

## Mark 12:35–37 — Who Is Jesus?

**March 8, 2020**

Open your Bible to Mark 12. We are studying verses 35-37. This is a very brief portion of Scripture with some huge implications.

And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, “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?” And the great throng heard him gladly. Mark 12:35–37 (ESV)

One of the big questions everyone needs to answer in this life is, “Who is Jesus?” In eternity, he will either be our savior or our judge, based on how we answer that question. The Gospel of Mark is helping us answer that question the right way as it teaches us the truth about Jesus. So far, this Gospel has shown us unprecedented miracles at the hand of Jesus. No matter the sickness, deformity or disease, Jesus healed all of them instantly, perfectly, and completely. No matter the strength of demonic opposition or demonic oppression, Jesus sent all the demons running like cockroaches when the lights come on. This Gospel has given us abundant evidence that Jesus is the man who is God. Soon Jesus would provide the most powerful piece of evidence that he is the man that is God. He died as a man and rose from the dead, which is something only God can do.

While Jesus has provided abundant evidence for his divine identity, the leaders of Jerusalem were spiritually blind and unwilling to see the evidence in front of their faces. The leaders of Jerusalem saw Jesus as a threat. They hated Jesus. This morning, in these short but impactful verses, Jesus gave more evidence that he is the man who is God. It is evidence that comes from the Old

Testament Scriptures and it is something the Jewish leader couldn't refute. In the face of Scriptural evidence, the Jewish leaders were speechless.

My hope is that if you are wrestling with the identity of Jesus and this morning you are undecided and on the bubble, the words of Jesus will push you over the edge so you too believe the truth. Jesus can be nothing other than the man who is God. Let's begin with a little background. We will look at historical background, then some biblical background before we get into the text.

### **The Background — The Jews believed the Messiah would be no more than a man.**

The Jews of history, and modern Jews today, have widely held the view that the Messiah would be nothing more than a man. They believed in the past, and continue to believe now, that the Messiah would be nothing more than a human being. They have believed the Messiah would be an earthly ruler, a man of immense power, influence and impact, but he would be nothing more than a man. They believed he would lead the nation of Israel to conquer their enemies. They believe he will accomplish all the promises given to Abraham and David. They believed in the past and continue to believe today that the Messiah would build and establish a never-ending earthly Jewish kingdom.

Let me emphasize this. The Jews of the past and the Jews today believed the Messiah would be a great man but nothing more than a man. He would be a man that would restore the nation of Israel to greatness.

There is some truth to this because there are prophecies that talk about the Messiah being a great earthly ruler for the people of Israel.

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!" Numbers 24:17–19 (ESV)

One additional point to make is the Jews did not see the Messiah as a savior of individual souls. They saw the Messiah as the savior of the Jews as a nation.

The historical Jewish view of the Messiah, that he would be nothing more than a powerful human being, brought the Jews in Jesus' day into direct conflict with Jesus because Jesus claimed to be much more than just a man. As we know, the religious leaders of Israel hated Jesus for the way he attacked their corrupt operation of the temple. They hated Jesus for the way he exposed corruption in their lives. What they hated about Jesus the most was what they considered his blasphemy. Jesus claimed to be more than a man. He claimed to be equal with God. He said things like this:

I and the Father are one. John 10:30 (ESV)

Jesus identifies himself as one with God because he is God. We see the same thing in John 14.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. John 14:10 (ESV)

Jesus' entire life was driven in the direction of the conclusion that John articulated at the end of his Gospel.

...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31 (ESV)

The term Christ in Greek and the term Messiah in Hebrew are the same thing. John wrote his Gospel so we would know Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, but he is more than just a human being. He is the man who is the very Son of God.

Let's move from the historical background to the biblical background we need to understand this passage.

Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders began to come to a head in Mark 11:27, when the chief priests and scribes challenged Jesus' authority. Who gave Jesus the authority to clear the money changers and animal sellers from the temple grounds? They claimed they were the only ones with authority. Since that time, the Sanhedrin, that is the Jewish ruling council, was trying to get rid of Jesus. In their minds, he overstepped his authority and had no right to exercise authority in God's house.

First, they attacked Jesus openly and publicly. After they lost their public attack, they withdrew and regrouped. They moved to underhanded attacks against Jesus. They sent three waves of questioners to undermine him, attempting to publicly humiliate him in the eyes of the people. The first was a group of Pharisees with a trick question about paying taxes. Second was a group of Sadducees with a trick question about the resurrection. Last week was a third questioner. It was a lone scribe who asked Jesus a trick question about what the greatest commandment is. Jesus was not ensnared by any of their questions. In fact, each time the attackers left looking foolish instead of making Jesus look foolish. Things ended in verse 34 with these words.

...and after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:34 (ESV)

They were done. Every time they tried to discredit Jesus, he discredited them. Beginning in verse 35, which is where we find ourselves this morning, Jesus turned the tables. Instead of them asking questions of Jesus, Jesus began asking questions of them. Jesus set out to prove the one thing they refused to believe — that he is more than just a mere man. He is the man who is also God.

As our text begins, Jesus was creating common ground with the religious leaders. He talked about what all of them could agree upon, that the Messiah would be a biological descendant of King David.

**Jesus affirmed the Messiah would be a descendant of David.**

Before we start in Mark, let's look at the parallel passages in Matthew. Mark is a very short Gospel. Matthew typically provides a bit of background information that the Gospel of Mark doesn't include. That is what we find in this scene. Let's see how Matthew set things up for us.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." Matthew 22:41–42 (ESV)

Jesus wasn't directing this question to himself. He was simply asking about the Christ, the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament. Who is he? Whose son would he be? They responded by saying David's son. He had to be from David's blood line. That is what everybody in that day agreed upon. It is what we find in the Old Testament Scriptures. Then we pick up the conversation we find in Mark.

And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? Mark 12:35 (ESV)

Remember the scribes were the intellectual and theological elite of the Pharisees. Jesus is questioning the conclusion the scribes, who were Pharisees, had just given him. As we read this question in context, we see Jesus is really asking, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is NOTHING MORE than a son of David?" Jesus would soon prove that the Messiah, that is the Christ, is more than just a man. First, let's see how the scribes came to the conclusion that the Messiah would be a biological descendant of King David.

**Old Testament prophecies predicted the Messiah would be a son of David.**

Most of the people in Jesus' day were aware of many texts in the Old Testament that prophetically spoke about God saving his people by a Messiah that would come from the blood line of David.

King David brought the nation of Israel to the pinnacle of its power and influence. When David died, the kingdom passed to his son Solomon. During his reign, despite his great wisdom, primarily because of his foolishness, the golden age of Israel began to fade. Solomon began to marry foreign wives, which resulted in God removing his favor. Only one generation after Solomon, the nation split in half through a civil war into a northern and southern kingdom. This was not like the civil war our country experienced years ago, where our nation split and reunited. Israel split into a northern and southern kingdom that never reunited. There was bitter civil war between those kingdoms for generations until both kingdoms were taken into exile. At that time, the people were holding onto a promise God gave them. The promise was that one day, God would raise up a

descendant of David who would restore the kingdom. He would be known as the Messiah, the anointed one, the chosen one.

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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 2 Samuel 7:12–13 (ESV)

This son of David was known as the Messiah. He would set up an everlasting kingdom. Psalm 89 also clearly tells us the Messiah would be a son of David that would set up a never-ending kingdom.

You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.’” Selah Psalm 89:3–4 (ESV)

So the people were holding onto these prophecies in which God told them he would send a Messiah in the bloodline of King David who would restore them. He would establish a kingdom that never ends.

**Jesus was seen as the son of David by many in the crowd.**

These prophecies, that a son of David would restore Israel and build a never-ending kingdom, were well-known to the people. Many of the people that saw Jesus’ miracles and the way he cast out demons began to conclude that perhaps Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the long-awaited son of David that had finally come. Remember that in the mental template of the people, the Messiah, the son of David, would not be a divine being but a super powerful, amazing human being, like an Old Testament prophet alive in their day. This is how an increasing number of people around Jesus were beginning to identify him. As we look in the Gospels, we see a number of ordinary people calling

Jesus the “son of David.” This was one way they verbally claimed he was the long-awaited Messiah promised by God.

For example, two blind men called Jesus the son of David before he healed them, which was their way of identifying him as the Messiah.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” Matthew 9:27 (ESV)

When blind Bartimaeus heard Jesus was passing by he called out to Jesus identifying him as the son of David.

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Mark 10:47 (ESV)

In the Triumphal Entry, the people called out to Jesus, calling him the son of David. They were identifying him as a great human being that would be a leader of their nation, restoring it to greatness.

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Matthew 21:9 (ESV)

So we get the picture that Jesus was viewed as the son of David by many of the common people. Jesus being a literal son of David, a biological descendent of King David, may not be that important to us but to the Jews it was and always has been extremely important.

Since it was so important for Jesus to be a son of David, a literal biological descendent of King David, the Gospel of Matthew goes to great lengths to prove Jesus’ genealogical history. This is why the Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy. The first chapter of Matthew traces Jesus’ lineage from Abraham, through King David to Jesus’ earthly adoptive father, Joseph. Luke also makes a

crucial point out of Jesus' genealogy. In Luke 3, we have Jesus' genealogy, but in Luke it is Jesus' genealogy through King David from his mother's side. So according to Matthew, Jesus' adoptive earthly father was a descendant of King David. According to Luke, Jesus' biological mother was also a descendant of King David. So Jesus was a son of David on both his biological mother's and his adoptive father's sides. This was super important. The easiest way to attack the identity of Jesus was to prove he was not a descendant of David, then he would not be able to fulfill key Old Testament prophecies.

Incidentally, all Jewish genealogical records were kept in the temple so the religious leaders, who were caretakers of those records, could easily verify the ancestral roots of Jesus. Ancestral roots in that day were not allowed to be claimed. They needed to be proven. That is why every Israelite knew his tribe, ancestry, and forefathers.

So the scribes' claim that the Messiah must be a son of David was correct. Old Testament prophecies give those details. Many of the people following Jesus were enthralled by him and called him the son of David, because they saw his power, authority, and leadership. They saw him as the Messiah.

Now that Jesus had the religious leaders agreeing that the Messiah must be a son of David, he pushed the envelope. Simply calling the Messiah a human son of David was inadequate. If you read more in your Old Testament, you find the Messiah must be more than just an ordinary human being who is a biological descendent of King David.

### **Jesus revealed the Messiah would be more than a man.**

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?” Mark 12:36–37 (ESV)

Jesus went to Psalm 110 and quoted the first verse of this Psalm. His point was that the learned scribes missed something important about the Messiah. This Psalm tells us the Messiah would be more than just a man. Let’s work our way these verses piece by piece.

### **Jesus considered this Scripture to be inspired by God.**

Jesus said that when David spoke these words, he spoke them “in the Holy Spirit.” In other words, these words were not words casually spoken by David or mistakenly spoken by David. They were words the Holy Spirit was speaking through the mouth of King David. These are God’s words! They are not in error.

This does not mean other words in the Bible were not spoken by God and these words were spoken by God. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us all Scripture is spoken by God. Jesus was merely emphasizing the words of Scripture have a divine origin and not a human origin, so they are authoritative and without error.

### **There are two people called Lord in this verse.**

This text says “The Lord” said to “my Lord.” There are two different people called Lord in this verse. David identified one of them as “the Lord.” The other he identified as “my Lord.” The Greek in the New Testament doesn’t reveal this but when we go back to Psalm 110:1 in the Hebrew, we find something very interesting.

The first word Lord is written in all capital letters in some translations. This is an indication that the Hebrew being this word is Yahweh. That is the sacred name of God, the name God originally identified himself to Moses by at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. The Jews revered God's sacred name so much that they wouldn't even pronounce it audibly when they read Hebrew Scripture. What we have in this verse is that God allowed David to listen in on a conversation Yahweh was having with someone else who is also called Lord. If you notice, the second time Lord is used in your Bible, in the phrase "my Lord," only the "L" is capitalized. In Hebrew behind this Lord is the word Adonai. The term Adonai means someone who is the Mastore, who is in absolute and complete control, the highest authority. Think of Adonai as a way of calling somebody the CEO, the top of the authority food chain.

Many times in the Old Testament, the terms Yahweh and Adonai are used back to back to describe God as being the one who is completely in control of everything. For example:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Psalm 8:1 (ESV)

In Hebrew, the first Lord is Yahweh. The second Lord is Adonai. It literally reads "Yahweh, the one who is in the position of highest authority, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

While in Psalm 8:1, Yahweh and Adonai are used back to back to describe Yahweh as the one who has all authority and control. In Psalm 110:1, Yahweh was talking to a different person who is described as Adonai. This second person

was described as King David's Lord. Yahweh will put him at his right hand where he is in the position of authority and control over everything and everyone.

Who is this second person? He is different than God the Father but he is identical to God because he is put into the position of being at the right hand of God. Yahweh will take all of this Adonai's enemies and make them a footstool to his feet.

Remember who was saying this. It was King David. David was a man in the position of highest authority on earth. He didn't bow to any other human being, yet this person was David's Lord and master.

Put the pieces together. The Messiah will be a biological descendant of King David who is a human being, but he will also be a divine being who will be in the position of highest authority in the universe at God the Father's right hand. Jesus' point is the Messiah is more than just a human being descended from David. He is also David's master. He is also the one in the position of highest authority in the universe. He is the man who is God. The scribes missed something.

Jesus doesn't come out and state this conclusion. He ended with a question that was intended to let the religious leaders come to this conclusion on their own so they would own it and believe it.

**David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son? Mark 12:37 (ESV)**

Jesus definitively proved from Scripture that the Messiah will be a biological son of David, but the Scriptures also tell us he will be more than

David's son. He is also David's Lord, the one who holds the position of highest authority in the universe at the right hand of God.

Earlier, the religious leaders were upset when Jesus kicked the animal sellers and money changers out of the temple. They wondered who gave him authority to do those things. This verse is the answer. Jesus has the authority because he is the one in the position of highest authority in the universe. He is more than just a man. He is the man who is God. He is David's Lord and master.

I like the way Matthew tells us this conversation ended.

**And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. Matthew 22:46 (ESV)**

Nobody could prove Jesus wrong. Jesus proved from Scripture that the Messiah would not just be a son of David, but that he would be David's master, he would be God. The conclusions were inescapable. The religious leaders completely gave up talking with Jesus and arguing with Jesus. They lost every time.

What would have been the right way to respond to Jesus at this point if you were part of the religious leadership in Israel? It would have been repentance. It would have been some confession. It would have been some humility. It would have been a willingness to reexamine the Scriptures. It would have been a sudden realization why Jesus could heal the sick and raise the dead. It would have been a sense of awe as you realized the one you were talking to was more than a man, he was God. That would have been the right response. That was not what happened.

## **The religious leaders hardened themselves against the truth and were lost.**

The religious leaders hardened themselves against Jesus and were lost forever because they refused to hear the truth that was right in front of them.

In Mark 14:43, it was the chief priests and the scribes who came to arrest Jesus with clubs.

In Mark 14:53, it was the chief priests, elders, and scribes that gathered together to condemn Jesus.

In Mark 15:1, it was the priests, elders, and scribes that bound Jesus and led him to Pilate to have him crucified.

In spite of having the evidence of Jesus' life, miracles, healings, casting out of demons, and now having proof from their own Scriptures that the Messiah was much more than just a man, they turned against Jesus and were lost forever.

This is the question this passage of Scripture raises that we need to ask ourselves this week: In the face of abundant evidence for the identity of Jesus, how will we respond to Jesus?

### **What does this mean for me?**

**I need to decide what I believe about the identity of Jesus.**

Whoever doesn't get the identity of Christ right will be lost forever.

We cannot consider Jesus just another human being. He is the human being who is also a divine being. He died for us. He rose from the grave and is seated at the right hand of God the Father today. It is only those who confess their sin to him, and trust in the death of Jesus to forgive their sin that will be saved.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. John 3:18 (ESV)

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13 (ESV)

Having a right view of Jesus is the only way to be saved. He is a human being, a son of David, who is also Adonai, the one who is seated at God's right hand, who is fully God. Don't let anyone lead you away from that belief. You ask, "Who would try to do that?" Let me give you some examples.

The Jehovah's Witnesses will try to lead you away. They will tell you Jesus is nothing more than the first created being in the universe but he is not God. That is the recipe for hell.

The Mormons will try to lead you away. They will tell you Jesus is a god and that you too can become a god. They claim there are many little gods running around. This flies in the face of John 3:16 which tells us Jesus is the only begotten son of God.

The Muslims will try to lead you away from this core belief. They will tell you Jesus was no more than a prophet. He was just a man and certainly not God.

These are all recipes for hell. Any religion that has a different view of Jesus is deadly. It will not lead you into a relationship with God.

While the religious leaders openly rejected Jesus and were lost, as this section closes we find the crowds subtly rejected the identity of Jesus, and they were also lost.

**Hearing about Jesus gladly doesn't save anybody.**

These verses close with these words.

...and the great throng heard him gladly. Mark 12:37 (ESV)

For the crowds, listening to Jesus had become entertainment. They loved watching Jesus make the prestigious religious leaders look like fools.

Here was the problem. Hearing about Jesus gladly didn't save anybody. The only way into the kingdom is not to just enjoy the words of Jesus but by responding to the truth about the identity of Jesus. It is confessing your sin, humbling yourself, and asking Jesus to be the Lord of your life.

Today, many people come to church to gladly hear the truth of Jesus. They think of church as a good place for friends and family. While they gladly hear the truth of Jesus, they never intend to surrender their lives to Jesus. Listen to me. It is not enough to say, "I believe in Jesus." James 2:19 says even the demons believe in Jesus. The demons believe Jesus is fully man and fully God. The demons believe in Jesus, but they never want to submit to the truth about the identity of Jesus. They don't want Jesus to be in charge of their lives. They live for themselves.

Is that you? Do you have demon-like faith? Do you gladly hear truth about Jesus, but when you look inside your heart you know you do not want him to be in charge of your life?

If Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God because he holds the position of highest authority in the universe, the only place he can rightfully be in our lives is the place of highest authority in our little universe. We can't content ourselves with just being entertained by truths about Jesus. We must submit to those truths and give all of our lives to Jesus.

Many people are raised in the church and accept Jesus as man and God as a point of doctrine. Nobody is saved by accepting that truth as doctrine. They are saved by accepting that truth as their identity. Jesus is the highest authority in the universe; we must desire to have Jesus in the place of highest authority in our universe. None of us will do that perfectly but for all of us that must be our direction and our desire.

Augustine said it this way.

“Christ is not valued at all, if Christ is not valued above all.”<sup>1</sup>

I want to ask you this morning, are you here as someone who gladly hears the truths about Jesus without submitting and owning the truth of Jesus by the complete surrender of your life? We cannot play with this.

Let today be the day you choose to stop seeing Jesus and church as entertainment, as the preaching of God’s words as something you are glad to hear. Will you stop holding Jesus at arm’s length? Is today the day of salvation? Do not harden your heart. Do not put this off for a future date and time. There are a limited number of windows in our lives when God brings us to a point of special spiritual sensitivity, prompting us to make a decision and make a change. If the Holy Spirit is prompting you, decide to make that change today. Open your heart and life and make Jesus your identity, not just the entertainment you gladly hear. As Augustine said, “Jesus is not valued at all, if Jesus is not valued above all.”



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