

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
**MARK**

*Week 39: Rewarded by Men, Rejected by God*

**Text: Mark 12:35-44**

In last week's text, we saw how Jesus engaged with a scribe who had a genuine desire to know his opinion on which commandment was the most important. He was one of few scribes, recorded in the gospels, who showed an openness towards Jesus' teaching, while the rest of them rejected him outright. In this week's passage, we see how Jesus rejects the religiousness and self-importance that culture esteems so highly: instead, we see how the kingdom of God upholds the humble and those who live this life for their eternal reward, rather than for the praise of man.

By now Jesus was in the temple, teaching publically for the last time before he was crucified. And as it was Passover week, the most holy week on the Jewish calendar, there were many Jews there from all over the world, gathering together for the week in order to worship God. With a captive audience, he chose to zoom in on the most influential and publically recognised people in their society, the scribes, in order to dismantle some of the ungodly, religious thinking and practices that they held to.

- Read Mark 12:35-37

**1. Those Who Live For Reward In This Life And Reject The Reward of The Next Life:**

I. Have Lots Of Answers But No Awe. Lots Of Theories About God But No Submission To The Authority Of God

In the situation as it was, with Israel being under strict Roman rule, the promise of the coming Messiah would have been permanently on their minds, and it would have been something they continued to talk about as they longed for political freedom from their oppressors. The scribes would have referred to the most prominent Messianic text, Psalm 110, to remind the people that a king was coming to liberate them, someone from the line of King David, but one who would supersede him in greatness and honour.

This was even better news for the scribes themselves because they knew that with a new king, they would be elevated to positions in government and in the church, which would stroke their egos and give them even more reason to celebrate themselves. Knowing their hearts, Jesus used the very same Psalm to pick holes in their theology, and to reveal that they had a very small view of who the messiah really was. In the Hebrew language, one can see the difference in the two words used for 'Lord' in the Psalm. The one word is "Yahweh" and the other is "Elohim". Jesus revealed to his listeners that in this Psalm, where Yahweh was speaking to Elohim, the Father was giving the Son the place of authority to rule as the Messiah. So the Messiah that they were waiting for was to be a combination of the Son of man, and the Son of God, and therefore, Lord over all of them.

For all their knowledge of the scriptures and religious activity, the scribes didn't even know the God they so diligently served. They had lots of doctrine, but very little dependence, and they had lots of knowledge, but they would not submit to it. They were blind to the very truth they themselves taught.

- ❖ Q: What is the difference between knowing a lot about the scriptures and submitting to them?
- ❖ Q: Why does it not help us to know a lot of doctrine if we do not depend on the one that the doctrine speaks about?
- ❖ Q: In what area of your life are you not currently submitting to God's authority and what are you going to do about it?

- Read Mark 12:38-40

II. Care More About How Much People Love Them Than How Much They Love God

The scribes had a place of honour among their people. They wore long white robes, and had special seats in the synagogues and at weddings. Some even received money for appearances at social events. Their culture was one of appearances, and respect meant everything. We are just like the scribes. We love places of honour, and we care more about the respect and honour others give us than about what God thinks of us.

III. Use People To Meet Their Needs Instead Of Using Their Means To Help Needy People

At this time in Israel's history, widows and orphans were extremely vulnerable, and it was important to God that his people cared for them. But some of the scribes abused the vulnerable position of the widows by buying their land from them at discounted prices, and then allowing them to stay on the land "rent free", while playing the role of the noble landlord. What appeared to be in the best interest of the widows, was in fact a scheme to appear caring, whilst in fact increasing the widows' vulnerability by removing their only form of security – their land.



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There are many pastors today who abuse their position of authority, gaining financially from their congregations, while appearing to be living God-fearing lives. Instead of being shepherds to their flocks, they play the role of CEO, and take large cheques home each month. But they are not the only ones. We cannot self-righteously point fingers at those men without looking into our own hearts. Many of us pursue the affirmation of other people, and use them to get what we need, rather than pursuing God, the only one who can give us the true sense of worth that we so desperately need.

- ❖ Q: Whose opinions of you matter the most? Name the 3 people you need to impress and explain what you get out having them esteem you.
- ❖ Q: In what ways have you gone out of your way to impress people whose opinions you hold highly?
- ❖ Q: To what extent are you willing to pay/serve/bow/compliment/flatter others in order for them to think highly of you?
- ❖ Q: Why is this in fact self-serving?
- ❖ Q: Why does our need for approval end up robbing us of our joy?
- ❖ Q: How is Jesus the answer to our need to approval and affirmation?
- ❖ Q: How would you counsel someone who struggles from 'approval addiction' with the gospel?

- Read Mark 12:41-44

## 2. Those Who Live For The Reward Of The Next Life At The Expense Of Their Fame And Acclaim In This One:

### I. Are More Concerned With Their Hearts Towards God Than Their Public Acts of Devotion – I Corinthians 13:3

The woman who had very little gave all that she had, despite the fact that people looked down on her in her poverty. She was still willing to give to the Lord, even though in man's eyes her level of giving was embarrassing. Jesus was more impressed by her giving than the wealthy people that gave from their surplus, because her giving cost her everything, while their giving gave them applause and made them feel good about themselves.

### II. Give All They Have

Jesus was not impressed by the amount people gave, but by the heart with which it was given. This widow was left with absolutely nothing once she had given her coins, and that indicated that her devotion was first to the Lord, and she placed her trust for provision entirely in him.

### III. Believe That God Can Do Big Things Through Their Small Contribution

The widow had no idea that she was being watched by Jesus, and that her story would be recorded for the world to read until the end of time. She gave because she loved and trusted God, and she didn't belittle her own small amount. Many of us do not give to God unless we can actually see where it goes, seeing a measurable impact. Many of us will not serve or give in obscurity, doing small acts of obedience just for God's pleasure, and so our serving and giving ultimately ends up being purely self-serving.

### IV. Know That God Will Square Accounts On Judgment Day

We do not see anywhere in the gospels that this woman's fortune changed during her lifetime. It is likely that she continued to live in poverty, and that she probably died in obscurity. But what we do know from the scriptures is that when God restores all things after the judgment day, those who served in this life will end up being served in heaven. The order of things will be totally reversed. And so, despite her difficulty on this earth, we expect that this poor widow will be richly rewarded in heaven. This stands in stark contrast to the greatly esteemed scribes, who await condemnation.

- ❖ Q: Do you ever judge people for the way they choose to worship God? Why is this foolishness according to this story?
- ❖ Q: Why do our hearts matter more to God than our actions?
- ❖ Q: Do you give to God's work without needing to see what it is being spent on? Why is this an important heart issue for us to address?
- ❖ Q: Are you willing to serve others at church, in your workplace or at home, without being acknowledged for it?
- ❖ Q: What should our motive be for serving God and others in this lifetime?

## 3. It Should Serve As A Challenge And An Encouragement To Us To Know That Jesus Is Watching Us, And That He Sees What No One Else Sees

We need to remember that Jesus sees every thought, motive and act of rebellion in our hearts, even if no one else can see it. This should convict us about our thought lives, and our secret lives that others don't get to witness. It should also encourage us to serve and give because he is watching us, knowing that he is the only audience worth working for.