

Turning Theologians On Their Head

Mark 12:35-40

Introduction: 1) People often enjoy what I call “theological gymnastics.” We like to engage in “theological wrestling,” seeing who can come out on top. Who is the quicker wit? Who can make the sharper and better theological argument? Such subjects, often for debate, can include is Jesus God, what must I do to be saved, how do you explain the problem of evil, does God exist? How do you know? Within the family we “box” over our view of the end times, divine sovereignty and free will, old earth creation vs. young earth creation, the nature of spiritual gifts and the list goes on.

2) Now it is one thing for you and me to question one another about theology. It is something all-together different when the one asking the question is Jesus!

3) Jesus has just answered the question on the greatest and most important commandment (12:28-34). Prior to that He had addressed issues of His authority (11:27-33; also 12:1-12), paying taxes (12:13-17) and the reality of the resurrection (12:18-27). Mark informs us “that he answered them well” (12:28). In fact Jesus answered them so well that “no one dared to ask him any more questions” (12:34).

4) It is now Jesus’ turn to ask a question and in doing so He turns the theologians upside down. And, He does not ask just any question, He asked the most important question. He asked the question concerning the identity of the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the world. We need to listen in carefully on this conversation. There is much at stake.

I. The Coming of Jesus reveals a greater David.

12:35-37

- Jesus is teaching in the temple (v. 35). Matthew informs us the Pharisees were present (Matt. 22:41), and Mark lets us know “a great throng heard Him” (v. 37).

- Jesus has been on the receiving end of the questions all day long (Tuesday of Passion Week) in what A.T. Robertson calls “a day of controversy” (*Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 160). Now it is His turn. James Edwards says He puts before them “the question of the day” (Edwards, *Mark*, 374).
- I don’t think it would be a stretch to say it is “the question of the ages.” It is the question of the identity of the Messiah. What our Lord had raised privately with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi (8:27) He now takes public. He knows this raises the stakes. He also knows the cross is just 3 days away. Again, a moment of truth has arrived.

1) The Christ is David’s son and therefore human. 12:35

- Jesus begins simply enough by establishing common ground upon which all could agree. In the form of a question He notes that the scribes, the Law teachers, affirm that the Christ will be the son of David. No problem here.
- The Davidic sonship of the Messiah was a common and almost universally accepted belief in Israel in Jesus’ day. It is still a popular belief today among orthodox Jews. For example in John 7:42 we read, “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”
- Indeed the Davidic sonship of the Messiah is firmly and widely established in Old Testament scripture:

- 2 Sam 7:1-17	- Jere. 23:5-6	-Hosea 3:5
- Ps. 89:3-4	- Jere. 30:9	- Amos 9:11
- Isa. 9:1-7	- Jere. 33:15-17, 22	- Micah 5:2-5

he is God's Son who reigns as King seated at His Father's, His heavenly Father's, right hand. David's words will not work if Messiah is just a human being. He must be more. This is where Jesus is trying to take them. This is what they had failed to see. Tragically, they still don't see it.

- Significantly Jesus will cite this text again when the high priest asks him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (14:61)? We find our Lord's immediate response in the very next verse, "And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power; and coming with the clouds of heaven." Yes he is the Messiah. He is also the Son of the Blessed. He indeed is the God-man.
- The Pharisees no doubt scoffed and fumed in their anger at His words and their defeat. In contrast Mark tells us, "And the great throng heard him gladly" (v. 37).
- Don Carson says it perfectly, "The teacher who never attended the right schools (John 7:15-18) confounds the greatest theologians in the land" (p. 488).

II. **The Coming of Jesus results in a greater accountability. 12:38-40**

- I cannot count the number of times I have made the statement, "Revelation brings responsibility. The more you know the greater is your accountability." You might ask where did I get this? The answer is simple: I got it from Jesus (see v. 40; Matt. 11:20-24).
- I believe the most dangerous vocation in life is being a theologian. I believe the most dangerous place you can go is to a Bible believing church that faithfully proclaims the

gospel and teaches the Word of God. Each time you hear God's word taught, your accountability before Him increases.

- Tragically those who often receive God's revelation and traffic in His truth become deaf, even hardened. Rather than walk humbly they become proud. Rather than serve others they steal from them. Rather than help others they hurt others. Having drawn so near to Jesus, they think and act nothing like Jesus. God will not overlook such hypocrisy and sin.

1) Beware of those who put on a show.

12:38-39

- Mark summarizes in 3 verses what Matthew 23 records in 39! He warns the people of v. 37 to "Beware" (pre. imp). Beware of the teachers of Torah, the Law. Why? 7 reasons total are given. We will break these down into 3 categories.

First, they crave recognition as they walk about in their long flowing robes, full length prayer shawls with tassels that would draw attention to themselves. They were not interested in seeing the needs and hurts of others. Rather they wanted others to see and admire them! Bling is not new! Neither is religion exempt from its lure.

Second, they demanded acknowledgment of status. When they walked by "in the marketplace" they expected people to rise and honor them with titles fitting their significance and importance. Such titles included "Rabbi", "master" and even "father" (see Matt 23:7-10). This is how they expected to "be greeted."

Third, they demanded people pay attention to their rank and position of authority (v. 39). No back rows for these boys. They were to sit up front looking back at and "down on" the commoners in the congregation.

Fourth, they expected “the place of honor at feast” (v. 39). “Put me by the host.” Only preferential treatment will do. Jesus addressed this plainly in Matt 23:11-12 when He says, “The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” These religious elites would have nothing of this.

2) Beware of those who take advantage of others. 12:40

- Jesus provides a 5th warning to the people concerning their religious leaders. “They devour” and take advantage of the vulnerable, in this context widows. Like some televangelist and religious charlatans in our own day they preyed on the weak exploiting the generosity of others for their own profit. Taking the meager means of a widow’s Social Security check did not faze them or trouble their conscious one wit. “More for me” was their motto. There is “money to be made in ministry” was their philosophy. The prophets condemned in the strongest terms those who took advantage of widows and orphans (Isa 10:2; Amos 2: Micah 3) and Jesus joined their chorus. Had they not read Lev. 19, especially verse 18?! Did they not hear Jesus when He spoke of the 2 great commandments, the 2 great loves?

3) Beware of those who make a pretense of their piety. 12:40

- Sixth, the religious hirelings were experts in pseudo piety that was vacuous with no substance. They could “make long prayers” in public but their private prayer closet was littered with dust for lack of use. I have no doubt that their prayers were eloquent. Jesus, however, judged them empty. Better a few fumbling words from a humble heart than a marvelous oration from a proud heart.

4) Beware of the judgment of God that awaits us all. 12:40

- The Bible says, “to whom much is given much is required” (Luke 12:48). The greater our revelation the greater our accountability. To know what is right and not do it invites “the greater condemnation” in judgment. No wonder James, our Lord’s half-brother, would write in James 3:1, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”
- Heaven will not be equally delightful for all though all will be fully satisfied. And hell will not meet out equal punishment for all though all will be punished. Indeed God will judge with special severity hypocritical religious leaders who prance like show ponies, strut like peacocks, abuse the less fortunate and traffic in false worship that is a show with no substance. Such wickedness in motive and action makes plain they never embraced the greatest servant of all, the greater Son of David, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah-Son of God.

Conclusion:

1) In his classic *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis takes us to the heart of our faith when he addresses the identity of Jesus Christ and the response we all must give. The trilemma of Lord, Liar or Lunatic has become famous and right so.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m 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 was 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 a level with the man who says he is 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.” (pgs. 55-56).

2) It is so clear isn't it! Jesus is both David's Son and David's Savior. Jesus is both David's Son and God's Son. Jesus is both human and divine. Jesus is both man and God.

3) So now you know who He is. There is no evading the issue. There is no sitting on the fence. You must decide for Him or against Him. Your accountability has never been greater. To say no now is only to invite greater judgment when you stand before God and explain to Him why you rejected His Son. Please make sure you choose wisely. Your eternal destiny is at stake!