

Mark 12:35–44

God. Grifter. Giver.

We are in the passion week – the final week in Jesus’ earthly ministry before going to the cross. The religious leaders (Sanhedrin) were unsuccessful in their attempts at trapping Him with their questions, and now the questions are done (**Mark 12:34**). They wanted Him to fall into a trap that would result in His death, but it didn’t work. They don’t want Him around. They are desperate to find a way to pull the trigger that ends His life because they don’t want the kind of change that Jesus came to create. They want Him dead – which is exactly why Jesus had come. Jesus had come to die (**Mark 10:45**), but His death will not come as the result of a trap (**John 10:18**). When Jesus dies, it will be because He has willingly laid down His life.

So, the trap questions haven’t worked, and the religious leaders are done asking questions; and now it’s Jesus’ turn to ask a question of His own. **He asks a question about the lordship of the Messiah**, and it’s the last personal interaction that He has with the religious leaders before He goes to the cross – which means it’s significant. After asking this question (*which He just leaves hanging; He doesn’t it*), **He then gives a warning against the pride and hypocrisy of the scribes** (*the legal experts in Judaism*), and then the chapter ends with a scene in the temple treasury where Jesus gives a word about what **radical generosity** looks like in the kingdom of God.

Three Main Points:

1. Jesus is Lord (**12:35–37**).
2. Pride and hypocrisy will be eternally condemned (**12:38–40**).
3. Generosity is measured by the heart, not by dollar signs (**12:41–44**).

1. **Jesus is Lord** (**12:35–37**)

The big question in the temple has to do with **the authority of Christ** (**11:28**). “*Who do you think you are, and what are you claiming as the source of your authority?*” This has been the theme of everything that has happened in the temple this week (*cursing the fig tree, overturning the tables, the condemnation of the religious hypocrites, the way He is teaching the people in the temple*) – all of it reveals that **the King** has come to His people; **God** has entered His house; **the Savior of the world** (the Messiah) is here! Jesus Christ is Lord.

- **A Bible Study Question:** Now that they are done asking questions, Jesus asks them a Bible question (*in the form of a riddle*) which is meant to remind them that the Messiah would be more than a mere human. The Jews knew that the Messiah would come from the family line of King David – which is why He would be called the Son of David. And the people knew that this description fit Jesus: He was from the family line of David. What the Jews did **not** expect is that this Son of David would also be God-incarnate. **Their Messianic expectation** was bound to earth. He would be a human (*nothing more*), and He would accomplish earthly things (*nothing more*); He would be an earthly ruler; He would conquer earthly enemies, fulfill earthly promises given to Abraham and David, set up an earthly kingdom. And since they didn’t see any of these things being accomplished through Jesus, they rejected Him as the Messiah: if He will not accomplish things according to their expectations, then they want nothing to do with Him [which fits the way many people still feel about Jesus today]: *if He doesn’t answer my prayers according to my desires – if He doesn’t work in my life the way I think He should...then I refuse to believe in Him*]. **Lesson:** just because Jesus wasn’t who they **wanted** Him to be doesn’t mean that He wasn’t who He **claimed** to be. Just because He is not moving in power the way you want Him to doesn’t mean that He isn’t moving in power.
- So, He gives them a Bible study riddle. You believe that the Messiah will come from David (which is true). How is it then that David himself calls the Messiah, “Lord” (Ps 110:1)? How is it that **the Son of David** is also **the Lord of David**? How is it that the one who comes **from** David is also **before** David? The answer: because He is God. He is before David because He is before all things (**Col 1:17**), and He is after David because of what we celebrate at Christmas: God became a man, born through the family line of David – **fully God and fully Man**. Fully God so that He might live the perfect life that we could never live. Fully Man so that He could lay down His life on the cross in death for the forgiveness of our sin.

- Jesus is saying, “Look at your Bibles: the Messiah is more than Son of Man; He is also LORD of Lords.” From where does My authority come? It comes from the fact that I am the LORD of Kings. It’s one thing to cry, “*Son of David*” (**Mark 10:47**). It’s another thing to cry “*My Lord and my God*.”

The last thing Jesus says to these religious leaders here in the temple is a word about His identity: “*you need to know who I Am*.” And the same thing is true for each of us in this room. You can get everything else in this world right (*politics, finances, health, golf swing, retirement, education, career...*) but if you miss the question of who Jesus is, nothing else matters. And this is not merely an intellectual question: do you know that Jesus is, in fact, **Lord**. It’s a personal question: *is Jesus the Lord of your life?* Is He **your** Lord? If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus as **your** Lord (*your boss, your king, the one in charge*), then you are not saved (**Rom 10:9**). This isn’t just a riddle; it’s eternity. Everything hinges on the lordship of Christ in your heart.

What keeps a person from surrendering their life to the lordship of Christ? **Pride**.

2. **Pride and hypocrisy will be eternally condemned (12:38–40).**

After Jesus asks His question, Mark says that “*the common people*” heard Him gladly (**37**). This is an important distinction because it implies that there were some people who did not hear Him gladly – and that would be the religious leaders; they did **not** hear Him gladly. Why not? Because everything He said just exposed their hypocrisy and idolatry and greed and pride. So, while the common people heard Him gladly, the religious leaders never wanted to hear from Him again. We can imagine them standing nearby with their fists clenched, with scowls on their faces, and shooting fireballs at him from their eyes. The most recent group to question him was the scribes (**12:28–34**), and so Jesus speaks a word of warning to “*the common people*” about the scribes (*but I think that He means to include all the other religious elite in this word of warning*).

READ 12:38–40

These religious wanted to be noticed. They wanted the red-carpet greeting. They wanted the best seats. They wanted VIP treatment. This is the kind of high life they wanted to live, and they didn’t care what it took to get there. They didn’t care who they devoured along the way – so long as they enjoyed the prestige and possessions and pleasures for which they sought. Jesus said, beware of these people because they will receive greater condemnation when this life is over.

1. **Greater Condemnation:** one of the things this passage teaches is that there are varying degrees of reward in eternity, and there are varying degrees of condemnation. To put it in the simplest terms possible: when it comes to the children of God, those who **invest more** into the Kingdom of God now will **receive more** in the Kingdom of God then. And the same is true for those who are enemies of Christ: for those who reject Christ now, there are varying degrees of condemnation in hell based on how they live now. And Jesus says, because of how their selfishness is destroying the lives of others around them, these religious leaders will “*receive greater condemnation*” when this life is over.
2. **Beware:** this means, pay attention to who these people are, and stay away from them (**Rom 16:17**). Why? Because, just as a predator (*wolf, snake, lion*) seeks to devour an animal that is unprotected, the same is true for Christians and false teachers: if we are not on our guard against false teachings, it will devour our heart, soul, mind, and strength. **Word of warning:** just because somebody has the credentials doesn’t mean their message is biblical. Just because somebody has a seminary degree or a fancy title in front of their name or a large following or a best-selling book doesn’t automatically mean that their message is true. Just because you hear something on Christian radio doesn’t automatically mean that it’s true. These religious leaders had all the credentials, but they did not desire God, and they did not love people. Church, be careful who you listen to. *How do we know who to listen to?*
 - Does their message align with the Word of God? Does it sound like the gospel that Jesus gave? Is there evidence in their life that they love people and that they delight in God? Do their words draw your heart & mind toward the things of God or toward the things of earth?

3. **Jesus calls them out.** There are times it is appropriate for ministers of the gospel to publicly call out false teachers. **There are times** (*from this pulpit*) when your pastors have named individuals who we believe to be false teachers who are soliciting a false gospel for selfish ends. We do this because this is what **Jesus** does.¹ Right here! This is what **Paul** does.² This is what **John** does.³ And this is what we are called to do.⁴ We do this because we do not want you being devoured by a false gospel. These religious leaders were dealing with the things of God as “*a pretense*” for the sake of wealth and fame, and Jesus calls them out. They pretended to care about others, but they were focused on wealth & fame.
- If a preacher owns multiple homes worth over \$10 million, then you ought to beware of their message, and your pastors should be helping you to beware of them.⁵ When their life is marked with an abundance of “earthly bests,” then look a lot more like the scribes than they do like Christ.
 - If a preacher has multiple private jets and has a net worth of \$150 million, we would be wise to ask whether this person is living for the Kingdom of God or living for the best that this earth has to offer.⁶
 - If a preacher’s message focuses on how to be healthy, wealthy, prosperous – *living your best life now*, these are people whose lives resemble the “best-ness” of the scribes, and Jesus calls us to beware of them and their message so that we are not devoured by their hypocrisy and idolatry.

3. **Generosity is measured by the heart, not by dollar signs (12:41–44).**

After speaking of widows’ houses being devoured by self-serving, self-seeking, self-gratifying hypocrites, Jesus uses a widow as an illustration of true wealth and true generosity. He sat down in the part of the temple where He could watch people give their offering. There were thirteen different collection boxes called **shofar chests** because they were shaped like a shofar (*ram’s horn*): narrow at the top where the money was put in and wide at the bottom where the money was stored. **The currency** at this time was metal coins (*no checks, cash, Venmo, automatic withdrawals, credit card numbers, etc.*), and so, as the coins were dropped into the shofar tubes, the shape caused the money to rattle as it slid down into the chest – making a very public noise that anybody nearby could hear. And, since they could hear it, they could tell whether the amount was large or small. There was no way to be discreet about how much you gave.

As Jesus is sitting in the treasury, He sees (*and hears*) all the money being dropped into the boxes. He watched (*and listened*) as the rich folks put lots of money into the offering box (**41**). Their offering made a big sound which made it a big show. But then He saw this “*one poor widow*” who came and put in two small coins (**42**). It’s doubtful that anybody else in the temple even gave this woman a passing glance. Compared to everybody else in the temple, her offering would have barely even made a sound, but Jesus heard it – and He saw her. And He wasn’t going to let this moment pass by without using it to teach His disciples what true generosity looks like.

Read 12:43–44

In other words, it’s not about the **substance** of your gift; it’s about the **sacrifice** of your gift. The rich gave out of their abundance, their excess. In other words, they gave what they would never miss – the leftovers. Their giving reflected a heart that was similar to the scribes: first, they prioritized themselves, and then they made a show of worshiping in front of others by giving God what they would never miss. They gave out of their abundance.

The woman, on the other hand, gave out of her poverty – which is to say that she gave sacrificially. Jesus looked at His disciples and said, “*This poor widow has put in more than all...*”. Why? Because generosity is not measured

¹ Matt 16:6, 12; 23; Rev 2:6, 15.

² 2 Cor 11:13–15; Gal 1:6–9; Phil 3:2; 1 Tim 1:19–20; 2 Tim 2:16–18; 4:14–15.

³ 3 John 9–10.

⁴ Eph 5:11; Titus 1:9–11.

⁵ Joel Osteen (Lakewood Church, Houston).

⁶ David Oyedepo (Winners’ Chapel, Nigeria).

by dollar signs; it's measured by the heart. Her gift reflected a heart that worshiped God above all else. Her gift revealed a heart that delighted in God such that she freely gave that which cost her something.⁷

In his sermon on this passage, **Pastor Alistair Begg** told the fable of **the Chicken and the Pig**. A chicken and a pig decide to go into business together. The chicken suggests that they open a restaurant together. "Good idea," says the pig. "*But what should we serve at this restaurant?*" The chicken replies, "*How about bacon and eggs!*" The pig shakes his head and says, "*No... See, for you, that would just be a contribution, but for me, it would be a sacrifice.*" That's the point Jesus is making here. For the rich, their giving is just a contribution, but for the widow, it was a sacrifice.

Example: like the dinner of cheese and crackers that a family fed me in Ukraine. They saved for weeks to be able to afford that meal, and it was their joy to give us that which cost them much.

The point of this lesson is **not** that we need to empty our bank accounts or drain our retirement savings and put all of it into the offering box.⁸ **The point** is that God is not impressed with the noise or the numbers in our worship; He is focused on your heart. Worship is **not** about giving God the leftovers of your time, energy, money – and keeping the best for yourself; it's about giving God the best of your time, energy, money – and then trusting Him to take care of the rest. It's about "*seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*" [trusting the promise that] "*all these things will be added to you.*"

Jesus sees your heart. He sees...not only *what* you give to Him, but He sees *the heart* behind the gift. The question is not, "*How much did you give?*", but "*Does your giving reveal a heart that delights in God above all else?*"

CLOSING

What have we seen today?

1. Jesus is Lord and is worthy of our worship.
2. Beware of those who pretend to worship God as a means for personal gain.
3. Don't think that God is impressed with the quantity or the quality of your worship. These things may be impressive to the people around you, but God isn't looking at the amount or the talent in your worship; He is looking at your heart. And He is worthy of a heart that delights in giving sacrificially to the kingdom of God.⁹

⁷ "The Lord evaluates the spirit of the giver, not the size of the gift." ~ John MacArthur

⁸ 1 Tim 5:8.

⁹ 2 Sam 24:24; Mal 1:8,13–14.