

Can You De-Scribe Him?

Mark 12:28-40 June 17, 2026

John Wheeler was a brilliant physicist. He helped establish the basic principles of nuclear fission. He was instrumental in the Manhattan Project and the development of the hydrogen bomb.¹ He coined the term "black hole."² He was the mentor and advisor to 46 different PhD students at Princeton University.³ An amazing scholar. But in 1939, he came across someone who was even more brilliant. A young man named Richard Feynman, assigned to Wheeler as a teaching assistant.

Wheeler was astonished by Richard's scores in the daunting Putnam Mathematics competition. Wheeler said, "Nobody else who's applying here at Princeton comes anywhere near so close to the absolute peak."⁴ Feynman also produced a *perfect* score in physics on Princeton's entrance exam - something no one had ever done.⁵ This young man understood things on a new level.

But the higher ups in the scientific communities at the time didn't like that Richard Feynman was a Jew. He had been rejected by Columbia University for that very reason. At Princeton, the head of the physics department wrote a note saying, while they didn't have a *hard* rule against accepting Jews, they wanted to keep the proportion of Jewish students "reasonably small."

But John Wheeler didn't ignore Richard's genius. He "quickly realized that he could treat [Richard] as an equal in discussing physics, and that he could rely on [him] to find...solutions to the most challenging problems."

Once, John posed a hard question to Richard. Richard identified an error in the professor's theory.⁶ Richard went on to give many important contributions to physics, one of which was to explain all of classical electrodynamics through a very simple form.

In our text, a scribe comes to question Jesus. The scribe speaks as if *he* is the expert and Jesus is the one being tested - we'll find that's *not* what was really happening. By the time the conversation is done, Jesus will have schooled the teacher and provides a way to explain all the Law of God in a very simple form - one that if we miss, every other calculation we make will be incorrect.

Mark 12:28 - 28 One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, "Which command is the most important of all?"

Of course, Jesus wasn't a student. But He was a young man. He was outside the normal religious academy circles. He was unlike *anything* anyone had ever seen or heard.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Archibald_Wheeler

² <https://physicsworld.com/a/tale-of-two-physicists/>

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2017/11/17/richard-feynman-and-john-wheeler-revolutionized-time-reality-and-our-quantum-universe/>

⁴ Physics World

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Feynman

⁶ <https://speakola.com/ideas/richard-feynman-nobel-1965>

The establishment did not like Him. They had been sending all these hit groups to try to discredit Him, trap Him, mock Him. And it didn't work.

Now, this scribe walks up and asks Jesus one more question. The scribe is an absolute expert in the Law, in religion, in God's Word, and all the discussions and commentaries *about* God's Word. *Unlike* the other questioners, this scribe seems to be friendly, not antagonistic. He's been listening to what Jesus has been saying. And now he really wants to hear what Jesus' opinion is on this question. Which command is the most important?

The scribes had identified 613 commands that God's people *must* keep. They divided them into different categories - heavy (meaning important) and light (meaning less important).⁷ Which was *most* important was a much-debated subject among the scribes.⁸ But it's not which *one* command do we really need to follow and then we can ignore the others. The question is: What is the fundamental premise of God's law?⁹ God has a way of doing things. Certain prescriptions, certain boundaries, certain demands. What is it all built on? Is it *order*? Is it *individual liberty*?

Mark 12:29-31 - ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. ³¹ The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these."

If you want to understand the Law of God you *must* start with love. Not only do we *start* with love, but everything must be accomplished through the truth of God's love.

But it's not just an *internal* love between you and God - that's where it begins. But that *internal* love must also manifest *externally*. Yes, loving God is first, and yes, loving neighbor is second, but Jesus' point is that you have to have both. In other words, as James explains in his letter, if your faith doesn't operate, it's worthless. The love of God is not love at all if it doesn't result in action toward others. These two commands are inseparable.¹⁰

Richard Feynman is famous for Feynman Diagrams. It's way above my head, but on a simplistic level, instead of using pages of math to describe how subatomic particles behave, he figured out a simple, elegant way to *draw* the math on a diagram so you can see things like electrons, positrons, and photons moving through time, then you apply Feynman's rules, and you're able to work out complex calculations.¹¹

Jesus synthesizes all the Law by connecting your heart to God, then your heart and God's heart to others and applying the rules of love. Even though life is *full* of deeply complex relationships and

⁷ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

⁸ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*

⁹ David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

¹⁰ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

¹¹ <https://www.nyas.org/ideas-insights/blog/the-genius-of-quantum-physicist-richard-feynman/>

situations and problems and considerations, each one with its own issues to think through and work through, the bottom line is that we start with the basis of love for God and love for others.

Now here's what's remarkable: this was not some *new* formula. Jesus doesn't suddenly *invent* this idea that day in the Temple. Answering the scribe, He quotes the *shema*. This was the Scriptural prayer that a faithful Jew would pray *every single morning*.¹²

So the secret to all God's intentions - the unified theory of faithfulness - is right there on their lips from the founding of their nation. Truly love God and actively love others.

Mark 12:32-33 - ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, teacher. You have correctly said that he is one, and there is no one else except him. ³³ And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."

This guy is starting to see things *not* as the establishment around him does, but as Christ does. He's submitting to Jesus' opinions. Notice what he says there at the end: Love is *far* more important than *all* the burnt offerings and sacrifices. By using those two terms, *he* is summarizing the *entire* sacrificial system.¹³

That system was what Pharisees and scribes dedicated their whole lives to. But *this* scribe is starting to understand that Jesus provides a new way to see everything that pertains to Godliness.

You know, this is the *only* time in all four Gospels where we see a scribe agree with the Lord.¹⁴ In the Gospels, Pharisees and scribes are enemies of Jesus. But not *all* of them were evil or bad. Some were truly seeking God. And, after the resurrection, *many* found faith in Christ. But they would have to surrender to Jesus' Lordship. They would have to fall under *His* teaching.

Mark 12:34 - ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to question him any longer.

Not far, but not *in*. Academic understanding was not enough. This guy knew a lot. He was starting to apprehend beyond the other scribes. But he wasn't a disciple yet. *That's* what kept him out of the Kingdom. He didn't need to find more answers, he needed to follow the Savior.

Now, the scribe had said to Jesus, "I like your dissertation. I approve of it." But Jesus immediately says, "No, you don't get it - *I'm* the Authority. You don't grade Me, *I* grade you. *I'm* the Judge. *I'm* the King Who decides who is in the Kingdom and who is not."

¹² Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

¹³ Brooks

¹⁴ Witherington

Now, this was a pretty positive interaction. But there at the end we're reminded that this has been a long string of conflict situations. Since chapter 11, verse 27, the establishment has been challenging Jesus. Here in verse 34 it's obvious: Jesus is the *clear* winner of all these debates.¹⁵ And now Jesus is going to take a minute to hit back, specifically at the scribes as a group. First, by exposing their insufficient grasp of Scripture.

Mark 12:35-37 - ³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he asked, "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself says by the Holy Spirit: The Lord declared to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' ³⁷ David himself calls him 'Lord.' How, then, can he be his son?" And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

Many Old Testament passages reference that the coming Messiah would be a son of King David. Everyone assumed - the scribes included - that he would be a natural descendant who would wield military and political power.

But now Jesus brings them back to this particular passage - Psalm 110 - and says, "Let's actually look at this text, let's consider what it *really* says and what that *really* means, instead of just breezing past the words and allowing our assumptions to form our interpretation."

Jesus points out that David understood that the Messiah must be *more* than just a man. He's more than just a descendant. The truth is, the Messiah *must* be both God *and* Man.¹⁶ And His Kingdom is not just United Israel 2.0, because His enemies are not simply Philistines or Romans. His enemies are *all* who oppose Him. His enemies are sin and the devil and death itself.

The people listened with delight. The Sanhedrin's plan to discredit Jesus was absolutely failing. But even though they were *happy* to listen to Him, that doesn't mean they *understood*. As one commentator writes, "The people do not realize that Jesus subverts all of their hopes."¹⁷ They want political power and freedom from Rome. That wasn't the Messiah's plan or work at that time.

By the way - I find this interesting - the New Testament has more references and allusions to Psalm 110 than *any* other Old Testament passage.¹⁸ It's very important in God's mind. And notice that Jesus affirms it was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that David was the human author.

After highlighting the scribes' insufficient grasp of Scripture, Jesus exposes their corrupt behavior.

Mark 12:38-40 - ³⁸ He also said in his teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who want to go around in long robes and who want greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and say long prayers just for show. These will receive harsher judgment."

¹⁵ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

¹⁶ BKC

¹⁷ Garland

¹⁸ BKC

Jesus was not saying that *every* scribe did these things. But *some* of them did. And even though the scribe up in verses 28 through 34 was close to the Kingdom doesn't mean the establishment was to be trusted. Much the contrary. Jesus *warns* the people to beware.

Richard Feynman famously despised the in-group elitism of the National Academy of Sciences.¹⁹ Jesus is not partisan. He's not throwing in with the Pharisees or the Sadducees or the scribes or the Herodians or the Zealots or the Essenes. Because He's not about prominence or political power or getting as big of numbers as He can. He's about truth.

Here He warns us to beware of people who parade their religion.²⁰ One biographer spoke about John Wheeler and noted that you would never see him without a jacket and tie.²¹ That's ok. But the scribes would wear these overly long, white robes so *that* you would be impressed with them.²² They had built up this perception of their importance and greatness, so much so that culturally speaking, it was considered good form to have these guys at any banquet you hosted.²³

Meanwhile, who does God the Father invite to *His* banquet? Anyone who is willing to accept the invitation. The lame and the blind. The poor and the weak. He opens the door for us to come in and be blessed by Him.

Now, how can someone receive a *harsher* judgment from God? Isn't hell *hell*? The truth is, there are a variety of places that indicate there are levels of judgment.²⁴ Don't think of the cartoonish version or Dante's 9 Circles of hell, but there's some indication. And on *this* side of eternity, teachers of God's word are definitely to be held to higher *standard*. James 3 indicates that.

The scribes had a lot of expertise, but they didn't *know* the truth. Their calculations were all wrong. Jesus reveals the truth. Here's how *God* looks at these things. Here's *God's* theorem, not manipulated by man's shortcomings, our vanity, our partisanship, but pure truth.

Richard Feynman has an important quote: "Physics isn't the most important thing. Love is."²⁵ Sadly, he didn't know the love of Jesus. And he was unfaithful in his love toward his own wife. But he wasn't wrong in that statement.

Our job is not to decide whether *approve* of what the Bible says, but to accept it and adapt our understanding to *God's* point of view. And as we grow in love and in the *understanding* of what God's love is, then the rest of our spirituality will grow and blossom and bear fruit as we not only *agree* with Jesus, but *follow* Him with all our lives.

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_the_National_Academy_of_Sciences

²⁰ Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

²¹ Forbes

²² Lane

²³ Witherington

²⁴ Luke 12:47-48

²⁵ <https://ashishbamaniam.substack.com/p/these-5-quotes-by-richard-feynman>