

## ***The Fruit of the False*** ***Mark 12:35-40***

***So what if all about me sneer,  
If I'm a shadow soon forgot,  
Or even if by those who're near  
I'm left in nether lands of not.***

***It must not, cannot be my aim  
To seek respect and raw regard,  
Or strive and strain to blunt the blame  
Of faithless human disregard.***

***My motives must be focused pure  
Upon one single sacred goal.  
Beyond the luster and the lure  
Of pride, I'd lift my Savior's soul.***

***So criticism and complements  
Alike are dung; my light's the Son.  
At last when feeble flesh relents,  
I want to hear Him say, "Well done!"***

In Haiti, only death is in color. Everything else is painted in shades of brown. Brown-skinned people live in brown mud huts, thatched with dry weeds and straw. And brown children play on brown dirt packed smooth by dusty brown feet.

But outside every village is a technicolor dream. There, a cluster of mausoleums painted blood red, sunset purple and lemon yellow glitter in the sunlight.

This is the village cemetery. And like graves in Jesus' day, they sparkle and shine. But the symphony of color is only a white-washed veneer. Inside, they are full of decaying flesh, dry bones and dust .

Jesus said those brilliant tombs are an apt illustration of the legalistic scribes and Pharisees who so fiercely opposed Him.

***Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew 23:27-28***

Exiled to a rocky outcropping in the neon blue waters of the Aegean, John was caught up to Heaven. There, he was given a stunning preview of horrors and holocausts to come. And one of the most terrifying visions was a glimpse of judgement day.

***I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small,***

*standing before the throne, Revelation 20:11-12*

The Judge who will sit high up on that glittering white throne will be none other than Jesus Christ. And He warned that day will come as a shock and a surprise for some people.

*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 7:21*

Temple scribes will be among those who will be stunned that day. But those men were more than merely spiritually dead. They were also dangerous.

*In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes..." Verse 38*

Like ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing, those teachers of the Law were dangerous because the faith they professed wasn't genuine. That isn't only true of the scribes then, either. It is also true of false teachers today.

But we must not only be watchful and wary of Bible teachers whose faith is false. We must also beware that we are not one of them: that our own faith is not false. So to help us diagnose false faith, our Lord illustrated three aspects a faith that is not real.

### *The Message of the False*

It seems strange the Savior would make such a stern attack on the scribes at that moment. After all, those legalistic Jews had just called off the battle, finally abandoning attacking Him with dilemmas designed to blow up in His face.

So we might expect our Lord to breathe a sigh of relief and turn His attention elsewhere. But He didn't. Instead, He counter-attacked with a question of His own.

*And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" Verse 35*

Just two days earlier, crowds lined the road that wound down the Mount of Olives. And as Jesus passed by, people praised Him as the Son of David. That galled the scribes.

They understood better than anyone the coming Messiah would be just that, a descendant of David. So the Master challenged their basic concepts concerning the Christ to come: the Messiah they prayed would drive out the Romans.

*David himself said in the Holy Spirit, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet.'" Verse 36*

To underscore His point, Jesus quoted a verse the scribes all agreed referred to the Messiah.

*The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." Psalm 110:1*

The word *Lord* appears twice in that verse. But in David's Hebrew, they aren't the same words. The first *Lord* is Jehovah, the name God said was His when He spoke from the burning bush.

The second one is a word meaning *lord* or *master*. And virtually everyone agreed that second *Lord* referred to the Messiah.

With that in mind, Jesus asked a question the scribes had never been able to answer.

*David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son? Verse 37*

Throughout both the Law and the prophets, the Messiah was clearly and continually prophesied to be a descendant of David. Why then, the Master asked, did David consider the Messiah to be so superior to himself that he called Christ his Lord and Master.

The reason the scribes couldn't answer that question had to do with their basic beliefs concerning the Messiah. They believed the coming Christ would be a great man, perhaps the greatest man who ever lived. But he would still be just that: a mere man.

That is where they were wrong. Yes, Jesus was a direct descendant of King David. And as such He was a human being in every way.

But that is not all He was. He was also the Creator God in human flesh. The angel who announced His birth to a poor peasant girl in Nazareth put it best.

***Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, "God with us." Matthew 1:23***

The scribes were teaching a lie instead of the truth. Yes, the Messiah would be a man. But He would also be the Creator God robed in human flesh.

Both then and now that is the true test of every teacher's doctrine. And virtually every Christian cult fails that test. In slight and subtle ways, they all chip away at the deity of Jesus Christ.

So we dare not listen to them. We must never retreat from our belief that the Jesus who walked the footpaths of Galilee and courts of Jerusalem was and is and ever shall be the living God.

That is why John called Him *the Word* and declared He was not merely *a* son of God. He was and is *the* Son of God.

***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. John 1:1-3***

We must always be on our guard for anyone who does not declare that our Savior always was and ever shall be God. Anything less than that is more than merely false. It is poisonous heresy.

There is also a wonderful promise in the verse Christ quoted. After He rose up from His garden grave and returned to His heavenly home, our Lord sat down beside God in power and glory, resting in His heavenly Father's promise to so defeat all His Son's enemies, they would be like a footstool under His feet.

So we never need to worry and fret that wicked men serve Satan and both vigorously and violently oppose our Lord and His people.

We are never to wage war against such enemies, either. We are to love them as Christ commanded us. After all, they cannot win.

Our Heavenly Father has promised He will defeat them.

### ***The Motives of the False***

The scribes were not only false because their teaching was in error. After all, Christ counseled Christians to beware of false teachers, not false teaching.

And that is just what the scribes were. They were false first and foremost because they themselves were false.

Their faith was not genuine. It was all posturing and pretending. And their behavior proved it beyond all doubt.

***In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets," Verses 38-39***

As a mark of their important position, scribes wore shining white robes that reached to their feet. So everyone on the street would know who they were and give them proper respect.

Of course, there was nothing wrong with wearing white robes or even the adulation common Jews offered them. Their sin was that they so craved and coveted the honor people offered them.

At synagogue services each Sabbath, as teachers of the Law, scribes were given seats of honor beside the great cabinet that contained scrolls of the Holy Scriptures. And at banquets, they were given seats of honor, greater even than those offered one's parents.

Once again, there was nothing wrong with the honor those scribes received. The problem was that they so sought and savored such adulation. But even that was not the root of the problem.

Their real sin was that they loved praise, not from God, but from men. In a few short words, John aptly described their error.

***...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. John 12:43 (NKJV)***

That was the very heart of the scribes' problem. They tried to appear as if all they really cared about

was what God thought about them. But that, like their doctrine, was a lie. What they really craved was the praise and appreciation of men.

It is hard to blame them for that, though. Within each of us is a deep desire to be recognized and respected, to be honored as powerful and important by people around us.

But Christians aren't supposed to fit easily and naturally into this world. In fact, Jesus told His disciples they would not only fail to be honored by this world. They would be roundly hated.

***If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. John 15:19***

As Christians, we must not only refuse to seek this world's adulation. We must expect to be resented and rejected. In fact, we must consider the opposition and hostility of this world a sign that we really do belong to the Christ of the cross.

A hunger to be respected and loved by this world is symptom of a spiritual sickness. It shows a man doesn't really belong to Jesus, but to this world: a world that is still under the control of the prince of darkness.

That is why John commanded believers to resist loving this present world of men.

***Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15***

A false teacher can teach true doctrine and believe all the right things. But no one whose faith is genuine can seek and savor the attention and adulation of this world.

And the reason why is simple. Pleasing people is utterly incompatible with serving God.

***...am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10***

Each of us must ask ourselves the same question Paul asked himself. Are we seeking the favor of men or of God? We cannot seek both and still have a faith that is worthy of our Lord's praise.

That is impossible.

### ***The Manipulation of the False***

Our Savior's indictment of the scribes continued with a description of men who were not only in love with honor and adulation, but were also greedy and unscrupulous.

***...who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; Verse 40***

Jesus painted a picture of a respected spiritual leader who takes great pains to be seen as a selfless servant of God. And for all appearances, that is just what he is.

So when a man dies, he faithfully visits the grieving family. And as the widow struggles through depths of sorrow and loneliness, he is always there.

With tears welling up in his eyes, he offers long prayers on her behalf. He is such a source of solace and sympathy, she becomes sincerely grateful to him.

And that is just what he is waiting for. Because his real interest was never the widow at all. All he really cared about was what he could get from of her.

Our Lord warned us to beware of those who come to us with piety and prayers, with sweet sympathy and showy spirituality, but whose hearts are not at all what they pretend to be.

They might seem to be filled with Christ's love. But they are really motivated by covetousness and greed.

Among these are Christian ministers and ministries who, like the scribes, offer counsel when men write their wills. While they speak in sparkling terms of the Gospel they proclaim, all they really want is to obtain an estate, a bank account or a plot of land.

Such men are users. They might seem to care for others. But their minds are only on themselves and what they can get. They don't measure up to the model our Savior set for us.

***...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45***

That is the mark of any genuine servant of God. Selflessness, service and sacrifice are what really matter.

Also, we must never forget. Our gracious God is the One who meets our needs. So if we crave what men can give us, we are not living by faith.

Worse than that, such false believers are in danger of God's judgement. Our Lord was not pleased that the scribes managed to wheedle grieving widows out of their property, even if the estate did manage to find its way into the temple treasury.

That is why He concluded His remarks with such a stern warning.

***...these will receive greater condemnation. Verse 40***

On judgement day those who reject the Gospel our Savior died to purchase for us will be condemned. And that condemnation will be fiery and fierce.

But even that torment will not be as great as that which must be endured by those who hide hearts full of pride and greed with piety and prayer.

Mark commented that the people who listened to Jesus heard Him with great gladness. But merely hearing God's Word is never enough. That is merely more self-deception.

***...be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22 (NKJV)***

We must take our Savior's warning seriously, carefully consider His counsel, and weigh our own hearts. We must be absolutely sure the faith we profess and the piety we practice is more than a mask we wear to impress people and feed the desires that rage within us.

The alternative is too terrible to imagine.