

The wisdom of God enabled Jesus to not only escape the gotcha questions put before Him, but it also took His critics to the basis of their questions which should have caused them to examine their own hearts. The way in which His answered convicted them discouraged them from laying anymore verbal traps. If they were going to stop Him, it would have to be through deceit and false witnesses (Mark 14:56<sup>i</sup>).

In these last days before the crucifixion, Jesus was teaching the crowd in ways that will correct some of the false teachings of their leaders. In today's passage, He is addressing the false perception that the Messiah is just another Davidic king. He will also point out the hypocrisy of their religious leaders.

Now it is Jesus' turn to ask the religious elites a question. <sup>41</sup> *But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son?"* Luke 20:41 It was a question for all those religious factions that were trying to trap Him with their philosophical conundrums, those who were just sure a carpenter from Nazareth couldn't be the messiah. He asked, "How can they say that the messiah is David's son?" Pharisees and Essenes and many of the scribes knew the prophets predicted an heir of David would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16<sup>ii</sup>), but they did not realize He would be divine. How could He be a man and be divine? That is how Romans and Egyptians saw their gods. They believed their leaders were gods in human form. That was blasphemous to Jews. Jesus' question should have caused them to reconsider whether that was possible.

<sup>42</sup> *For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, <sup>43</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.""* Luke 20:42,43 Jesus presented His question from Psalm 110:1, a verse that is quoted fourteen times in the New Testament always referring to Jesus. There are two different words in Hebrew for Lord in this verse. The all capital LORD refers to YHWH, the eternal God of Israel's sacred name. The second "Lord" is the word, *adon*, which means master. YHWH said to David's master, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." This was a favorite messianic passage that encouraged Israel to believe another great king was coming who would conquer all their enemies. In some prophecies long after David, this One who was to come is even called David (Hosea 3:5<sup>iii</sup>). But remember, David means beloved and God called Jesus His beloved son (Matthew 3:17<sup>iv</sup>).

This prophecy gave hope to Israel that their glory days would someday be restored. When Solomon was king, all the surrounding nations paid tribute to Israel. None dared to attack Israel because it was at its height of power. After generations of idolatry Israel declined and was taken into captivity. They dreamed of a day when a leader would come and restore the former glory. "Enemies as a footstool" meant complete subjugation. Instead of being taxed, they would be taxing the surrounding nations.

Jesus' wasn't questioning that prediction but was asking who was speaking to whom. YHWH is speaking to David's Lord. Who is David's Lord? That was the question they had to consider. Hebrews consider the older as greater than the younger. Only scribes were considered more honorable than their fathers. That was countercultural.

<sup>44</sup> *David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"* Luke 20:44 Here was one of the proofs in Scripture that the messiah would be human and divine. He is the son of

David and the Lord of David. The people knew David's Lord was none other than God, for David was a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13:14<sup>v</sup>).

The psalm goes on to say that the Messiah is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4<sup>vi</sup>). The Messiah is an eternal King-Priest. The book of Hebrews uses this passage to remind us that Jesus is greater than the angels (Hebrews 1:13<sup>vii</sup>) and how His priesthood is greater than the sons of Aaron (Hebrews 5:4-10<sup>viii</sup>; 7:20,21<sup>ix</sup>). Peter referred to the passage in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:34-36<sup>x</sup>).

Jesus could have used Isaiah 9:6<sup>xi</sup>. That chapter tells us the Messiah is a child who is born to us and a son given to us. The people were familiar with that passage already, and they could not grasp the truth in it. The Isaiah passage tells us the Messiah will be called Mighty God and Everlasting Father. One could say it is what He will be called but not who He actually is, so there was a way around that declaration. But Psalm 110 clearly indicates that though the Messiah is the son of David, He is also David's Lord!

Jesus' enemies knew what Jesus was insinuating. They knew the passage and they would not answer His question because it went against what they wanted to believe. They chose to reject the very Scriptures they spent their life studying so they could maintain their positions and wealth. In other words, they had every reason to believe, even more than the common people, but intentionally chose to reject their Messiah and kill Him. Not only is intentional willful sin more wicked than other sins, but this act is knowingly against God Himself. It is an attempt to dethrone God. It was also intentionally misleading the very people they were to guide to the light of Scripture. It would be hard to imagine a viler act. It is the inspiration of Satan (Isaiah 14:13,14<sup>xii</sup>).

I think everyone at some time in their life comes to this point of having to decide one way or the other between the love of God in His Son or the things of this world. For those who lead others astray there must be a special place in hell. Accordingly, James 3:1<sup>xiii</sup> tells us teachers will be judged with greater strictness.

The truth that Messiah is the Lord of David and not merely another sinful human king is the point Jesus was addressing. But the Psalm has more for us to consider. When Rabbi quoted a verse, the crowd was expected to think of the rest of the passage. Lord help us know the Scriptures as well as they did. We have even more reason to know it than they did as we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the New Testament revelations clarifying many of the deeper meanings. But we tend to be too lazy to take studying the Word as a serious lifelong discipline. Orthodox Jews do, but how many of us value God's Word like that?

The Psalm goes on to speak of how the Messiah's followers will offer themselves freely to His service in holy garments, which is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Colossians 3:12-14<sup>xiv</sup>). It concludes by declaring that there will be a day when He takes over, conquering the nations that oppose Him. It ends with an allusion to Gideon when God had him thin down his forces at the brook. That tells us that followers of Jesus who resist evil in the world will be few, and that the Messiah will be ever vigilant. That certainly did not sit well with the scribes, Pharisees, and the Sanhedrin.

*<sup>45</sup> And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, <sup>46</sup> "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, Luke 20:45,46)*

Jesus boldly said this so all could hear. There were surely scribes in that crowd who were about to get some tough love. Some of them had been in on the plot to trap Jesus. If tensions between Jesus and the religious leaders weren't high enough already, they were about to reach a peak.

“Jeremias, the great New Testament authority, says in his book *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* that all the people rose respectfully when a scribe passed by, and that only tradesmen busy at their work were exempt. They were greeted respectfully as ‘Rabbi’ (“my great one”) or ‘Master’ or ‘Father.’ When the wealthy gave feasts, scribes were considered necessary ornaments to adorn the meal. They were always given a place of honor, reclining to the right or left of the host. The teachers of the Law were honored above the aged, even above their own parents. When they came to the synagogue, they sat in the place of ultimate honor-facing the congregation with their backs against the chest holding the Torah, so all could see their pious visages.”<sup>xv</sup>

So much for ecclesiastical garb! Set apart for God's service is a matter of the heart and not the dress. Special clothing that says, "Behold, I am holy," tends toward vanity. If your life of service to others hasn't set you apart, special clothes aren't going to help.

They loved those greetings. "O Great wise one, share with us country bumpkins some of your great learning!" Some of those Galileans to whom people from Jerusalem referred to as ignorant had memorized the five books of Moses before they were thirteen, spoke two or three languages, a constantly talked about the interpretation of Scripture. The honored Scribe had studied the Scriptures all his life but with the lens of the teachers who taught the messiah was simply another Davidic king. **Because of those preconceived ideas they missed two of the greatest themes of Scripture: grace and the divine Messiah who would save us from our sins.**

They loved the best seats in the synagogue. Hughes thinks they were in front of the Torah closet facing the congregation. "Look how important I am. I sit next to the sacred Scriptures!" And they loved the places of honor at feasts. It reminds me of politicians at a fund raiser. The host is obligated to put them in a prominent place and announce their presence. It says, "I'm so superior to all you peons." All these things pointed to their egos.

None of us are exempt from the subtle demands of ego, wanting to be noticed, respected, even honored. It makes us feel good about ourselves. But pride is the destructive power of the flesh warring against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17<sup>xvi</sup>). Remember how Jesus took the little child beside Him and told the disciples the greatest was the least of all (Luke 9:46-48<sup>xvii</sup>). But beware, for we can even take pride in being a servant.

I remember someone telling me how they noticed I was always serving others. My ego lapped it up, but then the Spirit of the Lord in me rebuked my carnal love of the praise of men (John 12:43<sup>xviii</sup>). We should thank God for encouraging words, but always be on guard as to how we receive them. We should remember that if there is any good in us, we owe it to the mercy and grace of God. Corrie Ten Boom said she thanked people for compliments and each night would gather them together like a bouquet of roses and give them to the Lord, knowing all that was good in her came from Him.

False humility is pride in disguise. Real humility comes from letting God reveal your weaknesses to you and seeing where you would be without His gracious

intervention in your life. Then we can be shown what He has done in us despite our carnal natures that were crucified with Him (Galatians 2:20<sup>xix</sup>). And when He humbles us when we misspeak or do something that looks silly in front of others, don't justify it or defend yourself, but instead thank the Lord for keeping your pride in check. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9<sup>xx</sup>). That is when His power rests upon us! God gave Paul an affliction so he would not become prideful over the visions he had seen, and as a result the power of God flowed through his life.

*<sup>47</sup> who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.*" Luke 20:47 While desiring all that honor from men, they take what they can from widows, even their very homes! A local minister in our town was imprisoned for taking things from the home of a dying man he was attending to. I don't know if it was theft or a gift, but the court saw it as theft. God's heart goes out to the weak, the widow and orphan, those who are in need and helpless. James tells us that religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is to look after orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27<sup>xxi</sup>). What then does God feel about those with ecclesiastical authority taking advantage of them? What a hypocritical example that set before the people to sit in the synagogue in a place of honor while making a widow homeless!

Jesus addressed their pretense of long prayers in the Sermon on the Mount. He said these hypocrites pray so that others will see them (Matthew 6:5<sup>xxii</sup>). In Luke 18<sup>xxiii</sup> we read of the Pharisee who stood in the temple and prayed a prayer for all to hear, a prayer of thanksgiving for his righteousness. Not only do they have no heavenly reward for all their pious efforts, but the greater condemnation awaits them. Can anyone try to impress people with their greatness while declaring the greatness of our God? The two themes are incongruous. To exalt God, one must humble him or herself.

I have met several of these scribes' equivalents. They have no time for the orphan and widow, except to collect their donations or sell them their books. They insulate themselves from the laity. If they have disciples - they are kept at arms' length. They have arrived and need their space.

Today the TV so called evangelists are still devouring widows' houses. How many have mortgaged their homes to give large amounts to these frauds because they were promised a great return? I know one prominent evangelical pastor in Phoenix who encouraged widows to mortgage their homes to help finance the building of a bigger sanctuary. The heart of man never changes (Jeremiah 17:9<sup>xxiv</sup>)!

While it is easy to condemn this type of hypocrisy, where does it sneak into our own hearts? I see it in families when a will is read. I see the fight over property. Save your family from this by making your last will and testament very clear and legal. But I have also seen real Christians take the high road to their loss even when the situation was questionable.

When greed meets a desire for the spiritual admiration of others, the result is hypocrisy that drives the inquiring soul from the church. No wonder Jesus said theirs is the greater condemnation, or in plain English, they will be punished most severely. May God give us a true picture of how far we have yet to go to reach Christlikeness that our humility might be genuine. May He save our hearts from greed in all its disguises. May our prayers always be for God's ears without a thought for what others might think of the

words. May we truly learn what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 12:30<sup>xxv</sup>).

This bold confrontation of religious hypocrisy was bound to end in the leaders crucifying Jesus, but He wanted people to know the truth. He knew something they and their leaders didn't know or understand, that as the Lamb of God, He would be the ultimate sacrifice for their sins and ours (1 Peter 1:18,19<sup>xxvi</sup>). In fact, Jesus was practicing what He preached regarding loving our enemies (Matthew 5:44<sup>xxvii</sup>). Confronting them with the truth was not only helpful to the crowd, but to the scribes who were plotting His death. Even if they didn't believe He was the Messiah, after His resurrection they would have to think again about His love that spoke the truth regardless of the results to Himself.

This is an area of Christlikeness that many of us struggle with. Ravi Zacharias so exemplified this in the way that he would answer his critics. No matter how caustic the question, he always answered respectfully and with gentleness. He always thanked the questioner for the question, even when it was a thinly veiled attack. He has gone to his reward, but I pray that his Christlikeness would encourage us all to be more like Jesus with the Lord's love for the lost inquirer, no matter the intentions behind their questions or attacks. We live in an era where the media is stoking the divisions and hatred in our nation for better ratings or to promote their personal ideologies. We will stand out as different if we refuse to join in the hateful rhetoric and show love and grace instead. We don't need to compromise the truth to be accepted, but when it comes from a heart of love and compassion, people will often realize the difference in us.

Psalms 110 teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God, our eternal High Priest. It also teaches us He will return to reign over all the earth. When we know that is true, we don't have to respond out of fear or feel threatened. Our humility is bolstered with faith and trust in the One who loves us and gave Himself for us. He is destined to reign over all and we with Him. Let us then have confidence that in being the least, the servant of others, we are truly great in the eyes of the only One whose opinion matters (Luke 9:48<sup>xxviii</sup>). May His life flow through you and me as we serve others with His love.

#### Questions:

- 1 Review the setting of this passage?
- 2 What is Jesus attempting to relay to the people?
- 3 What was His question and what did it teach?
- 4 Why couldn't they answer?
- 5 What does the rest of the psalm teach us?
- 6 Why did Jesus confront the scribes' behavior?
- 7 What was the real problem with them?
- 8 How does that problem tempt us?
- 9 Why is their judgment greater? Application?
- 10 How should we respond to those who oppose us?

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<sup>i</sup> **Mark 14:56 (ESV)**

<sup>56</sup> For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

<sup>ii</sup> **2 Samuel 7:12-16 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

<sup>iii</sup> **Hosea 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

<sup>iv</sup> **Matthew 3:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

<sup>v</sup> **1 Samuel 13:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

<sup>vi</sup> **Psalms 110:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

<sup>vii</sup> **Hebrews 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

<sup>viii</sup> **Hebrews 5:4-10 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. <sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; <sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” <sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

<sup>ix</sup> **Hebrews 7:20-21 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, <sup>21</sup> but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’”

<sup>x</sup> **Acts 2:34-36 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.” <sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

<sup>xi</sup> **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>xii</sup> **Isaiah 14:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

<sup>xiii</sup> **James 3:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

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<sup>xv</sup> Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth

<sup>xvi</sup> **Galatians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Luke 9:46-48 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. <sup>47</sup> But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side <sup>48</sup> and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

<sup>xviii</sup> **John 12:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

<sup>xix</sup> **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

<sup>xx</sup> **2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

<sup>xxi</sup> **James 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Matthew 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Luke 18:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

<sup>xxv</sup> **Mark 12:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

<sup>xxvi</sup> **1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Matthew 5:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Luke 9:48 (ESV)**

<sup>48</sup> and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."