

“Self Exaltation”
Mark 12:38-40
(Preached at Trinity, May 7, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Much of **Chapter 12** records the efforts of the religious leaders to discredit Jesus by trapping Him in His words, but over and over Jesus disarms them. Finally, we read in **Verse 34** "After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."
2. But Jesus continued teaching regarding the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. He exposed their false understanding of the Messiah. How was it that they referred Him as the Son of David when David referred to Him as Lord?
3. Now, in **Verses 38-40** He continues His condemnation. This is actually an abbreviated account of our Lord's words. Matthew provides a much fuller account.
Matthew 23:2-33
4. Mark provides for us the chief motivation for the corruption of the Scribes and Pharisees. They were driven by pride. That love of self that drives men to pursue the exaltation of men while robbing God of the glory that belongs to Him alone.
 - a. This is the sin that leads to all other sin – It was this love of self and craving for personal exaltation that led to the first sin.
 - b. It was this pride that brought God's judgment down upon Israel. God's people must be a poor and lowly people
 - c. It is the sin that brings us to challenge the authority of God and His rightful right to rule. We disregard Him and His Law. We disregard His glory and seek our own glory.
 - d. Every time we try to milk a compliment. Every time we brag about our accomplishments. Every time we seek attention we are robbing God of His glory and God shares His glory with none.
Isaiah 42:8 NAU - "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another"
 - e. We are by nature God robbers, robbing God of His glory.
Romans 1:21-22 KJV - "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools"
 - f. This pride leads to the destruction of families, friends, and business relationships as everyone seeks only that which is best for themselves.
It even destroys churches.
 - g. This is what causes men to steal. They feel they deserve to own what rightfully belongs to others. They commit murder because the only life they value is their own.

5. We find here that even religious people who have access to the truth and who have been called to positions of leadership can serve from a motive of personal gain. Such was the case with the Scribes and Pharisees.
Even Christian pastors are in constant danger.
1 Timothy 3:6 NAU - "*and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil."
6. Jesus wasn't condemning *every* scribe and *every* Pharisee. Some of them would prove to be faithful followers of Christ. But it would seem that most had fallen into corruption.
 - a. This is the condition of humanity. There are few who are humble.
These hypocrites had one purpose for obeying the Law. It was not out of a desire for holiness to the honor of God. It was to be seen of men and to receive their praise.
Matthew 23:5 NAU - "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men"
Mark 12:38-39 NAU - "who like to walk around in long robes, and *like* respectful greetings in the market places, ³⁹ and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets"
 - b. It was all in hypocrisy – they only did those things that could be seen
Matthew 23:4 NAU - "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much* as a finger."
 - c. We should always examine our own hearts. Why do you truly want to be holy? Is it to be more respected by other Christians? Is it so you can feel better about your self? Or is it to glorify God? Is your desire to be holy to display the holy character of God?
 - d. Pastors should always ask themselves what is my motivation in this sermon. Is it to receive the praise of men as a good preacher or is it a passion for the souls of men? Is it out of a true desire to shepherd God's people or is it out of selfish motives?
7. The hypocrisy of pride is blind deception. When we seek to deceive others with our greatness we are truly only deceiving ourselves. It is nothing but foolishness and futility. It is foolish to trade the praise of God for the praise of men.
8. Tonight I simply want us to consider this important issue of pride once again. I don't fear preaching often on those subjects God speaks often on. Pride is one of the core problems of man and we are slow to apply it to ourselves. We naturally think we are humble.
9. Let me give you several reasons why it is nothing but foolishness and futility.
 - I. It is foolishness and futility because it pretends that God does not see. That He can be fooled like men
 - A. Hypocrisy focuses only upon what can be seen of men
 1. People go to church, tithe, carry their Bibles, talk religious talk
 2. But they seldom pray, seldom study their Bibles, care little for others
 3. Hypocrisy may never be exposed before men. It is possible to fool men our entire life – particularly during times when God's standard of holiness is ignored or replaced by the standard of men. But God is never fooled.

B. God sees all

1. It is foolish to pretend that God doesn't see our hypocrisy
Psalm 94:4-9 NAU - "They pour forth words, they speak arrogantly; All who do wickedness vaunt themselves. ⁵ They crush Your people, O LORD, And afflict Your heritage. ⁶ They slay the widow and the stranger And murder the orphans. ⁷ They have said, "The LORD does not see, Nor does the God of Jacob pay heed." ⁸ Pay heed, you senseless among the people; And when will you understand, stupid ones? ⁹ He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see"
2. It is foolish to pretend that God doesn't see you at home, at work, when you are with your friends
3. It is foolish to pretend that God does not know your heart

C. Question Jeremiah asked God:

Jeremiah 17:9 NAU - "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

Answer: God knows it.

Jeremiah 17:10 NAU - "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds."

It is foolishness to pretend that God doesn't notice pride

II. It is foolishness and futility because it has no value

A. The great deception is that it is a futile effort

1. Why work so hard for something that has no value
2. It would be like working a year to acquire a bag of dog hair, or a jar of finger nails – there is no value!
3. This is why so many are depressed in old age. They've labored their whole lives and have nothing to show that's of any value
4. For the hypocrite all of the effort will profit nothing. In fact it is worse than nothing. - "these will receive greater condemnation."

B. If you labor to be seen of men there will be no reward except the momentary praise of men

Matthew 6:2 NAU - "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Matthew 6:5 NAU - "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Matthew 6:16 NAU - "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

- C. Our motive in what we do is as important as the deed itself
1. Vainglory is abominable to God
 - a. We must be cautious – even as believers
Our prayers can be sinful; our giving can be sinful; our acts of religious devotion can be sinful
 - b. From our childhood we have tried to please others – to gain approval. From our parents, teachers, friends
Our service to God must never be motivated by a desire for the approval of men
 2. All must be done to God's glory
1 Corinthians 10:31 – "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."
- III. It is foolishness and futility because it is antithetical to true religion
- A. True religion comes from the heart
1. The one Scribe seemed to understand this.
Mark 12:33 NAS - "to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."
 2. The hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees only focused on the external
Mark 12:38 NAU - "who like to walk around in long robes"
Matthew 23:5 NAU - "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of *their garments*."
 - a. Their long robes had tassels on the edges in order to stand out and be noticed.
 - b. Phylacteries were leather cases holding written passages that were usually worn on the forehead and on the left arm during prayer
 - c. The sad thing is that they had taken a statement with spiritual meaning and applied it as outward religion
Exodus 13:9 NAU - "And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt."
 - d. Outwardly they appeared holy and pious. Inwardly they were filled with abominable filth.
Matthew 23:27-28 NAU - "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. ²⁸ "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."
 3. It is good to covet to be more holy
It is the sin of pride to covet to appear more holy

- B. True religion results in meekness and humility. The scribes and Pharisees bore little evidence of humility.
Mark 12:38-39 NAU - "and *like* respectful greetings in the market places, ³⁹ and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets"
Matthew 23:11-12 NAU - "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."
1. Once again, pride is condemned
Proverbs 16:18 – "Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."
 2. The humble ones will find themselves highly exalted. They will find themselves dwelling with the most exalted One.
- C. Worst of all, they took advantage of the weak
1. We aren't told how they took advantage of the widows. But the widows were often the most helpless. God often warns against abusing the helpless.
James 1:27 NAU - "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."
 2. Perhaps in their pride they were simply taking advantage of the hospitality of the widows. Perhaps they were mismanaging the estates of the widows. Whatever it was they were guilty of abusing them.

Conclusion:

1. Our Lord's words are fearful, particularly for those in positions of leadership
Mark 12:40 NAU - "these will receive greater condemnation."
James 3:1 NAU - "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."
Hebrews 13:17 NAU - "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."
2. This passage is a powerful warning to all who would seek a place of prominence. The NT teaching is that it is far better to be last.
Matthew 19:30 NAU - "But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first."
Mark 9:35 NAU - "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."
Mark 10:44 NAU - "whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."
3. God sees us as we are. We must humble ourselves before Him and before others.
Psalms 139:23-24 NAU - "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴ And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way."
4. All of us should be confronted with the question, why do we do what we do? Do we harbor a secret desire to be exalted above everyone else?