

“Whose Son Is the Christ?”
Mark 12:35-37
March 1, 2026
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

We continue this morning our series in the Gospel of Mark. The Jewish leaders of Jerusalem have been challenging Jesus in the Temple. After Jesus’s last answer, they went quiet. But this morning, Jesus comes back with a question of his own about who the Messiah is, and with that, who Jesus himself is.

We’ll be looking this morning at Mark 12:35-37, but for context we’ll start back in our passage from last week, beginning in verse 28.

With that said, please do listen carefully. This is God’s Word for us this morning.

Mark writes:

^{12:28} And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ ³⁰ 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.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

And now, our main text:

³⁵ And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, “How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared,

“The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet.”

³⁷ David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?” And the great throng heard him gladly.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Lord, we call to you, and we ask you to save us,
so that we might be your faithful servants, and live in light of your testimonies.
We cry out to you,
and we put our hope in your words.
Hear our prayer now, according to your steadfast love.
Grant this, we ask, for Jesus's sake. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:146-151]

Introduction

In verses 29 through 34, Jesus speaks about the nature of God, our call to love God – to give him our highest allegiance – and after that, he brings up the kingdom of God, and entrance into it. And then, after all that, in verses 35-37, our text this morning, Jesus raises the topic of who he is – of who the Christ is.

And as he does, what Jesus teaches us here is that allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus. And allegiance to Jesus brings knowledge, salvation, and victory.

Allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus. And allegiance to Jesus brings knowledge, salvation, and victory.

Let's break that down together.

Allegiance to God Requires Allegiance to Jesus

First, we see here that allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus.

And this becomes especially clear when we read verses 35-37 in context.

Right before this passage, Jesus is conversing with a scribe, essentially about the topic of ethics – what our greatest calling and duty is. And it turns out they agree about the ethical question in view. And for that, Jesus commends the scribe in verse 34 by saying “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

And Jesus really is commending the scribe. But it's also interesting how the commendation stops short.

Jesus doesn't say the scribe is “in” the kingdom of God – he doesn't identify the scribe as one of his disciples. Instead he says, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” Close. But not yet there.

Which should then leave us, as readers, wanting to ask: OK ... so what's missing? What does he lack that's keeping him from being in God's kingdom? [Horne, 157]

And we don't have to sit with that question for long, because Jesus goes right into it with his very next teaching – the very next passage. [Edwards, 374-375; France, 485] There Jesus introduces the question of what the scribes lack – what they get wrong about God and his kingdom.

And the question revolves around the nature and identity of the Christ – the Messiah.

Now, Mark has already told us, back in chapter eight, that when Jesus speaks about the Christ – when he talks about the Messiah – Jesus is talking about himself.

And leading up to this passage, Jesus has asserted authority in the Temple [Mark 11:15-33], he's been hailed as the one coming in the name of the Lord, to bring the kingdom of David to bear [Mark 11:1-11], and he's been referred to as the Son of David [Mark 10:46-52]. These are all Messianic things. So when Jesus speaks about who the Christ is, he's speaking about himself – about how he fits into what God is doing in the world. [France, 483-484]

And in that context, Jesus says, starting in verse 35:

“How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared,

“The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet.”

David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?”

Now ... what's going on here?

Well, to begin, the title “Christ,” which is really just the Greek version of “Messiah,” means “anointed one.” And the conviction of many Jews in the first century was that God would send them someone who would be especially anointed by God as their king – as their leader. And this anointed one – this Messiah, this Christ – would save the people from their enemies. He would deliver them. And there was great anticipation in Jesus's day, as people looked for the Christ – for this anointed leader, sent by God. It was a big deal.

And for over a century this expected leader – this coming king – had been referred to as the “son of David.” [Edwards, 375; France, 486]

David, who had been king over Israel about a thousand years earlier, was the most significant king in the history of God's people. And God had made a promise to David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne over Israel forever. And so, understandably, since the coming Messiah – the Christ – was expected to be a descendant of David, he was often referred to as the “Son of David.”

But Jesus here takes some issue with that.

And it's not that Jesus disagrees that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. Jesus himself was, in fact, a descendant of David, and he had just accepted the title "Son of David" a couple chapters earlier in Mark's gospel. So, it's not that Jesus says the title is incorrect. It's that he says here that the title is insufficient – by itself, it's not enough to fully explain who the Messiah is. And by itself, it may even lead to some misunderstanding. [Edwards, 377; Witherington, 333]

Because, among other things, in the ancient world, a descendant of someone was usually seen as being lower than that person. And so, referring to the Christ – the Messiah – as the Son of David, and using that alone as the category by which you understand him, leads one to think that the Messiah would be great ... but he would still be something less than King David was.

And so Jesus turns the people's attention to Psalm 110.

Psalm 110 was written by King David himself. And it contains an interesting phrase. In it, David himself writes: "The Lord said to my lord."

Now, the first "lord" there – "The Lord" is referring to God. In Hebrew it's the covenant name of God: Yahweh. It's "Yahweh said to my lord." So, David is writing about something that God himself said. But who did God say it to?

David identifies the person God said this to as "my Lord" – as his Lord – as David's Lord.

It's this person that Jesus identifies as the Messiah. And in Psalm 110, this person is indeed given Messianic promises.

But Jesus's point is that this Messiah – this Christ – this coming King would not be lower than David, but he would be higher than David ... well above David. Because, looking forward to the coming of this Messiah, David himself calls this Messiah his Lord – David's Lord, as Jesus points out in verse 37. [France, 487; Wright, *Mark*, 174]

And so, Jesus is saying here that the Jewish scribes and Jewish people of the first century had missed something. Jesus is saying that the Messiah – the Christ – is going to be a bigger deal than they realized.

And that's a major claim because the first-century Jews already thought the Messiah was a pretty big deal.

It was no small thing for them to call the Messiah the Son of David – that was a high honor.

But Jesus here says that that honor is not enough – that description is insufficient. The Messiah can't just be David's son ... because he's also David's Lord. The Messiah won't just sit on the throne of David, ... because we read in Psalm 110 that he will also sit at the right hand of God, well above David, as David's Lord.

"Son of David" is not the best descriptor for the Messiah, Jesus tells us here.

So what is? And if the Messiah is not primarily David's Son, then whose son is he?

And that's not a question foreign to Mark's Gospel. In fact, Mark began his gospel by addressing this very question. The very first words Mark wrote down in his gospel were about the question of who Jesus is – and specifically whose son he is.

Mark's gospel begins with this – Mark writes: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Mark begins by telling his reader: You know the Messiah you have been longing for – you know the Christ you have been looking for? Jesus – the Jesus I will tell you about – he is that Messiah, he is that Christ.

But, Mark adds, he's also more than that. He's not just the Messiah – he's not just the Christ. He's also the Son of God. [France, 484-485, 488; Leithart, 172]

And what that means will get fleshed out throughout Mark's gospel, but in its fullest sense, it means that Jesus Christ is not just God's human messenger, not just God's human king ... but Jesus Christ comes as God himself – God the Son: fully man and fully God, David's son and David's Lord, Son of Man and Son of God – the only one who could truly sit on God's throne, at the right hand of God the Father.

That's who this Jesus is.

And that's why allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus. If Jesus sits on God's throne, if Jesus is at God the Father's right hand, if Jesus himself is God, then you cannot be God's ally unless you are Jesus's ally. You cannot love and serve God unless you will also love and serve Jesus.

That claim is one of the things that sets Christianity apart from every other religion: the indispensability of Jesus.

Because of who Jesus is – because he is not just another messenger of God, or prophet of God, or servant of God – because Jesus instead is the unique Son of God: God come to earth in human flesh – because that's who Jesus is, we cannot separate our allegiance to God from our allegiance to Jesus. We cannot be mere theists. Belief in God alone is not enough. Because we cannot know, or trust in, or ally ourselves with God in any way that is ever separate from us knowing and, trusting in, and allying ourselves to Jesus.

Because God the Father has said to Jesus: “Sit at my right hand.” [Mark 12:36] Because God the Father has said to Jesus: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased. [Mark 1:11] Because God the Father has said to us concerning Jesus: “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” [Mark 9:7]

For these reasons, we know that any true allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus.

But even more than what this conviction requires of us, this truth also sets Christianity apart when it comes to the nature of God himself.

It means that our God – the God of the Bible – is not a God who stays far off. He doesn't stay at a distance, and then only send us visions, or dreams, or angels, or commandments, or books, or a vague sense of who he is, and then hope we will find our way to him. That's not what God is like.

No, the centrality of Jesus, the deity of Jesus, the fact that Jesus himself is God, come in human form, means that the God of the Bible is a God who comes to us himself. He traverses the gap between himself and us – between heaven and earth – and he has come among us, and dwelt with us, and even taken on our human frame.

As one theologian has put it: “To say that Jesus is in some sense God is of course to make a startling statement about Jesus.” But, “It is also to make a stupendous claim about God.” [Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*, 51-52]

And one of those stupendous claims, is that God – the true God – has not stayed far off from us, but he has come close to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is who God is – this is who Jesus is: Jesus is the King of heaven, Jesus is the Son of God – Jesus is God himself, come to us in human form.

Which is why allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus.

And having established this, our text points us to three results – three fruits – of this truth.

What we see is that because this is true – because allegiance to Jesus is synonymous with allegiance to God – giving our allegiance to Jesus brings us knowledge, salvation, and victory.

Knowledge, salvation, and victory.

Let's consider those briefly.

Allegiance to Jesus Brings Knowledge

First, allegiance to Jesus brings knowledge.

Theologian Richard Osmer talks about how one thing people especially need is an “interpretive guide” to life. [Osmer, 18-20] It's a concept worth reflecting on.

We human beings enter this world ... and there's a lot to sort out: massive questions of who we are, what's going on in the world, how we should live. Those questions come both at the day-to-day level, and also at the big-picture meta level.

And one of the most consequential decisions you and I make in life is deciding: “Who will be our interpretive guide in this world?”

We decide this, in some sense, on a day-to-day level. The podcasts you choose, the books you read, the cable news channel you decide to watch, the talk radio you tune in to, the church you attend, the preacher you listen to, the Sunday school classes you go to, the friends you seek advice from, these are all interpretive guides you choose, often without thinking about it, in your day-to-day life: guides who offer you their interpretation of this world, and their advice for how you should live in it.

But then, we also have our big-picture, meta-level guide – we might say our primary guide – that we choose to tell us what it means to be a human being, what this world we live in is really all about, and how we should live our lives in light of these big truths. For some people the major guide they choose to answer these questions is an ancient text, for others it’s a modern thinker, for some it’s the dominant culture they live in, for others it’s their gut feelings they have about life and the world.

But the fact is that each of these guides is merely human. Whether it’s ourselves we trust, or someone else, whether it’s someone modern or ancient, whether it’s someone intellectual or mystical, each guide the world provides for us is merely human. Just another human being ... making their best guess about who we are, and what this world is about, and how we should live in light of all this.

But if Jesus is more than the son of David ... if Jesus is the Son of God ... well, then there is an interpretive guide who comes from above the human perspective. Then, in Jesus, we have access to an interpretive guide who is not merely human, not merely creaturely – but if Jesus is the eternal Son of God, then he can offer to us an interpretation of this world, and a guide for this life, not just as another human being, but as God.

In Jesus, we have access not to humanity’s best guesses about this world, but to God’s divine truth about life, the universe, and everything.

We can trust Jesus’s words, and Jesus’s actions, like no one else’s in all of history.

And with that, we can also trust whatever Jesus tells us we can trust. And Jesus, in this passage, tells us we can trust the Christian Scriptures. And he tells us we can trust the Christian Scriptures not because their human authors are so amazing – not, in this case, because David was so great – but because God himself has given us the words of Christian Scriptures as his words.

Jesus makes this point in verse 36. There, he says: “David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared,” and then Jesus quotes the Hebrew Scriptures.

With that phrase, Jesus is saying that Psalm 110, and with it, the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole, and by implication the New Testament as well – Jesus is saying here that the Christian Scriptures are not just written by men like David. They were also written by God, the Holy Spirit. The Bible

is not just a collection of words written by a bunch of different men, centuries ago. The Bible is also, at the same time, the very words of God. [Edwards, 376; Witherington, 332-333]

And our assurance of this comes not ultimately from our own human wisdom, not from our human discernment or cleverness. Our assurance of the Bible's reliability comes from the fact that Jesus told us we could trust the Bible as God's word to us. And Jesus tells us this not as a mere man – not as merely the son of David – but Jesus tells us this as the eternal Son of God – the One who is truly reliable above all others.

Allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus. And allegiance to Jesus gives us a truly reliable, and completely trustworthy interpretive guide to who we are, to what this world is, to how we are to live, and to how we can relate to God our Maker.

That guide is the Bible. And we can know it's reliable, because Jesus, the Son of God has told us it is reliable.

Whether in the day-to-day aspects of life, or at the big-picture meta-level, who do you tend to treat as your interpretive guide for life and for this world?

And are those you look to – whether it's another human being out in the world, or your own gut, or an ancient tradition – is that guide really reliable enough to base your life on?

One fruit of allegiance to Jesus is knowledge – true knowledge, trustworthy knowledge, reliable knowledge, that comes from Jesus and from the Scriptures that Jesus tells us have come from God himself.

Allegiance to Jesus brings knowledge.

Allegiance to Jesus Brings Salvation

Second, allegiance to Jesus brings salvation.

Remember the question we started with: Why does Jesus say in verse 34 that the scribe is not yet in the kingdom of God?

The scribe seems to agree with Jesus when it comes to the nature of ethics and morality. They're on the same page on these key issues of life.

But then, Jesus also indicates that ethics and morality are not enough to get one into the Kingdom of God. Otherwise this scribe would be “in” the kingdom, instead of “not far” from it. So what more is needed?¹

¹ In Mark's narrative, two other questions also lead us to be thinking about the nature of salvation at this point.

First, the preceding paragraph has raised the issue of the animal sacrificial system of the Temple itself. While this system was instituted by God, and while Israelites were called on to offer sacrifices to God for several reasons,

And to answer that question Jesus points the scribe – and he points us – to Psalm 110.

We need to remember, when Jesus or any New Testament author quotes a verse or two from the Hebrew Scriptures, they're usually encouraging us to go back, and look at that larger passage as a whole.

So, if we do that, and we look to Psalm 110, remembering that Jesus has just told us that this psalm is about the Messiah – that this psalm is about him – then what do we find?

Well, the psalm tells us, of course, that the Messiah will be Lord – he will be a supreme King, sitting besides God himself. We heard that in verse one of the psalm, which Jesus quoted.

But then, also, a few lines later, in verse 4, God – Yahweh – says something else to the Messiah. There we read:

The LORD [Yahweh] has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You [the Messiah] are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

The Messiah will not just be a King. He will also be a Priest.

And he won't be an ordinary priest. Rather than being just another priest from the Levitical priesthood – rather than being just another descendant of Aaron – the Messiah will be a priest “after the order of Melchizedek.”

This refers back to Genesis 14 in the in the first book of the Bible. As the author of Hebrews explains [Hebrews 7], this means that the Messiah will be a priest from an even higher order than the Levitical priesthood of Israel. He outranks the current high priest. Even Abraham bowed before his priesthood because this priesthood came miraculously from God.

Which explains, among other things, why Jesus has authority over the Temple – answering, in a sense, the question of the Sanhedrin back at the end of chapter 11. [Wright, *Victory*, 507-509; Wright, *Mark*, 173-175]

But even more than that, it tells us how Jesus can bring people into the Kingdom of God when ethics, and morality, and religious ritual alone cannot [Mark 12:32-34].

including for the forgiveness of their sins, the scribe indicates in verse 33 that the Temple sacrificial system is not really enough to bring one into the Kingdom of God and again Jesus seems to agree.

Second, we should have in our minds the question that got all these debates started. Back in Mark 11:28, after Jesus cleared the Temple, the Jewish religious leaders came up to him, and asked Jesus on what basis he was claiming to have authority over the Temple in Jerusalem: “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” And after a little back-and-forth, Jesus refused to give them a straightforward answer. But now, with his allusion to Psalm 110, we will see that he gives them something of an answer. [Wright, *Victory*, 507-509; Wright, *Mark*, 173-175]

Because Jesus is the highest priest of God, and so he can bring people into God's kingdom like no one else – because he can offer the kind of sacrifice that no one else can.

When we fail to love God, when we fail to love our neighbors, when we sin and fall short, as we all do, Jesus, the true High Priest, the priest after the order of Melchizedek, offers a greater sacrifice for us than we could ever offer. He offers himself, on the cross, to pay for our sins. And by his sacrifice, we are made right with God. By his priestly work, we are cleansed, and so made fit to enter God's kingdom. By his administration of the true Temple in heaven, we are given passage into the presence of God.

Allegiance to Jesus is not just allegiance to a great King. It's also allegiance to a great High Priest. And that High Priest, as both man and God, has offered himself as a sacrifice for our salvation.

What's needed to enter the Kingdom of God?

More than religious ethics. More than religious buildings. More than religious rituals.

What's needed to enter the Kingdom of God is allegiance to Jesus, our High Priest, who died so that we might be forgiven, and made right with God.

Allegiance to Jesus brings knowledge.

Allegiance to Jesus brings salvation.

Allegiance to Jesus Brings Victory

Third, and finally, allegiance to Jesus brings victory.

And this point is made in verse 36, as Jesus quotes from Psalm 110.

There we read: "The Lord [Yahweh] said to my Lord [Jesus], Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet."

What God promises to Jesus here is ultimate victory. What God promises to Jesus is victory over every one of his enemies.

The world we live in is full of conflict. We see it in nature. We see it between nations. We see it in our own culture and society. We see it in our personal lives, and spiritual lives. Conflict is all around us, and sometimes as we look at it, we find ourselves asking: "In all this conflict, who is going to win? Who will ultimately be victorious?"

And what our text this morning tells us, what Psalm 110 tells us, and what Jesus tells us is that the answer for every conflict in the world, every battle, every tension, every war, is that ultimately in the end, Jesus will win.

“Sit at my right hand,” God the Father says to Jesus. And then he promises Jesus that he will put all of Jesus’s enemies under Jesus’s feet.

Psalm 110 goes on to tell us that many will come and freely offer themselves to Jesus. It also tells us that Jesus will shatter those worldly powers that persist in opposing him – who refuse to submit to him.

Jesus will, in the end, have total and complete victory. Jesus will, in the end, defeat all of his enemies.

Which means not just human enemies, but every enemy. Not just those who serve Satan ... but even Satan himself. Not just those who are unrepentant in their sin ... but even sin itself. Not just those who bring unjust death to the innocent ... but even death itself.

Sin and Satan, death and disease, every force and every individual who opposes Jesus, who resists his reign, will be defeated. And all who serve Jesus – all who have allied themselves with him, all who have trusted in him and submitted their lives to him – they will share in Jesus’s victory. Because Jesus is such a good and loving King, that he delights to share his victory with his people. And so we will live forever, with him, in a new heaven and a new earth, free from anything that would mar or oppose Jesus’s loving rule.

What we see in our text this morning is that allegiance to God requires allegiance to Jesus.

And allegiance to Jesus brings knowledge.

Allegiance to Jesus brings salvation.

Allegiance to Jesus brings ultimate victory, and eternal life.

Conclusion

And so, brothers and sisters, let us give our truest and our highest allegiance to Jesus.

Let us trust in his Word above all others. Let us come to him alone for salvation. And let us be assured that he will have the ultimate victory, and he will share it with us.

Let us love Jesus with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength – knowing that as we love him, so we love God himself.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.
- France, R.T. *The Gospel of Mark*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Horne, Mark. *The Victory According to Mark: An Exposition of the Second Gospel*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003.
- Leithart, Peter J. *The Gospel of Matthew Through New Eyes; Volume One: Jesus as Israel*. Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2017.
- Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008 (2017 Printing)
- Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Witherington, Ben III. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003. (Especially p.131-140 and 415-429)
- Wright, N.T. *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Wright, N. T. *Who Was Jesus?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church's core value of "Reformed Catholicity"), and also (following the Apostle Paul's example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.