

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 12:35-40

Topic

As part of His criticism of certain scribes,
Jesus accuses them of devouring widows houses

Title

"The Real Housewives of Jerusalem"

Introduction

I almost met Tim Burton.

He's the renowned director of such films as *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and *Edward Scissorhands*. He directed *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, which is in theaters now.

Geno and I were in Tarzana, at a Peet's Coffee Shop, waiting for a vintage guitar store to open. I don't remember the exact sequence of events, but at some point we were talking about a Tim Burton movie that was about to be released; I think it was *The Corpse Bride*.

Another customer overheard us, and interjected something pretty technical about the film. We responded, but I didn't think much of it. I think Geno knew it was Tim Burton.

My second clue came when the barista called him, "Tim."

In my defense, I'd never seen a picture of Tim Burton, so I did not recognize him. Nevertheless it was an epic celebrity fail.

A much bigger fail can be found in our passage. **The first century Jewish religious authorities failed to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.**

True, they had never seen a photo of their Messiah; but their Scriptures presented a pretty good word picture of Him.

Their problem was they were only considering part of the picture painted by God's Word.

You and I have never seen a photo of Jesus; but we have a complete picture of Him, now that we have both the Old and the New Testaments.

It's important we see Jesus as He truly is revealed, in every facet, if we are to succeed in revealing Him to a world perishing and in need of the salvation He offers.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions of my own: #1 Are You Revealing Jesus As He Is Presented In The Word?, and #2 Are You Revealing Jesus As You Are Present In The World?

#1 Are You Revealing Jesus
As He Is Presented In The Word?

(v35-37)

Speaking of the movies, a common plot-point is for the king or prince, or the queen or princess, to throw on a disguise and go out among the common people.

Think Aladdin in the Disney animated feature named after him. Jasmine is in the marketplace, in disguise. She sees a little boy struggling to grab an apple off a cart, so she gives it to him. The vendor thinks she's stealing it, and threatens to cut off her hand, until Aladdin swoops in and saves her.

Jesus wasn't in disguise. It's just that the Jews weren't thinking their Messiah would be more than a man. They *could* have known, but they were only seeing part of what their Scriptures said about Him.

In our verses, Jesus is going to give them the whole picture.

Mar 12:35 Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"

"Answered" doesn't mean that Jesus was asked a question. He was responding to being peppered with questions. Having answered everything thrown at Him, He now had a question of His own.

He was addressing His own disciples, but there were plenty of scribes within earshot.

We need a name for this kind of evangelism - where you are having a private conversation that is purposely loud enough for others to hear.

How about, "Loud-missions?" Or, "Amplified Bible?"

Scribes were the revered teachers of the Scriptures. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees had scribes. The common people depended upon the scribes to interpret God's Word for them.

They taught, accurately I might add, "that the Christ is the Son of David."

"The Christ" means their Messiah. It is a letter-for-letter translation of the Greek word *christos*, meaning "the Anointed One," which is a translation of the Hebrew word for "Messiah."

The title "the Anointed One" recalls the fact that in ancient times a man was made king by being anointed with oil. It represented the Holy Spirit coming upon him.

The teaching that their Messiah would be a son, the royal heir, of David, was strongly taught in the Scriptures. For example:

Psa 89:3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David:

Psa 89:4 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.' "

Psa 132:11 The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.

Jesus was, of course, a physical descendant of David, "the fruit of [his] body" - otherwise the Jews could have immediately countered any claim He might have to be their Messiah.

Here is where it gets interesting. Jesus quoted another Scripture that the scribes knew described their Messiah.

Mar 12:36 For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, TILL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES YOUR FOOTSTOOL." '

Notice that it says "David himself said by the Holy Spirit." It's quite an incredible phrase. It teaches the divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

The biblical doctrine of inspiration is not dictation. As evangelicals, we view the Bible as a genuinely human product, but one whose creation was superintended by the Holy Spirit, preserving the authors' works from error without eliminating their specific concerns, situation, or style. We call it "verbal, plenary inspiration of the original manuscripts," by which we mean that each word (not just the ideas or concepts) was meaningfully chosen by the human author under the superintendence of God.

The verse is from Psalm 110. It is one of the most quoted psalms in all the New Testament - five times directly, and other times indirectly. It is maybe the most quoted Old Testament verse.

The heart of interpreting it, or misinterpreting it, has to do with identifying who David is talking about when he says "My Lord."

I get the impression from Jesus that the scribes passed over this question. They knew it was a description of their Messiah, but they could not make sense of it.

I can tell you what at least some Jewish scholars say today to try to make sense of it. First, they argue that the two words for "Lord" are different; and they are correct. The first is YHWH, "Jehovah," while the second is the Hebrew word, *Adonai*, meaning "my Lord" or "my master." They therefore say that the second reference is to a mere man.

The kind of master that is meant, however, is made clear in the whole psalm. The psalm shows that the reference is to One who is *more* than a mere man. It is clear in context that both names refer to Persons of the Godhead.

Second, Jewish scholars argue that, since this was a psalm, it was meant to be sung by the Levites about David himself, *not* about a descendant of his.

Sorry; wrong. Because, if that were true, *Jesus Himself was misinterpreting it.*

In the next verse, it is clear that Jesus was indicating whoever is being described is not David, but is their Messiah who both **preceded** David and **descended** from David.

But even more convincing is that Jesus identifies this Person as Himself, even more clearly, at the end of the Revelation, when He says, "I, Jesus... am the Root and the Offspring of David..."

Mar 12:37 Therefore David himself calls Him 'LORD'; how is He then his Son?" And the common people heard Him gladly.

David calls this Person "Lord." He wasn't talking about himself; this is *not* Levites singing *to* or *about* David.

The only possible interpretation was, and is, that this Person both preceded David, and followed him, in history.

Check this out: Jesus wasn't merely talking about the interpretation of some Messianic verse. **He was talking about Himself.**

Remember, this is occurring during Passion Week. On Palm Sunday the crowds had hailed Jesus as "the Son of David," shouting their *Hosannas!* (Matthew 21:9).

Prior to that, He'd been hailed as the Son of David by others; for example, by blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10).

In effect what Jesus was saying was, "Do you understand that I, the Son of David, am also his Lord; that I, being a man, and David's descendant, preceded him because I am also God?"

Put this teaching together with other verses, e.g., Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

That's why I said earlier that the scribes could have known that their Messiah would be more than a mere man.

Next notice the phrase, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, TILL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES YOUR FOOTSTOOL." '

This verse, these words, are packed full of doctrine. The psalmist foresaw their Messiah being rejected by the Jews, ascending to Heaven to sit at God's "right hand," until He could return as King once all enemies were vanquished.

We have the benefit of hindsight to understand that this is *exactly* what occurred, and is yet unfolding in human history.

The scribes didn't see Jesus as He was drawn for them in their Scriptures. We need to make sure we don't do the same.

In his book, *The Original Jesus*, author and pastor Daniel Darling lists ten Jesus' of our own making. I'll list them, but in the interest of time, I can only expand on one or two or three.

He lists Guru Jesus, Red-Letter Jesus, Braveheart Jesus, American Jesus, Left-Wing Jesus, Dr. Phil Jesus, Prosperity Jesus, Post-Church Jesus, BFF Jesus, and Legalistic Jesus.

Guru Jesus is the wise, winsome, slightly supernatural figure who fits nicely alongside other religious titans like Buddah, Muhammad, Vishnu, and others. This is a safe Jesus, who will only ever tell us good, affirming, uplifting things, but doesn't bother us with dangerous talk of the Kingdom of God.

Braveheart Jesus has come to help men recover their masculinity. This Jesus is a response to a very real crisis in the culture: a crisis of manhood. But a Christ-shaped masculinity isn't defined by hyper-masculine tough talk and cuss words - both of which have become common in pulpits across America.

BFF Jesus is a friend of sinners, who offers personal salvation by faith. However, the BFF Jesus of some of our modern worship songs sounds less like the righteous ruler of Revelation and more like Taylor Swift's ex-boyfriend. He's needy and clingy.

The particular Jesus' listed are the observations of the author. Don't get bogged-down in them, except to see that it is easy to present a wrong, or at least an incomplete, picture of Jesus.

It might be good to ask yourself, "Am I presenting one of these Jesus'? Or maybe some other Jesus?"

Our best defense against drawing the wrong picture of Jesus is the systematic reading and study of the entire Bible.

The Bible is, after all, about Jesus; He said so Himself:

Heb 10:7 THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME - IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME - TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.' "

Have you ever seen those renderings of planet earth from space that start to zoom in, getting closer-and-closer, until you see your own house and yard?

The first one I can recall was the opening of the Tom Hanks dark comedy movie, *The Burbs*.

If you only look at the zoomed view, you'll get a totally skewed perspective on the larger world.

Same is true with God's Word. You need all of it, commenting on itself, to get the real Jesus.

We cannot afford to over-emphasize or to under-emphasize anything in the Bible.

The only way I know of doing that is to take it all in, as the inspired word of God, verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book, over-and-over again.

Even then, we must be careful to not force upon the words our own political or patriotic or psychological templates. We need a humility of heart, a submission, that allows God to show us the Original Jesus.

#2 Are You Revealing Jesus As You Are Present In The World?

(v38-40)

Since the scribes taught about God and godliness, it was natural to expect they'd be good representatives of God.

After all, studying and teaching others the Word of God should have a profound effect on you, right?

Right - but not in their case. With their skewed picture of Jesus, their behavior fell far short of being godly.

Mar 12:38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes...

Jesus was not hesitant to issue warnings. The teachings you listen to, and the books you read, can be harmful. There are false teachings, and doctrines of demons, that can lead someone to an eternity separated from God in eternal conscious torment.

The content of the teaching ought to be examined, but so should the character of the teacher. Jesus is going to bust those scribes whose behavior reveals evil, ulterior motives.

Mar 12:38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces,

Mar 12:39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,

We should not conclude that all scribes were bad, or equally bad. We saw, earlier in the chapter, a sincere scribe, who Jesus said was "not far from the Kingdom of God."

Jesus was setting forth tests whereby His hearers might determine the character of the scribes in whom they would put their trust.

The scribes to avoid were those who had a certain way of walking. They purposely moved in such a way as to call the utmost attention to their long, swishing robes. We might say they sashayed.

In the pulpit, there's a fine line between being engaging and becoming entertaining. It's of course wrong to judge motives, but some guys, and gals, are obviously over-the-top in their presentation of the Word of God. It becomes more of a performance than it is preaching.

The "greetings in the marketplace" were something more than saying "Hi," and asking, "How are you?" Because of their position as teachers, these guys were shown honor and respect. That's OK, until some of them expected, for example, to be kissed on the hand when greeted.

I remember after my confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church, having to wait in line to kiss the bishop's ring. It was weird, to say the least, but I was under the distinct impression that I'd be lost forever if I didn't do it.

I can appreciate proper respect for position. I remember a scene from the TV political drama, *The West Wing*, where a certain reporter didn't stand when the President of the United States walked in. President Martin Sheen gave an articulate scolding to her about the need of showing respect for the office, not the man.

Because I'm a pastor, I get called a lot of names. Reverend... Pastor... Pastor Gene... Pastor Pensiero... PG... and Gene. For a while one dear brother, who misread the text, used to refer to me as Pasture. I didn't have the heart to correct him.

(Of course, because of who I am, I get called a lot of other names!).

"The best seats in the synagogue" were on the bench at the end of the room before the chest where the Scripture scrolls were kept. It faced the audience and was reserved for the leaders and people of distinction.

It is customary in many denominational churches for the elders and maybe the deacons to sit on the stage during the service, behind the pulpit, facing the congregation.

I'm sorry, but I can't think of anything more awkward. Instead of listening to the Word being taught, I'm looking at those guys, to see their reaction. Or to see if they're paying attention at all.

Especially with so many of us using our phones or tablets as our Bible, think of the potential for distraction as these guys post on Facebook during the sermon.

"The best places at feasts" refers to the places on the reclining couches reserved for the most honored guests. Today we'd refer to it as the head table.

[Mar 12:40](#) who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

One of the commentaries I consulted explained the relationship between scribes and widows, saying:

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Mark 12:35-40

"The Real Housewives of Jerusalem"

As one of their functions, **scribes serve as consultants in estate planning for widows.** Their role gave them the opportunity to convince lonely and susceptible women that their money and property should either be given to [them].

How low can you go? Cheating widows for personal gain is just slimy.

We believe it's best to not ask for money, but to let God move on the hearts of His saints to give. We talk about money when the text talks about it; and then we are careful to not come across as needy.

In thirty years, we've never been wanting.

Pretentious, long prayers were another hallmark of the slimy scribes. In public, they prayed extra long and extra loud, using the best King James English, in order to appear spiritual. Their eloquence and breath control and articulation was like that of a stage actor playing the part of a godly man.

Every now and then, when we open up for congregational prayer at a service, we'll have someone 'pray' a Bible study. It quickly becomes clear that they have a point they wish to get across to others, and they do it by pretending to pray, when they're really preaching.

Jesus painted a pretty good picture of these guys. His hearers would recognize many of the scribes as having these tendencies.

Their godlessness was far more serious than we might think. Jesus said, "they will receive greater condemnation."

The "condemnation" in question is eternal, at the final judgment. A final judgment which, by the way, will be meted-out by Jesus.

We know that all the wicked dead, all those who have died rejecting Jesus, will be raised from the dead simultaneously, to be judged and then cast alive into the Lake of Fire to suffer eternal conscious torment.

You can read about it at the end of chapter twenty in the last book in the Bible, the Revelation.

If all nonbelievers are to be thrown into the Lake of Fire, how is it that Jesus spoke of "greater condemnation" for some of them?

Another way this question is sometimes asked is this: "Are there degrees of punishment in Hell?"

Biblically, the answer is "Yes." Allow me to read a few verses:

Mat 11:20 Then [Jesus] began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:
Mat 11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Mat 11:22 But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Luk 12:47 And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

Luk 12:48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few...

Heb 10:29, “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”

If the Bible speaks of greater condemnation for Chorazin and Bethsaida than Tyre and Sidon; of one slave receiving more punishment than another; and of a more severe punishment being reserved for those who trample underfoot the Son of God, then it would seem that there *are* degrees of punishment in Hell.

Beyond that, I have no idea exactly how those more severe punishments will be meted out. And we can be sure that the torment of all nonbelievers will be unrelenting.

Christian means *Christ-like*. It's a basic fact of Christianity that the world gets its picture of Jesus from observing you and me. It's a like-it-or-not situation. It goes with the territory; it's part of the package.

The word "represent" has become a popular shorthand to encourage someone to be and to do their best. If you tell me you're going to be in a competition of some kind, I'll just say, "Represent," and you'll understand what I mean.

If you do well, I might say to you, "Way to represent." It's understood that the folks who saw you got a good impression of those in your group.

We - and by "we" I mean believers in Jesus Christ - ought to start using the word more. We can remind ourselves, and each other, that, both in church but also out in the world, we represent the Original Jesus of the Bible.

Let's do it in a manner that we can joyously say to one another,
"Way to represent!"

If you think about it, when we see Jesus at His Reward Seat, and He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant," isn't He really saying, "Way to represent?"