

Explaining the Scriptures

- Mark 12:35-40
- Remember last week we saw that a scribe came to Jesus with a good question and agreed with Jesus' answer, and Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"? I like to think that perhaps what happens next was in part Jesus reaching out to that one scribe, giving him the final picture of the puzzle so he would receive grace and faith from God...and believe! Maybe it happened.
- Jesus has been answering the questions that his opponents thought were unanswerable. Now it is his turn. Ralph Martin wrote, "After a day of questioning comes the question of the day!" Jesus asks a question that his opponents cannot answer. The question centers around Psalm 110 which for centuries after David wrote it, was used in the coronation of the kings of Israel and Judah. More than that, the Jews recognized Psalm 110 as a Messianic prophecy, that the Messiah would be born to the house of David, from his lineage. "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" It is a powerful word that the Jews of Jesus' day recognized as Messianic, but they did not understand it fully. In this text for today, let's look at how Jesus first Explains the Scriptures and then how he Exposes the False Teachers.
- **Explains the Scripture (verses 35-37)**
- Jesus knows he is speaking to Jews who believed that the Old Testament was divinely inspired. They might even have said it was, "breathed out by the Spirit," as Paul says of all Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16. Jesus alludes to this understanding when he says, "David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared." That's another way of saying, "David wrote what was given to him by the Spirit of God." They nodded in agreement. He then builds on that common understanding with a question, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" This passage is in the other synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke, and I think Matthew tells it in the way that is even plainer than Mark. Look at Matthew 22:41-45.
- Great question to ask anyone! "What do you think about the Christ?" We know that Christ is not Jesus' last name but a title and a reference to his mission. Seems like a safe question for the scribes and Pharisees, as they clearly do not believe that JESUS is the Christ!. He adds, "Whose son is he" They answer, "The son of David." Then Jesus asks, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord?"
- In other words, and what Jesus is exposing from the Word of God in Psalm 110, is that the son of David could only be the Lord of David if he existed before him. The birth of Jesus in the city of David was not the beginning of Jesus. It was simply the moment marked in time when the eternal Son of God humbled himself to become the Son of David. That title, "Son of David" writes William Hendricksen, "falls short of capturing his identity. He is not just David's son. He is God's Son." Remember the first words of Mark, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."
- Jesus has already said to them, as recorded in John's gospel, "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) Here he is pointing them to Psalm 110, which they believe refers to the Messiah, and telling them without saying it plainly that it points to him. When David wrote, "The Lord (Yahweh) said to my Lord (Adonai), sit at

my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet,” he was prophesying about him! Jesus. Jesus the Christ. The Jews had always seen this as a reference to a military-political Messiah who would come from David’s throne, David’s house, David’s seed, and put the enemies of Israel finally and forever in their place! They had part of it right, but they got the biggest part wrong. The enemy that the Messiah first had to put under his feet was sin and death and the grave, and that would be done not by military might but by the slaughter of the perfect and spotless Lamb of God. What Jesus refers to here from the Psalms is famous in the New Testament.

- It was in Peter’s very first sermon, on the Day of Pentecost: Acts 2:32-36. This message made it into Paul’s towering argument for the resurrection, in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26. This message made it into the first chapter of Hebrews, that powerful book of exhortation to believers and warning to those who would think of leaving Christ. Hebrews 1:13. This man who is the Son of David, is also and always has been the Son of God, the Messiah, the King. Even the very last chapter of the Bible points to this truth: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” (Rev. 22:16)
- Mark ends this part with, “And the great throng heard him gladly.” Which is not the same as saying that they understood and believed. He knew that about them **and** the scribes to whom he was referring. So, he turns his attention to the so-called experts in the Scriptures, the scribes and he...
- **Exposes false teachers (verses 38-40)**
- As a good shepherd, Jesus tenderly cares for his flock. As a good shepherd, Jesus vigorously defends his flock against those who would come in to lead them astray. This judgment on the scribes in this passage can be seen in much more detail in Matthew 23, if you want to look there at another time. But Jesus begins with a warning to those who would listen, “Beware of the scribes.” He will talk about three ways they practice their religion for the purpose of self-advancement, and we will look at those in a moment. But let’s not overlook the first warning he leveled against them. In verse 35, “How can the scribes say...” How can these men who KNEW the Scriptures not apply them and obey them?
- The Scribes knew the Scriptures, but they did not learn from them. There is a difference between someone who approaches the Bible to learn, to be changed, to have his or her mind renewed, and someone who looks in the Bible for something he can use for his own purposes. Brett McCracken says it like this in his book, *The Wisdom Pyramid*: “Some ask, *If to love the Bible is to become wise, then why are so many Bible-loving people so awful and unwise—using the Bible in self-serving ways to defend ignorance, justify bias, and perpetuate fear and loathing?* The answer is that they are *using* the Bible. They aren’t coming to the Bible to be shaped by it; they are coming to the Bible to shape it into what they want it to be...All of us tend to like the parts of Scripture that support our paradigms while we ignore or downplay the parts that threaten our status quo. But bad things happen when we start shaping Scripture around *us* rather than ourselves around Scripture.” What are those bad things?
- **We become proud.** The scribes liked to wear long robes, full-length prayer shawls that had 4 tassels on them. Made of wool or linen, these robes said, “Look at me; I am

wealthy, and I am important.” They also liked to be greeted in the marketplace. You say, “Well, who doesn’t?” Ok, the last time you walked into La Cocina or Village Grill or Harris Teeter, did everyone in the place stand up to honor your presence among them? That’s what “greetings in the marketplace” meant. These guys loved it so much that when they weren’t misusing the Scriptures in their teaching, they were walking around to receive adulation from their adoring fans. Here’s a correction: “Do nothing from selfish ambition, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Phil. 2:3)

- **We become selfish.** The scribes are not going to be in the nosebleed seats at the ballgame. Nobody would see them up there! They want the best seats at the ballgame and at church. There was a dais in the synagogues, right at the front that faced the congregation. That’s where the scribes liked to sit. And they loved to be at the head table at the feasts and lived for the moment when the master of ceremony would tell everyone how lucky they were to have such a wonderful and important person in the meeting. “Would you please rise, Rabbi. Oh, I’m sorry, no, let us rise and give you honor!” Here’s a correction: “Let no one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor.” (1 Cor. 10:24)
- **We become greedy.** The scribes were not wealthy like the Sadducees but they depended largely on the gifts of the worshippers and benefactors who supported them. Some of them offered “help” to widows who had just lost their husbands and were at a loss as how to handle their estate. The scribes would come in like vultures and end up with a large payment for their services. We see this judgment levied against ungodly leaders in the Old Testament, in Isaiah, Amos, and Micah, just to name a few places. The same can happen to any believer who begins to read the Bible only to justify his or her willful disobedience to plain truth. Time simply becomes a commodity for making more money and making a more comfortable life for my wife and children, and yeah I don’t have much time for church and I can’t really find time to lead my family in studying the Bible, and I would like to pray more and serve more and witness more, but I am SO busy with work, and...what’s wrong with that? Here’s a correction: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Tim. 6:10)
- **We become pretentious.** Jesus says the scribes “for a pretense make long prayers.” What a powerful little nugget that phrase is. The warning is not against making long prayers. There is no implied meaning here that short prayers are better than long prayers. Either is fine. No, the warning is against pretense. By definition, pretense means “an attempt to make something that is not the case appear true.” The word in Greek means “to appear, to shine before. An outward show or appearance...put forth in order to cover one’s real intent.”
- Now, this can be harmless. I remember the student one time who gave an impassioned persuasive speech, urging everyone in the class to give blood, the need for blood, the urgency of the matter, and “there’s a blood drive this week on campus, so go!” During the review I asked her how many times she had given blood, and she said, “Never! Scared to death of needles.” We laughed and several students chided her, and some invited her to go with them to do what she thought was so important. I remember a conference speaker years ago talking about pretense and how we send the wrong

messages sometimes. He said he saw a man wearing a shirt that advertised a weight loss program and on the back it said, "Ask me how I lost weight." The conference speaker said, "The guy was huge, and even though I needed to lose weight I didn't really see him as a reliable source of information. It gave a bad name to the product he was advertising."

- Pretense can also be very harmful. The same conference speaker said that he and his fiancée went through pre-marital counseling with their pastor, and at the very last session, after the pastor had talked with them for 6 weeks about the sanctity of marriage and how to build a strong one that will stand the trials and tribulations that will come, he said, "And just to let you know, my wife and I have decided to get a divorce." The speaker said to us, "We were young kids and didn't really know what to do with that. It was very painful and disillusioning."
- Here's the encouragement. None of us has perfectly pure hearts. None of us ever does anything with perfectly pure motives. And I know that the problem with being deceived is that we don't know we are deceived! May God help us walk in the light as He is in the light. And may God help us to walk with one another in a way that we welcome and invite each other to point out pride, and selfishness, and greed, and pretentiousness when we see it. But remember to take the speck out of your brother's or sister's eye after you have removed the plank from your own! Then help your brother or sister. Gently. Lovingly. But truthfully. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy." (Proverbs 27:6)
- Prayer
- **Greet One Another!**