

# Is Christ David's Son or Lord?

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*Mark 12:35-40*

When Jesus was passing through Jericho, if you recall, he could hear over the crowds this faint strain: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" It was a blind beggar's cry. The Savior's heart was moved, and the blind man brought before him, to whom he asked this question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

There is no less compassion in the heart of Jesus today, and we are no less desperate than that beggar. And the question which was posed to him is equally posed to you now. Through me Jesus makes his appeal, he asks you: "What do you want me to do for you?"

I know there are many forces in the world which will get a man or a woman into church. I do not know which force has brought you here. But being here, know that you now are confronted with the King of glory, the Lamb upon his throne, the Monarch of heaven and earth who basks in the eternal praises of a massive throng. And he, not unwilling to step down the golden steps, to pass through the ornate lions which line them, raises up your weary head with his hand beneath your chin and asks you eye to eye, "What do you want me to do for you?"

His question tells you all his heart—your reply will tell him all of yours.

One woman has come to church this morning for her children's sake. The world has reached its brim with polluting influences, and she wants to preserve her son and daughter from them. To Jesus' question she replies, "Rabbi, I want my children to stay out of trouble." Her heart is with her children.

One man is sitting now within these four walls because he feels loved here and enjoys the camaraderie of Christianity. "Rabbi," he pleads, "I want to feel accepted." His heart is with his friends.

One child or teenager has come to church this morning to appease his parents. In his mind he is replaying a video game or movie. "Rabbi," he says, "I want to go home."

Why come to church expecting so little? Jesus can do much more than bore you! We are like Herodias's daughter who, when offered up to half

her father's kingdom, asked only for John the Baptist's head on a platter, a useless prize.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to this immortal being, and you have been brought before him and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Well, what do you want Jesus to give you this morning before you pass back through those glass double doors? *That* we will consider as we look at our text.

### **MARK 12:35-40**

#### **The scribes want a man**

Since his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus has been conquering the city. But not as anyone expected. He did not draw a saber and set its point against his foes, but instead he opened his mouth—he did what we find at the outset of verse 35, he "taught in the temple."

Each faction of the religious elite fell to Christ's perfect wisdom. The Pharisees advanced in verse 13, but Jesus fired off his words like a cannonball, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," and the enemy reeled and retreated.

Then charged the Sadducees like the horsemen of the Light Brigade, in verse 18, wielding their objections to the resurrection. Again Jesus opens his mouth, "You are greatly mistaken," and the cavalry falls to his cannons.

One man remains on the field by verse 28, a scribe, a teacher of the Law, who asks Jesus what the greatest commandment might be. And so forceful and persuasive is Christ's reply, that the last survivor almost commits treason and changes sides in the battle.

The highest minds of Israel are strewn about the smoking landscape of the temple, and Jesus stands unscathed in their midst. At the end of verse 34 we read: "After that, no one would venture to ask him any more questions."

But for Jesus, this is no time for delay. He has defended himself against his enemies, but now he sharpens his sword, he bends his bow. There is one stage remaining in the conflict, and Jesus is now the attacker. He sets his eyes on the opposing scribes and opens his mouth one final time.

## What the scribes want

Verse 35: “How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?”

An Israelite scribe was a teacher of the Law of Moses. He knew the Law and he knew the oral traditions which his forefathers had passed down to him. He could be either a Pharisee or a Sadducee, much like a teacher today could be either a Democrat or a Republican. But most of the scribes were Pharisees, and so were popular with the people.

The crowds listened to these wise and learned scribes. They were the theologians of their day, and what they taught about God and the Law would find its way sooner or later into public opinion.

Here was one thing they taught: the Christ, the Messiah, the great kingly deliverer whom God promised through the prophets of old to send his people, would be a descendant of Israel’s greatest king, King David.

Interestingly, that was true. Even more interestingly, that was false. They were right in what they said, and they were wrong in what they did not say.

You who are still students, if you were taking a test and one question was, “Who was Abraham Lincoln?” would you be right to write down, “Abraham Lincoln was a man with a beard”? You would be right, and yet you would be wrong. You would receive no credit, because although you answered truly in what you said, you left unsaid what was most important: namely, that Abraham Lincoln was an American president.

As the scribes took their tests, when they came to this question, “Who is the Christ?”, they would dip their quill in ink and write, “The Christ is the son of David. He is a human king who will defeat all of our enemies, get rid of our Roman overlords, and win us land and riches.”

That is all the Christ was to them. And that was all they wanted him to be.

When they imagined their Christ, a mortal monarch seated tranquilly upon his steed, surveying with his eye the great realms he had won for Israel, distributing the wealth of nations among the religious elite of Jerusalem, they cried out, “We will have this man to rule over us!” This Christ was everything they wanted.

But when in study their eyes fell upon those many passages which suggested the Christ would be this, but would be *more* than this, they

set down their scroll. They didn't want more than this. They wanted a human Christ, and they wanted him to be nothing more.

They saw in the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm, which is repeated here in verse 36, that God said to the Christ, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." At that the scribes break into celebration and applause. But if one scribe should say, "Wait, how could this be an ordinary descendant of David, when David under the inspiring influence of God's Spirit just before calls Christ his Lord, 'The LORD said to my Lord'?" the scribes would whistle and walk along, as if they had not heard.

## Why they want it

Why?

Because if the Christ was a mere descendant of David, a human king, his victories would benefit the scribes with more wealth and more power and more influence in the world, without demanding anything of them.

But if the Christ was something *more*, if the highest human authority Israel had ever known, King David, regarded the Christ as even higher than himself, then the Christ would be something more than human. He would be God.

Son of David? Yes. But also, Son of God.

And the scribes knew, you could manipulate a king to your own advancement, but you could not manipulate God.

So the scribes imitated their forefathers, those who in the days of Samuel rejected God as their king and asked for a human ruler to be put in his place. These scribes are the vine-growers at the beginning of this chapter who rejected the owner of the vineyard, and who would rather kill his son than submit to him.

"Well," you say, "you are rather hard on the scribes. Maybe they were only mistaken about the Christ's identity." I am not as hard on them as Jesus was. Look at verses 38-40:

Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.

The scribes would not accept a divine Christ because they wanted to be God. They sinned the sin of Satan.

Hardly a moment passed in which they were not trying to exalt themselves. Here, one is walking from his home to the market place. See how unique his robe is—he cannot wear common clothes, for then he might not be noticed. No, he wears his fine garment, he lengthens the tassels on its corners so that all might see his devotion to Jehovah.

He has reached the marketplace now. He will not be ignored here. Men defer to him and call him “Rabbi,” and he drinks in his reward, sucks in the honor of the masses.

The next day is a Sabbath so he strolls solemnly into the synagogue, aware of the eyes that are upon him. He must not sit among the common folk—no, his seat must be on one of the benches to the right or to the left, or, better yet, must be at the very front of the building, in front of the ark which contains the biblical scrolls, facing the crowds, that he might always be seen by them.

Now he is invited to a banquet, and he will not be content with a seat further down the table from the host. No, to the host’s right or to his left, at the places of honor, those are the glories he thirsts for.

We must admit, the scribes were certainly tireless in their worship and devotion—only, they worshipped themselves and were devoted to their own glory.

The emptiness of their religion was obvious. Look, instead of defending the needy widows around them, somehow they managed to pocket the poor women’s livelihoods. And after they had accomplished that greedy deed, they would walk out onto a street corner and shout their long prayers to God in the hearing of all.

If Jesus should ask them, “What do you want me to do for you?”, their hearts would say, “Get rid of the Romans who are taxing and harassing us, and then get out of our way.”

Most of you, I am sure, know of Joel Osteen, one of the most popular pastors in the United States. He has announced the title of his newest book, which will come out in October. It is called, “I Am,” and in it he urges Christians to say that in reference to themselves: “I am healthy,” “I am beautiful.” This name of God, “I AM,” revealed by God to Moses on Mt. Horeb, was considered so holy that the Israelites in time past

refused even to utter it—now it is pulled down from its display case and set like a crown on the head of rebellious men.

This is modern scribalism. It is using Jesus to serve ourselves, accepting him as the Son of David, refusing him as the Son of God.

Again I ask, what do you want Jesus to do for you this morning? Some of you want him to be the Son of David, to take away certain hardships from your life, to improve your health and better your family, and then to go away.

To you I say, if this is all you desire, then do for me only this one thing. I want you to imagine that you are standing at the foot of Jesus' cross, watching his lifeblood trickle through his lacerations as he moans under the agony of the Father's wrath for sin. There he died so that you might be forgiven, reconciled to him, and might enjoy him forever in sweet and heavenly fellowship. There he has done everything to give you himself. And he says, "What do you want me to do for you?", and if there is anything you'd prefer over Jesus, I want you to look him in his eyes and say, "I want you to die."

There is no evil committed under the sun that is as evil as this: When Jesus asks what he may do for you, you say, "I want you to die so that I can have your crown." That is the position of all who choose pleasures of this life over Jesus. That was the position of the scribes, and so they do kill him. That is why Jesus says at the end of verse 40, "these will receive greater condemnation."

The scribes were fine with a Son of David, but they did not want a Son of God.

## **Christ is more than a man**

If, however, you are not willing to speak so heartlessly to the suffering Savior, what should you say? How should you answer his question, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Look at the last cannon which Jesus levels against the scribes, in verses 36 and 37:

David himself said in the Holy Spirit,  
"THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,  
'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,  
UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR

FEET.' ”

David himself calls Him “Lord”; so in what sense is He his son?

Here is a man standing simply before the scribes without any semblance of show, no scribal robes, no regal décor. Yet the crowds and the leaders surely know that this Jesus believes himself to be the long-awaited Christ. His discussion of the Christ is not an abstract one—what he says of the Christ he is saying of himself. And what he says is this: “I am David’s Master, and I will soon sit at the right hand of God, from where I will rule this entire world.”

Just think of the scribes’ thoughts there in the temple. They look at Jesus and see only a man, just as scholars debating the historical Jesus today might see only an historical figure. But Jesus by his words turns their minds upward to the throne of God. The prophet Ezekiel saw and described this throne, and the scribes would not have been ignorant of the description.

According to Ezekiel, a great storm approaches with fire flashing forth from it, a bright light about it, an eerie glow within it, like the glow of hot metal. As it draws near four fierce and horrifying creatures become apparent, each with four wings, and fire shooting between them and lightning. They move about quickly, and the sound of their flapping wings is like a raging river.

And above their heads, a broad plateau-like crystal, upon which is, high up in the air, something that looks like a great throne formed of a blue-green gem. And above that throne, the appearance of a man glowing like a hot metal filled with fire from the waist up, and the waist down the appearance of flame, and a glorious radiance emanates from him that looks like rainbow all about.

The scribes look back down from this thought, and there they see—a man, and only a man, in the temple, who says he is going to sit up there on the crystal expanse, next to the Blessed One.

Jesus offers them the very best—namely, himself. They can become his friends and rule with him, they can be forever lost in wonder as they behold his infinite glory. Their hearts may finally find their fullest joy in doing what they were created to do: seeing and savoring Jesus Christ. All of this opportunity is laid forth before them, there in the sky above his head. They can know the Son of God!

And they say, “Nah, we just want a son of David.”

### **Look away to Christ!**

Friends and neighbors, when the eyes of your heart behold the tenth of that vision above Christ’s head, the whole world loses its luster. You may like Isaiah cry out, “Woe is me! I feel like such a scribe! I love my own honor, I manipulate circumstances to steal for myself the glory due to God. What can I do?” I will tell you what you must not do. You who have so long looked at yourself, you must not look at yourself again for the answer to your vanity.

Look away to Christ! Are you not yet sick of yourself? The smallest package in the whole world is a man wrapped up in himself. There is not enough to you to satisfy your daily contemplations.

But there is enough to Christ!

Are you impressed this morning by your clothing and your hair. In fifty years a new generation will see pictures of you and laugh. But Jesus’ robe of righteousness is timeless in its beauty; his headwear, both the twisted crown of thorns and the glistening crown of gold, can never fade in glory. Set your eyes there.

Do you delight in your own wisdom or wit? Lay it down that you may come and with the crowds enjoy listening to Jesus. I know you will forget this sermon in a month’s time; but do not forget words of Jesus, tie them about your neck, write them on your heart.

Let us be done with ourselves and our scribal pride and our efforts at self-exaltation—oh the littleness of it all!

And when Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”, let’s not reply with something boring like, “Make my life easier.” Let’s look our bleeding Savior in the face and say, with hearts amazed at the very possibility of it, “Jesus, Son of God, consume us with yourself.”