Almighty? That's the choice we're forced with. That's the answer we need to make. That he is the Lord. And I wonder whether you're here this afternoon and you've never really been to church before, or you're exploring Christianity, or you're just quite confused about what the Bible teaches and what all of this stuff means, and you're thinking, well, who is this Jesus?

Have you considered his true identity? Because if he is who the Bible says he is, if he is Lord and God, then surely we must all bow down before him. We must accept his authority over our lives and submit to his rightful rule. And we must do it while we can. Because what it says there, verse 36, is that one day all of Jesus' enemies will sit under his feet. And so we must respond to him as Lord whilst we still can.

And so that's the first thing we see, confrontation. Second is condemnation. So these are three different stories here, but they all fit together, as we'll see. So there's no answer to Jesus' question here, and the crowd were delighted, but the teachers of the law are now condemned by Jesus. So let's see that, verse 38 to 40. As he taught, it's following on from what's just been said. As he taught, Jesus said, watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and, for a show, make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely. Okay, so the teachers of the law were supposed to be leaders. They were supposed to shepherd the people. And what we're being told is that they abused their power. And that's why Jesus condemns their hypocritical behavior by bringing various charges against them. So first, they like to walk around in flowing robes. So these flowing robes were long, white wool or linen garments with tassels attached to the corners like a big blanket. But it was in total contrast to the normal

[13:46] Jewish dress of the day. But it signified status and it signified power and it set these leaders apart from ordinary people. And they absolutely loved it. Dressed to the nines, different from others.

Second thing, they like to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. So they loved the adulation of others. Now apparently, when a teacher of the law walked down the street or through the marketplace, people were expected to rise to their feet and greet them. And they loved it. Third thing, they had the most important seats in the synagogues. Now, these seats were benches at the front of the synagogue along the walls. And these seats were normally occupied by important people. And they loved to sit there because it enhanced their reputation, whereas the rest of the congregation just sat on the floor. Fourth, they had the places of honor at banquets. So at every feast they went to, they expected the best seats. They didn't just want to be guests, they wanted to be the guests of honor because they loved first-class treatment. Then fifth, they devoured widows' houses. So women without husbands were their prey. And it was a gross abuse of power as they took advantage of the very people they were supposed to care for. The vulnerable women. Sixth, they made a show with their lengthy prayers. So Jesus now condemns their hypocritical praying. Their prayers didn't flow from a genuine relationship with God that they had. No, they were merely for show, simply to impress the people who were listening. And so what Jesus does here is he exposes all of this disturbing, hypocritical behavior of men who should have been spiritual leaders of God's people. And yet their disgraceful lifestyles, their hypocrisy, their corrupt hearts, in Jesus' eyes, means that they deserved condemnation rather than adulation. And that's why Jesus ends by saying this, these men will be punished most severely.

It's interesting because these were the final recorded words of Jesus' public ministry in Mark's gospel. So Jesus is saying something really significant to the people who should know better, who should really have figured out his true identity, who should have recognized that he is the long-promised Messiah, that as teachers of the law, experts on the Old Testament Scripture should have known that this is the one. He's here, he's come. And yet Jesus gives them nothing but critical words condemning them for their false and fake and fruitless religion. So their hypocrisy is stark.

And so Jesus here is warning us against this inauthentic, fake, false religion. It's not just useless, but it's dangerous, but it's dangerous, and it deserves punishment. And of course, Jesus is speaking to hypocritical teachers of the law. And yet what he says also applies to leaders of the church today and throughout history. Because Jesus' words here highlight the temptation of using any position of leadership or any position of power as a means of enhancing our personal status.

It was an abuse of power for these men to behave in this way. And so any kind of ministry should never be an opportunity to further our reputation, to inflate our ego, or to increase our comfort.

[17 : 48] And so we need to beware of seeking honor and recognition. And we should never think that the rules don't really apply to me. They're for other people. And of course, it's easy to criticize the religious teachers in Jesus' day, the teachers of the law. And we should criticize them. It's easy to do.

And yet sadly, Jesus' words could not be more relevant for the contemporary evangelical church today. Because there have been too many scandals that have involved celebrity Christian leaders where Jesus condemns here the very things that have been present in their ministries.

And so as I was preparing this this week, I just took a couple of minutes. I thought I'd give myself two minutes to copy down the names of some celebrity Christian leaders whose hypocritical behavior has come to light in recent years and has meant they are no longer in ministry.

So after a couple of minutes, I had to stop at 10. And it was easy. And most of these scandals are fairly recent. One was just a few weeks ago. And I won't name them, but I've got them here in my notes.

But they've displayed the kind of behavior that Jesus condemns. And so as we sit here in Glasgow, don't be thinking, yeah, they're all in America. That happens there all the time with celebrity Christian leaders. No, they're also here in the UK. And don't be thinking, yeah, yeah, it'll just be other denominations. No, one of them is in the Free Church of Scotland. And so as a Christian leader, or as a Christian, we will be known by our fruits. A religion, whether it's false religion or true religion, will be revealed by our lives. People will see it. If not immediately, certainly over time, they will see whether we are the real deal. These leaders that Jesus speaks to weren't. Many today aren't. But doesn't true religion flow from a heart that truly loves God? He loves God and loves other people. That's what Jesus said in the passage we looked at last week. Because Jesus wants us to love

[20:10] God and be devoted to him. The teachers of the law had failed to do this. And so what they provide for us is a negative example of how not to be. And I said earlier that these passages are all connected together. So we've had the negative example of what not to be in the teachers of the law. But now Jesus gives us the positive example of what we should be in the story of the poor widow and her offering.

And so let's look at that. Confrontation, first of all. Condemnation, secondly. And then thirdly, commitment. This is where the sermon is heading. This is the third and final point. This is what Jesus wants from us. And we see this costly commitment of a poor widow who gives her offering at the temple. So let's just read about her again. 41 and 42. Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a few pence. So the scene has shifted. We're now in the temple treasury. Jesus is watching people put their offerings in what were 13, apparently, brass receptacles where the offering money would drop down into like a trumpet-shaped thing. And it would drop in the bottom. And so there were no direct debits, no credit cards, no Apple Pay in those days. So every offering that was dropped in would make a noise. And so there was a huge loud noise. When the rich came, Mr. Moneybags comes, drops his money in, takes great pride in it, just going, big loud noise. You'd hear what people were giving. And then the poor widow, her offering, wouldn't even have made a sound because she put in two very small coins. Two lepta are the coins. That is very thin, small copper coin, the smallest Jewish coin in circulation, just like a penny. And apparently it was 128th of a denarius. And a denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. So 128th of that. And so basically, the widow gave the smallest gift possible. It was nothing in financial terms compared to the large sums of money that were given by the rich. Now, this may seem like an odd incident to include here, given the conflicts that Jesus has just had with the religious authorities. It's like a crunching gear change. And yet this is the climax of everything that Jesus has been saying, because the poor widow displays the kind of response that Jesus is looking for. She is showing how we ought to respond to God.

And that's why Jesus summons his disciples to teach them something about the woman's offering. Verse 43 and 44. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty, put in everything, all she had to live on. So she is a stark contrast, isn't she, to the religious authorities that Jesus has just condemned. They devoured widows' homes. They only took for themselves.

They were only interested in themselves. Whereas the poor widow gives to God. It is such a powerful contrast. On the one hand, there's the hypocrisy, the self-importance, the self-seeking ambition of the religious leaders, contrasted with the humility and the sincerity and the devotion of this widow.

She displays the kind of commitment to God that Jesus is looking for. Because Jesus said she gave more than everyone else. Which is a striking thing to say, isn't it? Because any treasurer, in fact anybody who can count, would wonder, how can she give more? That's because the method that Jesus uses for accounting is different to our method. Jesus knew she gave more because Jesus saw straight into her heart. Her gift was the least in monetary terms, and yet her sacrifice was the greatest.

[24 : 46] The rich gave out of their wealth. They had plenty of it, but she gave out of her poverty. Put it this way, the poor widow had two coins. She puts two coins in. She gives 100%.

Rich guy comes along, he's got 100 coins, puts 10 coins in, gives 10%. So every other giver didn't really miss the money that they gave. Whereas the widow did miss it because Jesus says she gave all that she had to live on. Her offering meant that she went without. And that's why Jesus commends her for her commitment. Because the others gave what they could spare, yet she spared nothing.

The original word used here expresses this. It's the word for life. She put everything in, literally her whole life. Jesus is saying she gave her whole life away. She held nothing back in her devotion to God. And so when it comes to our commitment to God, it is not really about the amount that we give, is it? It's about what it costs us to give. That's the real indicator of our commitment to God. The sacrifice we are prepared to make means more than the amount that we give, according to Jesus. And that's why this is such a challenge for us. Because for most of us, I'm sure, for most of the time, when we give, we give out of our wealth. In other words, we give. But what we give away, we don't actually miss it. Because we've got plenty left to spare for ourselves. And so we can give in such a way that it actually makes no difference to our lives. We've still got enough to be comfortable. We've still got enough to do everything we want to do. And so there's no sacrifice. There's no going without. There's really no difference. We just carry on as normal and enjoy our lives.

And yet, according to Jesus, if we don't experience any kind of loss, then we don't really feel the cost. If what we give doesn't force us to trust God, to greater depend on God for what we need, then we're probably not giving enough. And it's a sign that we're trusting in our wealth for our comfort and our security more than we are trusting in God. Now, Jesus is not simply making a point about giving here. And so I'm not ending the sermon by saying, this is about giving, and you ought to give more money to Christ Church Glasgow. That's not the point. So don't hear that.

Jesus here is teaching about discipleship. Because as he comes to the end of his public ministry, he is showing what it means to follow him by this woman's example. The widow's offering demonstrates what true discipleship looks like. She's a model disciple because she gives all that she has. She shows what true commitment to God involves and fulfills what Jesus earlier said about what being a disciple means. Remember, Jesus said, Mark 8, 35, for whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. That's just what this widow is doing. Literally giving her life away. And that's what Jesus calls all of us to do. If we are going to follow him, that is what it means to be a Christian. And so you might be thinking, well, how can we ever give everything away? How is that even possible? It is an impossibly high demand.

[28 : 52] Well, it's only as we grasp who Jesus is, his identity, and what he came to do, his mission, that we'll be able to do this. Because if he is the son of God, who became a man, then we must follow him. And while this poor widow gave up all she had, Jesus became poor and gave up all he had for us. We read this in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. Jesus gave up his infinite wealth, the wealth of heaven to come down, to live in poverty, so that through his costly sacrifice of his own life, we can be saved. Jesus died in our place so that we can be accepted by God.

And so when we turn away from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ, then we inherit his riches, which means we have everything we need in this life. And it means we have everything we need forevermore. Because his riches won't stop now, they'll continue forever. Because they've been freely given to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus. And so when we grasp that we have all we need in Jesus in Jesus and more. And by his grace, we can give everything away, can't we? It isn't ours in the first place. Everything away, all we have, even life itself.