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Mark 12:28 - 12:44



Gospel of Mark - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg discusses various events during the final week of Jesus' life, including his teachings on loving one's neighbor and the importance of relationships with God and others. He also highlights the vulnerability of widows and orphans during ancient Israel and admonishes religious leaders to protect them instead of using them for financial gain. The story of the poor widow who gave two small coins in the temple is praised for her sacrificial giving, and Jesus' teachings on the true value of wealth and poverty are discussed.

Transcript

Let's turn to Mark chapter 12, and we are looking at that final week of Jesus' earthly sojourn here before his crucifixion. That final week began at the beginning of chapter 11 with the triumphal entry. And on Monday of that week, the triumphal entry was on Sunday, and then the next day, Jesus was coming into town and he cursed the fig tree, and then he drove the money changers out of the temple, and apparently went back to Bethany for the night.

And the next day, Tuesday, when he was coming to town, his disciples observed that the fig tree had withered up. And as I was saying about that particular thing, it's the only destructive miracle we know of that Jesus ever did, and it was for symbolic value, I'm sure. And the withering of that fig tree, the cursing of that fig tree, sort of set the tone for almost everything Jesus would say throughout the week.

And that was, he had very little to say in his teaching that's recorded that did not in some way anticipate the destruction of Jerusalem. Not the destruction of him on the cross, but the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the Jewish state. And the cursing of the fig tree, I believe, was a pictorial demonstration of that prophecy, as I believe the fig tree represented Israel and its withering.

Of course, it withered because Jesus said, no one will ever eat fruit from you again. And Israel had been chosen by God in the Old Testament to be fruit bearing for God, and they really had very rarely produced any fruit that God was looking for. And so Jesus said,

well, this is it.

Remember, there was that parable he'd told in Luke 13 about the fig tree that was burdening the ground. And the owner said, why don't we just tear up this fig tree? Why should we let it burden the ground like this? And the vine dresser, actually, because it was in a vineyard, said, well, let me dig it and fertilize it one more season. And if it produces fruit good, if it doesn't, then we'll pull it up.

And that was also, I believe, a prediction about Israel being given really one last chance to produce. And in that week, Jesus told at the beginning of chapter 12, the parable of the vine dressers. And the parable of the vine dressers was about that, too, because it was a vineyard that Israel was compared to in this case.

And as in Isaiah, Israel was a vineyard that was supposed to produce the fruit of justice and righteousness. So said Isaiah in chapter 5 of Isaiah, in verse 7, when he told also a parable of a vineyard that had some striking parallels to this one Jesus told in Mark chapter 12. But these vine dressers did not welcome the servants of the owner who came asking them to produce the fruit.

And these servants represented the prophets of the Old Testament. And they got themselves beaten and thrown out of the vineyard. One of them had a rock thrown and injured his head.

And so finally, the owner of the vineyard said, well, I'm going to send my son. They certainly wouldn't dare treat him that way. But they saw him and they said, this is the error.

Let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours. And so they killed the son also. Now, it's interesting because it says that it was their last chance when he sent the son.

Israel had had fourteen hundred years to produce that fruit. God had sent prophets to them for hundreds of years and they never produced it. And so last of all, he sent his son.

It's not worded quite like that in Mark, but in Matthew's version, it says last of all. He sent his son. So the last chance this vineyard was going to get, the last chance these vine dressers were going to get, was when the Messiah came, when the Son of God came.

And when they killed him, that was the last chance. There were going to be more chances. And so Jesus said, well, what do you suppose the owner of the vineyard is going to do to those wicked men who killed his son and his servants? And the answer was he's going to miserably destroy those men and lease his vineyard out to others who will bring forth the fruits of it.

And so that's, of course, a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the passing of

the kingdom of God from Israel to a new nation that would bring forth the fruits of it, as Jesus said, which would be the church. Then we saw that the Sadducees confronted Jesus in chapter 12, verses 18 through 27. And this is the only time in all the Gospels that we read of the Sadducees confronting Jesus.

The Sadducees actually had less in common with Jesus' theology than the Pharisees had. And Jesus had a number of conflicts with the Pharisees. They were continually criticizing him and his disciples for breaches of law, breaches of custom.

They just were finding fault with Jesus all the time. But actually the Pharisees had theology that was a lot closer to Jesus' theology than the Sadducees had, because the Sadducees did not accept all of the Old Testament scriptures. They didn't accept anything but the Pentateuch, the first five books, and the rest they recognized as some kind of sacred writings, but not as the word of God.

So they disagreed with Jesus on that, and with the Pharisees. The Pharisees went further. They accepted all the scriptures of the Old Testament, as Jesus did.

But they went beyond that, and they also accepted the traditions of the rabbis as equal to the scripture. So Jesus didn't go there. Jesus stood sort of right between the position of the Sadducees and the Pharisees on this particular matter, in that Jesus accepted all the Old Testament scriptures, and he didn't only accept the Pentateuch, or the Torah, as the Sadducees did, and he didn't accept the traditions of the rabbis as the Pharisees did.

But because Jesus and the Pharisees did recognize all the scriptures, they saw in the Old Testament scriptures a teaching of the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees did not see such. They didn't believe in a resurrection of the dead.

They didn't believe in spirits or angels either. And so they, even before Jesus had come on the scene, probably generations before Jesus appeared, the Sadducees and the Pharisees had been arguing over this theological difference, just like Calvinists and Arminians argue among themselves generation after generation. This is a big theological controversy.

The resurrection of the dead, is there a resurrection? Well, it was evident to the Sadducees that Jesus stood on the Pharisees' side of this issue. You might remember how that caused a commotion once for Paul, when he was standing before the Sanhedrin, and he was being tried. And he decided that instead of behaving himself, he'd do sort of what Slim does, and just cause a problem.

It says Paul saw that part of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and part of them were Sadducees. So Paul saw the opportunity to start a fight, not between himself and anybody, but between the two factions that were already there judging him. And it says in Acts chapter 23 and verse 6, it says when Paul perceived that one part were

Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.

It's concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I'm being judged. In other words, he's saying, I have come from Phariseeical stock, and I believe, as the Pharisees do, in the resurrection of the dead. And that's why I'm on trial, because of the resurrection of Jesus that I believe in.

I believe in the resurrection. Now it says, when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection and no angel or spirit, but the Pharisees confess both.

Then there arose a loud outcry, and the scribes who were of the Pharisees' party arose, and protested, saying, we find no evil in this man, but if the spirit or angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God. Oh, they just rub it in the Pharisees, in the Sadducees' eyes. An angel or spirit might have spoken to him.

Well, the Sadducees don't believe in either of those things. So the Pharisees come over to Paul's side on this for the moment, and when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force. And he got out of that trial.

I'm not sure why he wanted to get out of that trial. I mean, it just postponed it. But anyway, he decided he'd cause a commotion instead of be on trial that occasion.

But you see, that underscores how volatile the tension was between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over this issue of the resurrection of the dead. And so the Sadducees come to Jesus, knowing that he believes in that, and they say, well, here's a question we have for you. And this was a question I'm sure that they'd used many times on the Pharisees, and the Pharisees had been unable to answer it.

As I said, if they had been able to answer it, they would have answered it before this, and the Sadducees would not be able to have been asking it. They would have already had an answer that was established. And it was that one about a woman having multiple husbands in her lifetime because the law of Moses required her to marry the brothers of her deceased childless husband each time.

And there were seven brothers, and eventually they all married her serially. And so the question was, in the resurrection, whose wife is she going to be? And of course, the suggestion is there couldn't be a resurrection because that would bring about a situation where this woman, who had had seven husbands in her lifetime, would now have seven living husbands at the same time. And Jesus said, well, you guys err because you don't know the scriptures of the power of God.

In the resurrection, they don't marry. They're like the angels of God in heaven. So Jesus rubbed the angel thing in their faces too.

And he said that they're like the angels. And then he said, and don't you remember at the burning bush when God said to Moses, I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Now, see, now Jesus is using a scripture from the Torah, which the Sadducees did accept.

He could have quoted from Daniel chapter 12 or maybe Isaiah chapter 26 and made a point of the resurrection from those places, but the Sadducees didn't accept those portions of scripture. So he quoted from the Torah. So do you remember when Moses, in the law, met God at the burning bush and God said, I'm the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But Jesus said, God's not the God of dead people. He's the God of living people, which means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had died before Moses was born, apparently were still living as far as God was concerned somewhere. And so that was the next controversy Jesus had.

Now we have a couple of other cases. By the way, I didn't mention that the Pharisees had come first with the Herodians and asked them about paying tribute to Caesar, and he answered that. So he's been confronted by the Pharisees and the Herodians.

He's been confronted by the Sadducees also now. And now there's one of the scribes came to him. And the scribe was probably of the Pharisaic party.

Most of the scribes were. They didn't have to be, but that was just the way it was. The scribes and Pharisees were pretty much of one theological opinion.

The scribes were the experts in the law and the ones who transcribed it. And in verse 28 it says, One of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? Meaning the first in importance. Now notice this man came because they noticed that Jesus had given good answers.

This is the first time where it appears that someone came with an honest question, not just testing him, not trying to find fault with him. This is a scribe that actually was kind of impressed with Jesus' answers and thought, you know, maybe this rabbi would have some insights into this important question. What is the most important commandment? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, the Yahweh is one, and you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

This is the first and great commandment. And that is, of course, from Deuteronomy 6, verse 4. That passage is called the Shema. Shema is the Hebrew word that means hear.

It's the first word in the passage, Shema. The Jews call this law, this command, the Shema, and they speak it at the beginning of every synagogue service. It is like the statement of faith for the Jew, just like Jesus' Lord is the central declaration of the Christian message.

The central declaration of Judaism is, Hear, O Israel, Yahweh the Lord, Yahweh is one. And that was the great boast, of course, of Israel, was that they had a God who was the only God, only one God, whereas all the other nations worshiped multiple gods. So it was the monotheism of Israel that set them apart from all the other nations that were polytheistic, and this was the way they stated their faith in a single declaration.

And so even to this day, this Shema is the opening declaration of a synagogue service. And so the Jews were very familiar with this. Jesus was very familiar with it, of course.

But he's saying this really is it. But it's not just the first part, it's the other part. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength.

That's the first and most important commandment. But he said that's not the only one. There's another one like it.

A second one like it is this. You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. And that comes from Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 18.

He said there is no other commandment greater than these. Now in other places, Jesus cited those two commandments and said that all the law and all the prophets hang on those two commandments. But here it's the scribe that makes that observation and the importance of it.

He recognizes when Jesus says these are the most important commandments, the man agrees with him. The scribe said to him, Well said, teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but he.

And to love him with all the heart, with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. Now, once in a while, Israel produced a mind, a Jewish person, who recognized this, that the burnt sacrifices and offerings were not God's ultimate concern. Although they were central to the ritual worship of Israel at the temple, and certainly the priests and the Levites were busy about these things all the time.

This is what the full-time ministers were doing, offering sacrifices and all. But there were some Jews, like David in the Psalms, or like Solomon in the Proverbs, or like some of the prophets like Isaiah and Amos and Micah and Hosea, who recognized that the sacrificial system wasn't really what rang God's chimes. It wasn't really that that mattered more than anything else to him.

What mattered more to him is relationships. Relationships with God and with each other. And these two commandments are relational commandments.

Love is a relationship. Love is not a feeling, by the way. There are feelings associated with love.

But love, in the Bible, is a relationship. A relationship of mutual, or if not mutual, at least one way, if a person loves their enemies, it's one way, but it's basically sacrifice of one's own self for other people. Jesus said, greater love has no one than this, but they lay down his life for his friends.

A person might do that with or without emotions toward them. They do it because they care, not because you have fondness necessarily. When Jesus said to love your enemies, he didn't mean to feel fondly toward them or warmly toward them.

That's asking more than one would have control over. You can't control your feelings like that, but it means do good to them. Do good to those who pursue you.

Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who spitefully use you. That's loving what you do.

Now, that's when people love God, we know he loves us, therefore there's a two-way relationship. When people love their neighbor as themselves, if everyone's doing that, then that's a two-way relationship between you and your brother or your sister. And therefore, all the law and the prophets really, you know, is summarized in one word, we can say relationship.

A certain kind of relationship, a loving relationship between oneself and God and a love relationship between oneself and everybody else on the planet. And the scribe actually understood this, as David and others in the Old Testament did, but many of the Pharisees did not, who had reduced Israel to a ritualistic legalism and neglected love altogether. So this man was unusual in his time.

And he said, to love God with all the heart, with all the understanding, verse 33, and with all the soul and all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. So when Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, notice the guy first came to Jesus because he saw that Jesus answered wisely, Jesus answered well, and now Jesus realized this man had a wise answer too. He said to him, you're not far from the kingdom of God.

And after that, no one dared question him. He had put the Pharisees and the Herodians to silence over the coin issue, the tribute money. He had put the Sadducees to silence over the matter of the resurrection.

And, you know, all the people that wanted to challenge him were now apparently afraid

to do so. It doesn't say no one had any other ways that they wanted to interrogate him, but no one dared. Jesus had shown that they could not win in a contest against him.

And this man was not far from the kingdom of God. He apparently was not in the kingdom of God, but it's clear he was not far from it. And there must be people like that perhaps in every religion.

Not that another religion makes a man close to God because a man can be as far from God as an atheist and yet be a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Jew or even a professing Christian. They can be very religious and far from God, but at the same time, in every religion, who knows, maybe even in atheism, there are people who are not so far from the kingdom as they appear to us. Because they recognize that love, which is what God believes is the chief thing, is more important than ritual.

Frankly, I don't know very many atheists that I could say were near the kingdom, but I know one who might not be too far. He's the guy who calls me on the air once in a while. He says he's an atheist.

He's been saying that for a while. But when his parents' home was threatened by a wildfire in the California mountains, he called me on the air and asked me to pray for his parents' home not to be destroyed. So I don't usually pray on the air, but I prayed for his parents' home not to be affected by the fire, and it was near.

And the next day he called me up with another issue, another question. I said, hey, what happened to your parents' home? He said, oh, the fire went the other direction. And I said, well, would you regard that as an answer to prayer? And he said, well, I don't know.

But I suppose he's not real far from the kingdom. He obviously needs to take a few major steps to get there. But sometimes we're told or we have the impression that everybody who's not a Christian is just fiercely antagonistic against God, and that apparently isn't true.

This man was not a Christian. Cornelius, a Gentile, was not a Christian, and he was not antagonistic toward God. He was seeking God.

He was not far from the kingdom either. And so we have to realize we will encounter non-Christians who are not far from the kingdom. Sometimes we believe that because they haven't come into the kingdom, they all fall into one category.

They're all the haters of God, you know. But we need to be careful when we're dealing with people that we make a distinction between unbelievers, those that are really hostile toward God and really far from the kingdom. On the one hand, those that God has been drawing.

Over in Jude, we have these instructions about evangelism, actually. In Jude, verses 22

and 23, there's only one chapter. Jude 22 and 23, it says, On some have compassion, making a distinction, but others, save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

You need to make a distinction between people you're dealing with. Some, you just have compassion on them. Others, you've got to be afraid when you go close to them because they are so dangerous if only in the sense that they're spiritually defiling.

That you want to reach them. You want to save them. You want to pluck them out of the fire.

But you have to do it as gingerly as you would pluck something out of a fire. You know, if you want to pluck something out of a fire, if something of value falls in the fire and you have to grab it out, you're going to do that rather carefully and gingerly and watching to not burn your fingers. Jude is saying some people are so dangerous, spiritually speaking, that reaching them is a dangerous proposition.

Going where they are, into their environment, their influence is dangerous. You need to make a distinction between those ones and the other ones who aren't that way with whom you can just show compassion to them. Some people just need an arm put around them or a shoulder to cry on.

And there are people who are not that far from the kingdom. And Jude says you need to make a distinction between different kinds of people when you're reaching them. And so Jesus recognized this distinction and he didn't say, you know, come and follow me to the man.

Although the man, maybe he did, it's not recorded, but he indicated that the man was actually in a pretty good place right there. It's interesting because when I was taught how to evangelize when I was young, in the books on the subject, I was taught that the main thing you have to say to an unbeliever is that they're a sinner and that they are far from God and in trouble with God and they're under the judgment of God and that's how you start. I was always told people will not be interested in the gospel unless you make them concerned about how much trouble they're in.

A person won't take the medicine unless they know they're really sick, we're told. And then I found that Jesus and the apostles didn't always do it that way. I mean, here Jesus didn't say, man, you need to repent.

Although the man did, the man was not in the kingdom yet. The man needed to repent. But Jesus actually made an affirming assessment of him.

You're really not far from the kingdom. By implication, you're not in the kingdom and need to be, but you're really, you're much better off than I would have thought. Most of these people on here are worse than you.

Instead of trying to drive home this man's sin, he actually encouraged the man where he was at. And also Peter did the same thing with Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. And this, to me, is a mind blower when you think about it, you know, in contrast to what I was always taught about evangelism.

Because here Peter walks into the home of a Gentile who's not a Christian. And if he was evangelized in the way I was taught to evangelize, his first line would be, you're a sinner. You're alienated from God.

You know, you're on your way to hell. You're in need of salvation. And, you know, you just better get down and repent right now.

But actually, when Peter heard Cornelius tell the story about how an angel had come and sent him to get a messenger to bring Peter to his house, Peter comes into the house. And in Acts chapter 10, it's interesting how Peter begins preaching to him. In verse 34, then Peter opened his mouth and said, In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

Now, who's he referring to? He's referring to Cornelius, the Gentile, and these people in the house who fear God and are doing things acceptable to God. Although, not as Christians. They were Gentiles who were probably converted to Judaism.

At least it was through the Jewish religion that they had come to know about God in all likelihood. But notice he says, In every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. And then he starts to tell the story about Jesus.

But he doesn't start by saying, You are not acceptable to God and therefore you need Jesus. He said, You know what? I'm surprised. God has shown me that you are acceptable to Him.

You know, so many times we approach the sinners with the idea that God is your enemy because you're God's enemy. But, Jesus was like, He had the persona of a friend of sinners. Peter comes to this guy who hasn't accepted Christ yet and says, You know, God accepts you.

God is on your side. God recognizes what you're doing. Now, that doesn't mean you're saved because you still need Jesus to get saved.

But God is recognizing the distance you've come from where you were and God appreciates that. God sees, you know, good for you, you know. To give that kind of encouragement to a sinner is biblical apparently if that sinner shows signs of being not far from the kingdom.

Certainly, Cornelius was not far from the kingdom and this scribe was not. And so, there are only words of affirmation for him. Not a call to repentance, in fact.

Which is not to say these people didn't need to repent. But, it's possible that already the work of God in them was bringing them in the direction of repentance. You know, their whole approach to God, their softness of heart was perhaps a process of changing their mind and repenting that God was working them.

So, instead of, you know, urging them to repent. And, you know what they didn't do? They didn't go through the Ten Commandments with them. They didn't say, Do you know that you've broken each of these commandments? Therefore, you're in trouble with God.

They didn't do that. They just kind of dealt with them like Jude said. Make a distinction.

Make a difference with some people. Some people you might have to quote the Ten Commandments from. Others, just show compassion to them.

They're not that far from the kingdom. Now, verse 35. Now, now that no one dared to confront Jesus about anything anymore, he decided to turn the tables and confront them.

And put them on the defensive. 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? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit, Yahweh said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. Therefore, David himself calls him Lord.

How then is he his son? It says, And the common people heard him gladly. That would be in contrast to the religious leaders who did not generally hear him gladly. Now this little bit here in verses 35 and 36 and 37 is a compressed version of what happened because Matthew stretches it out a little bit.

Here, it makes it sound like Jesus is just talking to the people about the scribes and how the scribes are wrong. In Matthew's version, it actually has Jesus addressing the scribes the first thing and saying, What is your opinion of the Messiah? Whose son is he? And he lets them answer. They say he's David's son.

And then he snaps this trap on them and says, well then why did David call him Lord? A man doesn't call his own son Lord. Not in that society. Not in any society.

A man does not call his son my Lord. A person might call his father that, but it doesn't go the other direction. So if the Messiah is David's son, why does David call the Messiah his Lord? Where? In Psalm 110, verse 1. Yahweh.

The word Lord appears twice in our English translations in the first line. The Lord said to my Lord. But the first Lord there is Yahweh.

The second one is Adonai in the Hebrew, which just means my master. And it's the second one that is the Messiah. That's what Jesus knew.

That's what the Pharisees knew. Jesus and the Pharisees shared this opinion about Psalm 110. This is about the Messiah.

If they didn't share that opinion, this argument wouldn't work with them. It worked because he and they agreed the second Lord in that sentence is the Messiah. The first Lord is Yahweh.

And God said to my master, says David, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. So David speaks about the Messiah as his master. Why then do the scribes say he's David's son? Well, Jesus was not denying that the Messiah would be David's son because the Bible affirms that that is true.

The Messiah is the son of David and the New Testament declares that too. So what point was Jesus making? Well, the point he was making was that although indeed it may be true that the Messiah is David's son, there's more there than that because the Messiah must have some additional factor in his status that sets him above David for David to refer to the Messiah as his Lord. And what would that additional factor be? Well, what Jesus is getting at, although he doesn't say it because the Pharisees don't know how to answer it and he doesn't entrust them with it, he doesn't cast his pearls before a swine, the Messiah is the son of David, but he's also the son of God.

And because he's the son of God, David has got to revere him and look up to him. This dual nature of Jesus as son of David and son of God is brought out by Paul in the opening verses of Romans just as he's introducing the subject of Jesus at the beginning of Romans 1. At verse 1, Paul says, as he identifies himself, he says, I'm Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ called to be an apostle separated to the gospel of God, that gospel which he promised before through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son Jesus Christ our Lord who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead. Now, according to the flesh, Jesus was born of the seed of David.

Paul affirms that. But through his resurrection, he was declared to be something more. He was declared to be the son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

Now, we know what Paul was thinking of there. He was thinking of Psalm 2 and verse 7. Because in Psalm 2 and verse 7, God is speaking, or the Messiah is speaking about God, speaking to him. It's kind of complex, but the Messiah speaks in Psalm 2, verse 7, and says, the Lord has said to me, Yahweh has said to me, the Messiah, you are my son.

This day I have begotten you. Now, therefore, the Messiah is said to be the son of God. Yahweh says to the Son, you are my son.

This day I have begotten you. Now, that verse, Psalm 2, verse 7, is quoted by Paul elsewhere and applied to the resurrection of Christ. See, here in Romans chapter 1 and

verse 4, it says that when Jesus was risen from the dead, that was the declaration that he was the son of God.

What Paul is assuming is what he was saying in Acts chapter 13. In Acts chapter 13, Paul is preaching his first recorded sermon in the book of Acts in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. Talking about Jesus, it says in verse 32 and following, Acts 13, 32, And we declare to you the glad tidings, that promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled this for us, their children, in that he has raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, You are my son, today I have begotten you.

Notice he says, God has raised up Jesus, just like he said in the second Psalm. Well, what does the second Psalm say? You are my son, this day I have begotten you. How does Paul understand begotten then? He sees that as the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus is the first begotten from the dead. So Jesus is called in Colossians 1.18, Colossians 1.18, He calls him the first born from the dead. He calls himself that, as Jesus does in Revelation 1.5. Jesus is called the first born from the dead.

Jesus begotten from the dead in his resurrection. And when God said, You are my son, this day I have begotten you. Paul says, that's the resurrection he's talking about.

He's begotten from the dead and declared him to be his son. You are my son, because I begotten you from the dead. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus is the declaration that he is the son of God, Paul said.

Now when Jesus made this comment to the scribes and said, Why did David call the Messiah his Lord if the Messiah is his son? Of course, Jesus is not challenging the fact that the Messiah is the son of David, but he is saying there's more to this doctrine than you have figured. You haven't studied the scriptures well enough, apparently, because David looks up to the Messiah as his superior, as his Lord. And the implication is that in addition to being the son of David, the Messiah is the son of God.

Though Jesus, at the time that this comment is being made, in Mark chapter 12, Jesus has not yet been risen from the dead and therefore God has not declared him to be the son of God by the rising from the dead, but God had made that declaration about him at his baptism. He said, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. So, Jesus had already been declared in one sense to be the son of God, as well as the son of David.

And therefore, Jesus would be the one that David would call Lord because he held both positions, son of David and son of God. Now verse 38 says, Mark 12, 38, Then he said to them in his teaching, Beware of the scribes who desire to go around in long robes. They love the greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

These will receive greater condemnation. Now, this is a very short version of what

Matthew gives us a whole chapter on in chapter 23 of Matthew. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees.

And he makes some of these same points against them to their faces and much more, because there's like seven or eight woes in Matthew 23. This is a very abbreviated form of that. And, so, here he doesn't say woe to them.

He just says, Beware of them. Beware of them. Why? What are they going to do, kill you? No, they'll corrupt you.

People like that set a bad example of religion. And if you are a religiously minded person, you may be corrupted by their vision of religion. What is their vision of religion? Well, an esteemed clergy who wear fancy clothes, long robes in this case, they love to have people greet them as rabbi or reverend or doctor or whatever title they may have acquired in the sight of man.

They like the seats of honor in the synagogues or on the stage of the Billy Graham crusades and the best places at the feasts. Now, all of these things speak of the external honor that certain religious leaders seek for themselves. The clothing they wear, the way they want people to address them as rabbi, the positions of honor they sit at on the stage and so forth in certain situations where their status as religious leaders is somehow esteemed, honored, recognized publicly.

And, you know, you can't really fault a person if he doesn't want those things but people esteem him anyway. But the thing is, there are ministers who do, you know, want those things. I can't judge the heart of anyone because I don't know the heart of anyone but I just never understood how any minister can wear clerical garb without having a touch of this kind of attitude, you know? I mean, or even in some denominations where they don't wear clerical garb, just dressing up, you know, and knowing that that's what gives them sort of status in the pulpit.

Now, you might say, well, dressing up in a suit and tie doesn't give a man status in the pulpit. Well, let him show up without a suit and tie sometime and we'll find out if he thinks that he does or not. There are ministers who do preach without a suit and tie and it seems clear that they're not really, they're not thinking that clothes, you know, are a necessary uniform for a spiritual leader.

But there are people who do think that, not only about leaders but about the congregation itself. There's a big church in Portland, Oregon that in their bulletin it actually says, we expect men who attend here to wear ties and women to wear dresses. And they say, you know, if you were going to meet with an important dignitary you would wear your best clothes and therefore when you come to meet God you should honor him as much and wear your best clothes.

And so, of course, I'm sure that that church becomes a fashion show because if you show your greatest respect for God by wearing your most expensive clothes then everyone could show how much they respect him by wearing the fanciest clothes and outdoing each other. But whether it's a minister or a Christian who is trying to be recognized as spiritual for the things they wear, it certainly is a spiritual error. Jesus, you know, thought it was wrong for those religious leaders who wanted to be recognized for their fancy clothes.

See, God looks at the heart. It is true that if I was invited to go to dinner with a congressman or the president or something like that I'd probably borrow a tie from someone because I really would have to. I would just feel out of place.

I'd feel like I was drawing too much attention to myself if I didn't dress the part. But you know what? The reason I would do that is because it would matter to them. You know, if the president invited me to meet with some of him and his people and I knew they were all going to be wearing suits and ties I'd feel embarrassed not wearing one because it matters to them.

And the only reason there would be a parallel in dressing up to go meet with God is if it matters to him. The fact is, it doesn't matter to him. Jesus, I'm sure, didn't have more than one change of clothes.

Most Jews didn't. Most peasants in Israel were lucky to have one pair of clothes. A change of clothes was a great luxury that only richer people had.

Jesus, I'm sure, preached in his street clothes in the synagogue and so did the apostles. They didn't really have much choice in all likelihood. In James, this attitude is spoken directly to in James chapter 2. James chapter 2, beginning with verse 1, it says, My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

For if there should come into your assembly a man with a gold ring and fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, You sit here in a good place, and say to the poor man, You stand there or sit here at my footstool. Have you not shown partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? So, this very attitude of saying, Well, you should wear nice clothes to church. Well, James said, if you make a distinction between people because of the clothes they wear, you've got evil thoughts.

You're not thinking God's thoughts. God doesn't evaluate people that way. But when people do, it's clear that to them religion has become a matter of external show.

And it certainly is that way with many clergymen. Now, of course, I'm from a free church background. I'm not from a liturgical background.

I was raised in a Baptist church and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and so forth.

And the churches I've been in have been much more, at least after I left the Baptist church and started going to Calvary Chapel, I've never really been in a church where people dressed up to go to church or even where the pastor did necessarily. So, I know for a fact that not all pastors are necessarily into this mentality, but there certainly are those who are still.

And they were in Jesus' day. And they do want to be called, some of them, want to be called by whatever degrees they've earned. There was a man on the radio who used to have a Bible question and answer program like the one I have now.

And I should let you know it's not Dr. Walter Martin because that's the one everyone will think of when I say this. So, I just want you to know I'm not talking about him. And I'm about to say something negative about the guy.

I'm not talking about Dr. Martin. But it was a man who was on around the same time that Dr. Martin started the Bible Answer Man program. There was another program by another, hosted by another guy who held like eight earned degrees.

He's a rather famous Christian author and apologist. And I would have guessed this from hearing him on the radio, but I've heard people who went on tours with him to the Holy Land and stuff. The guy is cantankerous and hard to get along with and so forth.

But I remember on the radio, let's say his name was Dr. Jones. It wasn't, but we'll call him Dr. Jones. I would call him on the air and say, Brother Jones, I have a question.

And he'd say, that's Dr. Jones. He said, I earned that degree. I have the right to be called Dr. Jones.

So, I changed the channel. I'm not interested in any spiritual counsel from someone who is so far removed from the teaching and the spirit of Christ as that man was. But I don't think he's alone.

I think when people have earned degrees, sometimes they don't because they care about the degrees. And they think that makes them important. And surely it works for them.

I mean, there's no question about it. I mean, I think a person should be recognized for what he's earned. But if someone fails to do so, it's not like the guy needs to correct them and straighten them out.

I'll make sure you call me by doctor or rabbi or whatever it is. So, anyway, these are the, this is the mentality of the spiritual leaders that Jesus had to watch out for. And the reason you have to be aware of them is because you can pick that right up from them in your religious life.

When I think of some of the wrong-headed things that pastors do wholesale in the American church, I don't blame all those pastors directly because they picked it up from the pastors they sat under. And they picked it up from the pastors they sat under. This has been perpetuated because it's infectious.

They went to a church when they were younger where the pastor had status and so forth. I mean, Donna was telling me about a church in the Monterey Bay area where the church buys him, what, a Rolls-Royce or something? What, a Mercedes? A Lincoln Continental every year? Him and his wife both get new Lincoln Continentals and fancy suits and expensive watches and so forth. And this is a church made up of all rich people, right? No, it's going to be poor black people.

It's a poor black church. And the pastor, you know, expects to wear Rolex and have extremely expensive suits and a new Lincoln Continental bought for him and one for his wife every year by the congregation. And what then? Mink coats for his wife? That's the moving on up, you know, mentality, isn't it? Yeah.

You know, and I have to say, I would fault black ministers less than white ministers for that. Although it's blameworthy no matter who does it. I mean, he should know better.

But, I mean, in a sense, you know, black people at one time were held down here and perhaps they do feel like this is, you know, a way of showing that God has, you know, brought them out of whatever they were in before. But still, that's not a good enough excuse to tell you the truth. It's just, you know, I'm sure that pastor went to a church where the pastor did the same thing.

And it's just a cultural thing. And that's why you need to beware of those people. Because when they do that, the young Christian who's in their church begins to think that's the impression you get of what Christianity is.

And it'll either repulse you or suck you in. If it repulses you, it might repulse you right out the door of the church and back to the world. Or it might suck you in so you become just like them.

Especially if you're planning to go into the ministry. You know, you do to a very large extent, if you feel like going to the ministry, your concept of what a ministry looks like is based very much on the role models that have been in your life. And so, these guys, these scribes, were in the position to be role models for other younger men who wanted to be servants of God.

And picking up those attitudes of getting honor from men and having status because of what they wore, where they sit, or what titles they have earned. Jesus, beware of that. That is so scary.

That is so dangerous. And he said about them in verse 40, They devour widows' houses,

and for a pretense make long prayers, because they'll receive greater condemnation. That's what James said, that teachers will receive a greater judgment, a stricter judgment.

James got that statement from Jesus here. They receive a greater condemnation because they pretend at religiosity and spirituality while they are being just as corrupt as other people. Maybe more corrupt because their positions of respect that they hold and power and influence actually puts them in a position to take advantage of people more.

And so they devour widows' houses. That apparently means that they cheat widows out of their estates. In Israel, in the Bible, in the Old Testament even, one of the great complaints God had was that the widows often get cheated or they get mistreated in court of law because their widows did not have a man to defend them.

And in that society, it was a man's world. And men could just take advantage. I'm not talking about sexual advantage.

I'm talking about take advantage of them in terms of their property rights and so forth. And widows and orphans were the ones most vulnerable. James actually says that the true religion is to look out for widows and orphans and their affliction and to keep oneself unspoiled from the world.

But these guys typically took advantage of widows. And by the way, you know, I heard, I've heard many times, I believe it's a true statistic, that many of these Christian television programs get the majority of their support from widows, basically. Widows who don't have, you know, older women sometimes, you know, they're just easily duped by religious leaders.

And these guys who have these fake, you know, they sell prayer cloths, they send me this much money, I'll go up in my prayer tower and pray, and Jesus appeared to me and said, I'm going to die if I don't get eight million dollars from you guys by next week. I mean, all these stupid gimmicks that you'd think any rational person would say, boy, you think I'm dumb, don't you? Well, some people are dumb because they actually get that money. There was a guy named Gene Scott on TV for years and years and years.

He owned a television station and a pastor at a church, and he would just stare at the camera and say, I'm not going to say another word until we get \$50,000 pledged in here. Call right now. He'd sit there chewing on his cigar and cussing.

And he was a pastor, and that money would come in because he threatened not to say another word. He'd have these singers from his church choir come in and sing on TV. They weren't very good.

They were just amateurs, but he'd have them sing on his TV program, and he said, I'm going to have them keep singing this song until we get the \$100,000 pledge. It's like he's

holding the audience for ransom. You're going to have to listen to these people sing until you pledge money.

I don't know why people didn't know there's an on-off switch on their television. You don't have to listen to those people sing. You don't have to pay to not hear them.

I mean, this guy was on the air for decades. He's dead now, but he's... Someone was sending him millions of dollars every year. I think, where is that money coming from? And if you look at it, studies have been done about that.

It comes mostly from widows living on their husband's pension. And somehow these ministers... Well, I mean, let's face it. If you look at some of these... I don't want to name names, but I named Gene Scott.

If you look at some of these guys... I mean, even Jim and Tammy Baker. We can talk about them because they were universally scandalized. And Tammy's dead now, I think.

Look at their whole appearance on TV. Who does that appeal to? I don't know anyone that appeals to... It must be old ladies. I mean, really old ladies.

All that big hair and all that makeup and stuff. Is there any normal young person that thinks that's even easy to look at? It's clear that the whole image and the whole presentation is to prey on the sensitivities of older women. Widows.

And to get their money. And what happens when they get their money? Well, it's been exposed many times. Many exposés have been done.

You know, they... Send me your prayer request with \$50 and I'll pray for you. Well, they find the envelope essentially in the garbage can with the prayer request still folded up in it and the money taken out. You know? They're robbing widows' houses.

They're stealing from widows. And for a pretense, they make long prayers. I mean, it's amazing that Jesus could nail the religious leaders of His day with that precise thing.

And 2,000 years later, the religious leaders haven't learned that that's... You know, they've been exposed by Jesus about that. And it's the same thing they do. Now, verse 41, speaking of widows.

Now, Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money in the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Which is good.

But not as good as one poor widow who came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrants. Now, it's rather interesting that Mark would say, which make a quadrants. Because mites would be coins that would be known to the Jews in Palestine.

They were like pennies. Like little copper coins. Not worth hardly anything at all.

But a quadrants, which was worth two mites, was a Roman coin. And the fact that Mark saw it as necessary to tell his readers the amount that she gave in terms of Roman currency is one of the ways we know that Mark wrote to a Roman audience. Whereas Matthew, everything in his gospel is geared toward a Jewish audience.

It's clear that Mark had a Roman audience in view. The fact that he would translate the amount of the coins that she put into the treasury into a Roman currency. It's a dead giveaway that he thought Romans would be reading his book.

And so he called his disciples to him and said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury. For they all put in out of their abundance. But she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.

Now, apparently what she put in was 100 percent. And she might as well, two pence wasn't enough to live on anyway. You know, sometimes the less you have, the more you want to cling to it and not give it away.

At least me, I'm that way. I know because I have on many occasions, many, not recently, thank God. But there have been many times in my adult life when I was raising my kids, been down to my very last dollar.

And did not have any idea, I've never known where the next dollar is going to come from. But I don't usually get down to just my last dollar. But I've gotten down to it many times.

And I remember hanging on to that last dollar like I didn't hang on to anything else, you know. Just because I didn't know where the next one was going to be. I better spend this wisely.

Well, you can't spend a dollar wisely. You can't get anything for a dollar. But you know, when it's your last dollar, you think, I just can't get rid of this.

I remember once it was less than a dollar. I remember my wife, my wife liked to chew bubble gum. And she liked those three cent little individually wrapped bubble gum things.

And once she was going for a walk down to the store that was about half a mile from the school. And she said, I'm going to get some bubble gum. She says, I have two cents, do you have a penny? And I didn't.

We didn't have another one in the house. We didn't have one to our name. We didn't have anything in the bank.

We did not have, we had two pennies to our name. She had them both. Two mice.

We had two mice. I said, do you have a penny? I want to buy some gum. I said, I don't have a penny.

So she said, I'll pray and God will provide a penny. She walked down there and she found three pennies in the parking lot. Now to me, that's a great story.

But I've heard people, some people when they heard me tell that story, boy, you are a horrible husband. You know, you let your wife, your family finances get down to two pennies. I would never let my wife scrounge for coins in the store parking lot to buy gum.

Well, different folks are different than me. I don't have much choice about it. But the thing is, there have been numerous times we got down to our last dollar and I was much more careful about hanging on to that last dollar than any previous dollar before I got down to the last.

I remember once we got down to our last dollar and I held on to it, I held on to it, I held on to it. And after I held on to it for about a week, we finally had to buy something. I don't remember what it was, but I finally had to go and spend that dollar.

Gradually I had to go and spend that dollar. And when I got home, now nobody but God and my wife knew the money we had or didn't have. That's never been anyone else's business except God and my wife.

And sometimes it wasn't her business either. Only when she asked. But I spent that dollar, and that day someone came to our door with a gift.

It was \$400, which was a lot of money at that time for us. And we lived on that for weeks. But it came the day I released that \$1.

I'd been holding on to it for a week and finally gave it up and the money came. Well, that \$400 lasted for weeks, and then we got down to \$1 of that. That one, too.

This is a true story. I remember we got down to it. We had \$1 left of that \$400, and we'd spent it as we needed to.

But then I held on to that dollar for as long as I could. I'm pretty sure I held on to it for a week, and I just didn't want to spend it. Because if I spent it, I'd be broke.

I know. You're broke when you have it. But it's true.

I just thought, I can't release my last dollar. But the time came, I had to. I don't remember what we had to get.

You can't get much, but I had to get something. So I spent that dollar. And that day, I was driving out of the basin.

A couple walked up and handed me an envelope. It had \$200 in it. So I just found my experience.

And there were other times, too, that I'd have our last dollar. I'd hang on, hang on, and then I'd think. Eventually, I learned that the sooner I'd give it, the sooner I'd be broke.

And that's what God's waiting for. God's waiting for me to be broke so he can provide some money. I was keeping myself poor by holding on to that money.

And so I know when you're down to that low amount, that just releasing your grip on that last thing is the hardest thing to do. But this woman gave all she had was these two little coins. We shouldn't buy anything with it.

It was all she had. I don't know where she got it. Maybe she begged or something.

But she had two copper coins that were like worth less than two pennies of our currency. And she just put it all in there. Now, big sacrifice for her.

And we don't know how God provided for her after that. It would be interesting to know her story. But we don't follow her.

We just, we know one thing she got, and that was Jesus' personal commendation. I suppose I'd rather have that than almost any other reward for giving my last penny. You know, just have Jesus memorialize you, even anonymously, since we don't know her name.

But I mean, this woman has gone down in history. She doesn't even know it. She probably didn't even see Jesus standing there.

You know? She just did what she was going to do. She just gave all she had. And Jesus, for all eternity and all time since then, has memorialized her as the woman who gave all, the one who gave more than all the rich people gave.

And she probably never even learned that Jesus said that about her or saw her. I'm sure she never had occasion to read the scriptures, I'm sure, or know that was her. Isn't that funny? She's like world famous.

And she doesn't even know it. Never learned it in her lifetime, I bet. But you see, a lot of times we don't know.

But making the complete sacrifice, the offering of everything, that cannot go unnoticed by Jesus. He notices that. He might not make you world famous for it, but it's enough that he says, I see that.

I see that you've given all that you have. And I'm much more impressed with that than I am with the large gifts of people who don't give all that they have. And so Jesus then,

again, kind of teaches the same thing here that he teaches in so many other places.

And that is that though the Israelites tended to see money and affluence as a mark of God's blessing on a person, and therefore of a person's spirituality, Jesus kind of had, if anything, the reverse. Not that a person had to be poor to be spiritual, but the poor were more likely to be spiritual, because they had their trust in God. That's what it says in James chapter 2. It says, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? The poor of the world tend to be rich in faith because they have to be.

And so this woman, you know, the rich guys could give a lot of money as long as they had a lot to fall back on. This woman didn't have anything to fall back on, even when she had her money. There wasn't anything there to fall back on, so she just gives it away.

And though she's commended for it, it probably didn't, I don't know how much it's, I don't know how much it mattered to her. It's a little bit like that widow in the story of Elijah during the famine. She had only a little bit left.

She had a little handful of meal and a little bit of oil, and she and her son were going to have their last meal and dine, and here comes this prophet. And she's not even Jewish, she's Gentile. And the Jewish prophet comes up and says, give me something to eat.

And she says, I don't have anything except this little bit. I have a handful of meal and a little oil. I was going to bake this up and have a little kind of muffin for me and my son, and then we're going to die of starvation because there's nothing else.

And Elijah says, that's fine, do that, but give me some first. Typical preacher, huh? And so she does it, and she gives him really what little she has. And we know that she and not any other widow that we know of was spared through the whole famine because God kept providing every day more in the bin, more flour, more oil, so that she and her son ate enough until the famine ended, and many others starved.

She remained poor because actually God only provided enough every day for her, but she had to give first to God, and once she gave to God, that was an act of faith on her part. We know God provided. I'm going to suggest that although we don't know what became of this widow, any widow that gets Jesus' attention like this and gets that kind of condemnation, a commendation, I'm sure that she is provided for as much as that widow that Elijah visited.

It makes you curious, though, some of these people who kind of have these, they come into some of these stories with Jesus, like the rich young ruler. What happened to him later, you know? So it would be wonderful to know those things, but we will not know some of those things until we go to heaven, I guess. Well, this is a good place to stop because the next place is a good place to start next time.

Chapter 13 is the Olivet Discourse, and that will be a fun thing to study next time. So let's stop there.