

Mark 12:38-40 How to See False Teachers Falls Ch. PM 9/24/2023

The largest church in the United States each weekend, in a Houston, Texas former sports complex gathers 40,000 people. The television broadcast is viewed by 20 million people each month in almost 100 countries around the world. In 2004, the pastor wrote a best-selling book. The pastor is a modern false teacher. We know that he is a false teacher from 2 things. His teaching and his living. He refuses to talk about sin. He does not preach the gospel of grace. He teaches that God heals everyone, and makes everyone wealthy. If you are sick or poor, it is your fault, because you are not trusting God enough. He also teaches an error called word-faith theology or name-it-and-claim it. He craves and seeks popularity and praise from the world. To maintain his follower's approval, he preaches only the parts of the Bible that the listeners deem acceptable. Therefore, he speaks much of happiness never of sin, speaks much of heaven, never of hell, speaks about blessing, never about judgment. He gives them only what they want to hear. He preaches a partial gospel which is no gospel at all. He has no financial accountability, and he and his wife, his siblings and other people related to him are all on staff there making undisclosed salaries. He lives in a 17,000 square-foot mansion, with an estimated value of \$11 million. He preaches an empty gospel to a packed-out church, and lives like a millionaire.

The New Testament is filled with warnings about false teachers, starting with this passage in which Jesus, warned about how the scribes were false teachers. There are servants of God, and then there are those who masquerade as servants of God. There are those who draw attention to themselves, and then there are those who draw attention to Jesus Christ.

In the previous passage, verses 35-37, Jesus challenged the TEACHING of false teachers. In verse 35, "*how can the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?*" They actually were teaching in such a way as to lead people to conclude that the Christ was ONLY the Son of David, and not God. The teaching of false teachers was false.

Now, in the next passage, Jesus showed that the living of the false teachers was false.

The Lord Jesus taught the crowd how to see false teachers, and how to see God's judgment.

Verse 38, "*And in His teaching, he said, "Beware of the scribes..."*"

The first word of Jesus is "SEE." See in the sense of having perception. See in the sense of noticing what is really going on. What was it about the scribes that presented a danger?

1. They crave being somebody and being honored. (v.38-39 and 40b)

Verse 38, "*...who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces..."*"

The scribe in those days was easily picked out of a crowd. The scribe had a linen robe, plus a long white mantle reaching to his feet, and all along the mantle, there was a very long fringe. The fringe on the edge was made up of small strings, but very long strings. Around a scribe there was a lot of flowing. A lot of movement. It caught attention. They wanted to be seen as men of distinction. They wore white. Colors were for common people. The scribes were respected by the crowds. People held them in awe. When a scribe passed by, the people would stand up out of respect for him. The scribe was greeted with titles in public – Rabbi, Father, Master.

This is far from what they should be. They were not interested in helping with the hurts and needs of other people. All they wanted was to be seen and to have people admire them. They wanted status. Everyone was expected to constantly pay attention to their rank and position.

Verse 39, “...and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts...”

In the synagogue, the place of gathering for teaching, the seat of honor was reserved for the scribe. The scribe sat in front, with his back to the box that contained the Scriptures. His seat was in full view of all of the gathered people. Verse 39, best seats. best seats = literally ‘first theater!’ It is as if before the show would start, you would first get the show of the scribes entering and taking their seats up front.

The scribes were honored more than the elderly. The scribes were honored by people, more than those people honored their own parents. The highest places were assigned to the scribes.

Jesus was going against the culture of the time in condemning the scribes for their desire for these recognitions of status. Jesus saw that the scribes loved the attention. Jesus knew that the scribes were eating it up, and becoming more and more satisfied with themselves.

2. They use religion to hide (hide what? Hide two things ONE) hide **their greed,** and TWO) (...hide...) ...**their taking advantage of others. (v.40a)**

The scribes were not allowed to take a salary for teaching the Bible. So, they lived on what people committed to giving them. Like today when missionaries raise their own support. So, having people extend hospitality to the scribes was encouraged. They would teach that it was an act of service to God to feed a scribe. Especially if a scribe was poor and had a concern for how he was going to have his basic food and clothes. Many wealthy people committed to providing generously to the scribes, and some scribes were inevitably taking advantage of that.

Knowing that, we now get to the statement of Jesus in verse 40, that the scribes...verse 40a, “*who devour widows’ houses...*” We have a phrase in English – we say if a big eater comes over, he might ‘eat someone out of house and home.’

In Greek it is a phrase that says ‘to eat up the house,’ but not literally. More like – to swallow the house, and it is meant metaphorically. What this means is that the scribes would sponge on the hospitality of people, and people who themselves were poor.

The vulnerability of widows as representing the poor is a theme throughout the Bible. To rip off a widow or a poor person is particularly despicable. If there were yet another level of despicable, it would be the level of also taking advantage of the poor who have generous hearts. The poor who do not have much, but would be glad to give it to the Lord or to someone in need. Such persons are the subject of verses 41-44, and they are the opposite of these scribes.

Verse 40b, “...and for a pretense make long prayers...”

The taking of provisions of widows is connected to the scribes also, for a pretense, making long prayers. They took every public opportunity to win the respect of people by praying long prayers. For example, what if they were praying about the need for widows to receive needed money? it would seem in public like they cared for widows, but then in private, they were greedily taking money from the widows. This connection seems to be exactly what Jesus has in mind, since he placed these side by side in verse 40. That brings us to point 3, and the last six words of our passage, words spoken by Jesus.

3. They will receive God’s judgment, which we all deserve. (v.40c)

Verse 40 c, “*They will receive the greater condemnation.*”

Because the scribes would pray long prayers for a pretense, while privately devouring the homes of the poor, it exposed them to the searching judgment of God. What would happen then?

Jesus teaches this stern denunciation of the scribal practices.

This teaching was the last teaching of Jesus to the crowds in the entire Gospel of Mark. In verse 43, Jesus will teach a bit more about widows, but Jesus only said that teaching to His disciples. Jesus ended His public teaching with the words here in verse 40. The last impression Jesus left with the crowd was a warning about false teachers, these scribes, because of their way of living.

The apostle James must have been reflecting on this teaching. Listen to James 3:1, “*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways...*”

Who could become a teacher?

CHRIST.

There is someone who is different than the scribes. There is someone who does not like to walk around in long robes. There is someone who does not crave being somebody. There is someone who does not crave being honored. There is someone who does not look for the public greetings in the marketplaces.

There is someone who does not like to have the best seat in the synagogue.
There is someone who does not like the place of honor at feasts.

There is someone who does not use his religion to hide His greed, because there is no greed to hide. There is someone who does not use His religion to take advantage of others.

There is someone who does not rip off widows. There is someone who does not for a pretense, make long prayers in public.

There is someone who teaches that Jesus is The LORD. David's LORD, and David's God. That someone is Jesus!

Only Jesus loves others as Himself, the rest of us were greedy and selfish.

Only Jesus loves God the Father with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength. The rest of us fail to love God properly.

Only Jesus would justly receive no condemnation.

All of us deserve condemnation for our wrongs.

Only Jesus would receive the judgment of God due to us, and die in our place, and be able to walk out of the grip of death.

In Mark 3, the scribes as false teachers said Jesus was possessed by a demon, and that was how Jesus cast out demons. Jesus the true Teacher taught that Satan does not cast out Satan.

In Mark 7, the scribes, as false teachers, asked Jesus why His disciples did not follow their hand-washing ceremony, before they ate? Jesus as the True Teacher showed that they were hypocrites, because they follow the hand-washing ceremony, but their hearts are far from God. Jesus the true Teacher showed that they were taking the commandments of men, and falsely teaching that they were commandments of God.

In Mark 11:18, the scribes, as false teachers, were seeking a way to destroy Jesus, while Jesus, the True Teacher, was teaching in such a way that the crowds were astonished at His teaching. Jesus overturned the tables and taught that they were making a house of prayer into a den of robbers.

In Mark 12:27, the scribes, as false teachers, came to Jesus and were challenging His authority to overturn the tables and teach these things. Jesus, the True Teacher, was teaching them that both Jesus and John the Baptist were operating on the authority from heaven, but that the scribes would not believe.

In Mark 12:12, the scribes, as false teachers, were seeking to arrest Jesus, but feared the people. Jesus, the True Teacher, taught a parable against them.

In tonight's passage, Mark 12:38-40, the scribes, as false teachers, were showing themselves in public to not have the characteristics that God expected of them. Jesus, the True Teacher, was teaching the crowds how to see the false teachers.

Conclusion: Remember that Jesus gave His life to serve us and protect us by teaching us the truth. That truth shapes every Christian, and every Christian leader, as we all follow Christ. Anything else is a fake. I am preaching to myself!

The main verse of the whole Gospel of Mark is on this topic. Mark 10:45. Let me also read the few verses that lead up to it. On that day, the disciples were asking for honor. ‘Let me sit at your right hand or your left hand in glory!’ The disciples were arguing about who should have more honor, more glory. How would Jesus use this occasion to teach His disciples? Jesus called all the disciples to Himself to teach them the core of the gospel, which is going in the opposite direction. Instead of wanting others to serve us, we ought to want to serve others. Listen to the only True Teacher in Mark 10:42-45, “*And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*”

Two tests for false teacher vs. true teacher. Teaching and living.

Let’s evaluate Jesus on those two tests.

Jesus taught the truth.

Then, Jesus lived it out. Jesus actually did give his life as a ransom for us.

Both the teaching of Jesus, and then the decision of Jesus to give us His life on the cross, show us that Jesus is the True Teacher. All other teachers must serve God and others with self-sacrificing lives, and Biblical truth.