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Sermon Summary #39

What to do when Jesus asks you a Question Mark 12:35-37

Every so often, usually around Christmas and Easter, either the Discovery Channel or the History Channel on television will run a program titled, “Who is Jesus?” I tend **not** to spend much time watching them, largely because the consultants who provide the answer to that question are typically liberal theologians and historical scholars who reject the authority of Scripture and the inspired portrayal of Jesus that we find there.

As I’ve said to you many times, our study of Mark’s gospel is all about answering that question. In fact, when it comes to evaluating the eternal significance of life’s most important questions, all others pale in comparison, all others take a back seat, all others must be relegated to a secondary status. And that isn’t to say these questions aren’t important. Think about it for a moment. It’s important that we ask and answer questions like, “Should the U.S. pull out its military presence from Afghanistan?” Or again, “What can we do to fix our economy and reduce our skyrocketing national debt?” Or again, “What, if anything, can be done to improve our public education in America?” Or again, “How can we reduce the number of abortions in American?” I could list countless other important questions, but I trust you get my point.

But when viewed from the perspective of eternity, no other question really matters. When it comes down to the issue of life and death and heaven and hell, the only question that counts, the only question that must be answered, is: “Who is Jesus?”

Don’t count on the Discovery Channel to give you an answer. Don’t look to the History Channel or CNN or even Fox News to provide you with a response. In fact, you probably need to avoid a lot of the religious and Christian networks as well. The only final, comprehensive, and definitive answer to this question is found in Scripture. The only answer you can trust when it comes to the matter of your eternal destiny is the one that Jesus himself provides.

You see, it’s one thing for me to ask you the question, “Who is Jesus?” It’s another thing entirely when Jesus himself asks you that question. And that is precisely what he does here in Mark 12:35-37.

When I read a passage like Mark 12:35-37, I have to stop and catch my breath. It has that effect on me for a couple of reasons. In the first place, as I just said, it is Jesus who here turns the tables on all who would quiz him. **He** now asks the questions. The Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes and best legal minds of the day have been pummeling Jesus with questions ever since he made his first public appearance. It all came to a head beginning with Mark 11. Or better still it all came to a head when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem at the beginning of what we call Holy Week or Passion Week, the final week of our Lord’s earthly life.

“By what authority are you doing these things?” (Mark 11:28).

“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Mark 12:14).

“If a woman has been married seven times in this age, whose wife will she be in the age to come?” (Mark 12:19ff).

“What is the first and greatest commandment?” (Mark 12:28).

As you will recall, on each occasion the aim of those asking such questions was to trap Jesus, to ensnare him, to cause him to fall into some verbal gaffe so that they might use it against him. But each time he responded with truth and clarity and **shut their mouths**. In fact, we read in **Mark 12:34** that “after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.” Well, I guess not! You can almost hear them muttering as they slipped away into the shadows: “Man, this isn’t getting us anywhere. Every time we open our mouths he makes fools of us!”

The second reason this brief passage strikes me the way it does is because of the **shocking contrast** it presents to us regarding who Jesus is. It isn’t too far off, in fact it’s only days away, when Jesus will be arrested, stripped, savagely beaten, spit upon, mocked, a crown of thorns pressed in upon his brow, and eventually nailed to a cross.

And yet it is here, in Mark 12:35-37, that we see a far different portrait of the carpenter from Nazareth. Here, coming from his own lips, is a description of Jesus as the Son of the Most High God who will soon be seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. Here, coming from his own lips, is a declaration by Jesus that it is beneath *his own feet* that all the enemies of God will be progressively but most assuredly and finally subjected.

How can this be? How can the man who will be treated so savagely in only a few days say with such confidence and authority that he is David's Lord, that he is to be exalted to the place of highest dignity and power, that he is going to utterly subdue and defeat all those who oppose him and the kingdom of God that he came to establish? It is, I hope you will come to see, a truly breathtaking text!

So, what I'm asking you to do today is turn your attention away from the image of Jesus as a baby in a manger. Don't think of him primarily as a twelve-year-old boy in the Temple, confounding the leading biblical scholars of his day. Try not to envision him as an itinerant teacher traveling the dusty roads of Palestine, healing the sick, driving out demons, and ministering to the needy. Neither do I want you to think of him just yet as a sacrifice for sinners, hanging suspended from a cross. It isn't because these images and portraits of Jesus aren't true. They surely are!

But today Jesus himself is forcing us to think of him in profoundly different terms. ***He is forcing upon us a portrait of himself as the ascended, exalted, and enthroned Son of God, seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, slowly but surely bringing all his enemies into subjection to his sovereign rule.***

As you know, because I've repeatedly pointed this out, many people today who make no claim to being Christian persist in their praise of Jesus as a man. They lift him up on a pedestal as a paradigm of human decency and wisdom and kindness. And of course he is precisely that. But these are the very ones who steadfastly refuse to acknowledge him as risen, living Lord and sovereign ruling King over all that exists. They like him as a man, and openly admit that he was the very best of men, but they repudiate him as God.

I've said before and I'll say it again, I'm sick and tired of such silliness. It is nothing less than a mask behind which these people hide their unbelief. Such glowing compliments are in reality implicit denials that Jesus was anything **more** than a man. Of course Jesus was a man. He was the only perfect man. But if he was *only* a man you are hopelessly lost in your sins.

So listen to Jesus himself as he asks the religious leaders of his day, "Who am I?" Listen to Jesus as he himself asks you and me today, "Who am I?" Is he nothing more than mere human, or is he also God in human flesh, now seated and enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father?

So we turn now to the question Jesus asked of them, the question that he asks today of us as well.

It's important to remember that Jesus had a purpose in asking this question different from that of the religious leaders. He wasn't trying to win a theological argument. It wasn't his design to embarrass them or reveal their stupidity. He wanted to compel them by their own logic to recognize who he is. He wanted to take the very OT Scriptures that they affirmed as the Word of God and elicit from them a confession that he is who he claimed to be.

The question itself is simple enough. All the scribes and students of the OT acknowledged that the Messiah was the son of David. This was in fact one of the most popular titles for the Messiah. It has appeared on several occasions in Mark's gospel.

In asking the question, "How can the scribes say that the Christ [Messiah] is the son of David," Jesus **isn't** saying he **isn't** son of David. He's simply trying to compel them to acknowledge that he is far, far more!

To make his point, Jesus quotes from Psalm 110:1. Many find it difficult to grasp what this verse is saying, so let me lay it out for you in very explicit terms. Part of the problem is that with all these personal pronouns we struggle to know who is in view.

"The Lord [i.e., God the Father] said to my [i.e., David's] Lord [i.e., the Messiah, God the Son], 'Sit at my [the Father's] right hand, until I [the Father] put your [the Messiah's] enemies under your [the

Messiah's] feet.' David himself calls him [i.e., the Messiah] Lord. So how is he [the Messiah] his [David's] son?"

The point is that here in Psalm 110, David, king of Israel, refers to the Messiah as his "Lord"! So, Jesus turns to the people around him and asks this question:

"If the Messiah is no more than a man, if he is no more than the human, physical descendant of David, how is it that David calls him 'Lord'?"

For David to refer to the Messiah as "my Lord" is evidence that the one described is in a position of superiority to the speaker, namely David. And when David said it, according to v. 36, it was under the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration.

The Messiah, therefore, whoever he may be, has to be God!

Two other statements here must be noted.

(1) God the Father says to the Messiah, "***Sit at my right hand***" (v. 36a).

To be seated at someone's "right hand" was symbolic of the highest honor possible and the greatest authority imaginable. In the OT, God's "right hand" symbolized many things: victory (Ps. 20:6; 44:3; Isa. 41:10), the position of favor (1 Kings 2:19; Ps. 80:18; Jer. 22:24), and power (Exod. 15:6; Ps. 89:13; Isa. 48:13). To sit at the right hand of God is to rule and exercise dominion and justice. There is no higher privilege or power.

Later, in Mark 14:62, Jesus applies this to himself. The high priest demands that Jesus answer the question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man *seated at the right hand of Power*, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 62).

What does this mean for you and me?

It means Jesus is in that place of power and authority from which he pours out upon us the Holy Spirit! Acts 2:32-35 . . .

It means that our salvation is guaranteed and rock solid and that Jesus is ever ready to intercede on our behalf when we come under accusation by the Devil! Romans 8:31-34 . . .

It means that you likewise, if you believe and trust in Jesus the Messiah, are seated in the heavenlies and thus are secure in his love! Ephesians 2:4a, 6 . . . ; Col. 3:1-4 . . .

(2) God the Father says to the Messiah, "Sit at my right hand, ***until I put your enemies under your feet***" (v. 36b).

The "enemies" in view here are not only human but primarily **demonic**. All the spiritual forces of darkness have been conquered and are being progressively brought into subjection to the Lordship of Jesus. See Ephesians 1:20-22; 1 Cor. 15:24-27a.

This, then, is a **present reality** and not merely a future hope. "The brow once crowned with thorns now wears the diadem of universal sovereignty; and that hand, once nailed to the cross, now holds in it the sceptre of unlimited dominion. He who lay in the tomb has ascended the throne of (an) unbounded empire" (Eadie, 104).

Jesus is saying in no uncertain terms: "This is all about me! I am the Messiah who was prophesied centuries earlier in the OT Scriptures. I am the Messiah David had in mind when he wrote Psalm 110. I am the Messiah the people only days ago hailed and praised as I made my entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. And as the Messiah, **I am more than David's son. I am God's Son!**"

Jesus is inviting the scribes to reconsider whether or not "son of David" is adequate to explain the Messiah. Is it enough merely to refer to him in this way? Jesus isn't repudiating the title. He is indeed the son of David. As a man he stands in direct descent from David. And son of David was a clear and widely acknowledged

Messianic title in the first century.

But it is as if Jesus is saying to the people of his day the same thing I repeatedly say to the people of ours. Is it ok merely to acknowledge Jesus as a good man, a wise man, a great leader, etc.? No. If he is nothing more than a man he is not good. Likewise Jesus is challenging the people of his day by asking the question: Are you willing to go beyond affirming my descent as a man from the line of David and to acknowledge that I am the Son of God as well?

So here, then, is what this short but incredibly powerful passage is all about. Yes, says Jesus, I am the son of David. I am a man. But as true as that may be, it isn't enough! It is perfectly appropriate to refer to me as son of David. But it is not sufficient. The Messiah, the Christ, is also David's Lord. He is not merely David's son. He is God's Son! David would never have addressed a mere human descendant of his as Lord. A father or grandfather never addresses his son or grandson as Lord!

This is *not* a *denial* of the Messiah's Davidic sonship, but rather a *demand* that they acknowledge that more is required. Yes, the Messiah is David's son, but he is also God's Son. Are you willing to embrace this truth? Well, are you?

Jesus is no mere successor to David or a replica of him. He is David's Lord, with an authority far higher than any earthly throne and with a dignity far greater and more majestic than any human could bestow.

Jesus is both David's son and David's Savior!
Jesus is both David's son and God's Son!
Jesus is both human and divine!
Jesus is both man and God!

NT Evidence for the Deity of Jesus

- (1) He claimed **equality with God the Father** (John 10:30-33, a claim the Jews understood all too well!)
- (2) He claimed **pre-existence** for himself (John 8:58 – “Before Abraham was born, I am!”; cf. also John 17:5,24; Rev. 22:13)
- (3) He claimed the authority and power to **forgive sins** (Mark 2:1-12; see also Isa. 43:25)
- (4) He claimed to be **sinless** (John 8:46)
- (5) He called on them to **believe in him** no less than they believe in the Father (John 14:1-2; 5:23)
- (6) He required of his followers **the strictest allegiance**, even unto death (Mark 8:34-38; Mt. 10:37-38; Luke 14:26-27)
- (7) He claimed to be the **Judge** of all mankind (John 5:25-29; Luke 22:27-30)
- (8) He gladly accepted the **worship** of his followers (John 20:28; Luke 5:8)
- (9) He is **omnipotent** (John 1:2-3; Heb. 1:3; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:17; Acts 17:28)
- (10) He is **immutable** (Heb. 1:11-12; 13:8)
- (11) He is specifically called "**God**" (John 1:1,18; 20:28; 2 Pt. 1:1; Titus 2:13; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8; see also John 12:41)
- (12) OT texts referring to **YHWH** are applied to him in the NT
Isa. 40:3 / Mt. 3:3
Ps. 8:2 / Mt. 21:16
Isa. 6:1-10 / Mt. 13:14-15; Jn. 12:37-41

Ps. 110:1 / Mt. 22:44-45
Malachi 3:1 / Luke 1:76
Ps. 23:1 / Jn. 10:11
Isa. 8:14 / Rom. 9:32-33
Joel 2:32 / Rom. 10:9-13
Is. 45:23 / Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:16
Jer. 9:24 / 1 Cor. 1:31
Isa. 40:13 / 1 Cor. 2:16
Ps. 68:18 / Eph. 4:8-10
Isa. 45:20-25 / Phil. 2:9-11
Isa. 2:10,19,21; 66:15 / 2 Thess. 1:7-9
Ps. 130:8 / Titus 2:13
Ps. 102:25-26 / Heb. 1:10
Isa. 51:6 / Heb. 1:11
Ps. 34:8 / 1 Peter 2:3
Isa. 8:13 / 1 Peter 3:15
Zech. 12:10 / Rev. 1:7
Jer. 17:10 / Rev. 2:23
Ps. 62:12 / Rev. 22:12
Isa. 40:10 / Rev. 22:12

- (13) He is the **Creator** (John 1:3,10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2,10)
- (14) He is **providential Lord** (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3)
- (15) He is the **author of life** (John 1:4; Acts 3:15)
- (16) He **raises the dead** (Luke 7:11-17; John 5:21; 6:40)
- (17) He is the **object of prayer** (2 Cor. 12:8; Acts 1:24; 7:59-60; 9:10-17; 22:16,19; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:22)
- (18) He is the **object of saving faith** (John 14:1; Acts 10:43; 16:31; Romans 10:8-13)
- (19) He is the **focus of doxologies** or hymns of praise (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Rev. 1:5b-6; 5:13)
- (20) And as we have seen in Mark 12, he is the **Lord** who is seated at the right hand of the Father on high, beneath whose feet all enemies are subjected (Psalm 110:1; Mark 12:35-37).

Today and every day we sing of his death and shed blood, and his alone. Why? Because all others who died were but mere men. He was both human and divine, both son of David and Son of God!

So the question that Jesus puts to you today is simply this: Who is Jesus of Nazareth? That, dear friend, is **THE** question.