

The Gospel According to Mark - The Dangers of Reading Your Bible

"The Dangers of Reading Your Bible" (Mark 12:35-40)

Abby and I are currently looking for a home in Slidell. We look for several things as we view a potential option. One of those things is a nice stove. You might think that a stove is a peripheral issue when looking for a new home, and you would be right. But, I like to take a look at it, because it is useful. Stoves are useful. Think about the many things stoves can be used for. You wake up in the morning and you want something hot and delicious, so you go cook some crispy bacon and an over easy egg. You have some friends coming over later in the evening, so you go to the stove and make up a good roux and fix a pot of gumbo. One of the best things a stove can produce is a nice bowl of macaroni and cheese.

I can recall one instance of enjoying some stove cooked macaroni that will forever be burned into my mind. One afternoon I had come home from school hungry, like always, and my mom had decided to make us some macaroni and cheese. She made up some macaroni, then she had some other tasks to do around the house. So, my older sister and I grabbed some macaroni and started to work on our homework. I, being my mother's child, needed some salt on the macaroni and cheese, because it just wasn't as tasteful as I wanted it to be. So, I got up and went to grab the salt from the back of the stove.

I have always been a short human, so I needed a little boost to get the salt from the back part of the stove. Instead of asking for help, I decided I would place my arm on the glass stove top to boost myself up. I did just that, and I placed my arm right on the burner which was used just minutes before hand to boil our macaroni. I came down with a burning sensation in my arm and a unique smell filling my nose. I lifted my arm up to see my skin melting off of my forearm. The story continues and I got the medical attention I needed and spent the next 6 months seeing the doctor in order to fully recover. Needless to say though stoves are useful, they can also be dangerous.

The title of this message reads, "The Dangers of Reading Your Bible." What dangers could possibly accompany reading your Bible. In fact, God has ordained the words of Scripture to be the special and specific way he reveals himself to mankind. Therefore, the Bible is only useful. Sure, stoves are useful and dangerous, but not the Bible.

Now, I said God has ordained the words of Scripture to be the special and specific way he reveals himself to mankind. But let me back up for a second and say Scripture is not the only way God reveals himself. God also reveals himself through creation. He reveals his beauty in the majestic sunset sweetly sitting upon the outstretched blanket of the ocean waters. God reveals his limitlessness in the vast expanse of the universe, which no telescope is powerful enough to see all of its great distances. God reveals his great power in the perfect placement of that gigantic star we call the Sun, which has such a smoldering heat that if earth was any closer, the planet would be uninhabitable. Yes, God certainly reveals himself in creation in general, but God has also revealed himself personally in a more clear and specific way.

God has ordained his special revelation to come through the wonderful writings of the sacred Scriptures, or what we most often call the Bible. You have heard it said, and rightly so, that Scripture is the very words of God, or God's love letter to human beings. Furthermore, Paul highly commends these sacred texts in Second Timothy. He said: "But as for you [Timothy], continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:14-16). Paul said the Scriptures show us the way of salvation (being saved by Jesus), are useful for sanctification (becoming more like Jesus), and equip us for every good work (following Jesus in all we do).

The revelation of God in Scripture has been designed to be far more precious than his revelation to humanity through creation. In what way, then, can reading your Bible be dangerous? Again, stoves, though useful, can be dangerous, but Scripture is only useful. Well, Jesus would disagree. The recorded words of Jesus are going to identify some dangers for us today, and we would be wise to heed the very counsel of Jesus.

Our text this morning will come from the book of Mark, and we will start reading in chapter twelve at verse thirty-five. As you open your Bibles, or pull the passage up on your phone, I want to remind you of the context we find this passage within. While Jesus was teaching in public, many of the religious elite had been asking Jesus questions, trying to challenge him, trick him, or trap him into saying something incorrect. Yet, every time Jesus responded with godly wisdom and authority. Then Mark concluded this section, almost humorously by saying, "From then on no one dared ask him [Jesus] any more questions."

The religious elite are done asking their questions, but Jesus now has some questions for them. This is where our text begins. In your head, read along with me and reflect upon the words of Jesus.

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by 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.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight. As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

In these verses, Jesus rebuked the teachers of the law for placing themselves above the authority of Scripture. This morning, through this text, God commands us to submit ourselves to the teachings of Scripture. Prayerfully, I hope all of us walk out of here today recognizing Scripture as the supreme authority in our lives, and therefore seeking to be obedient to it in every way.

Surely, we noticed as we read the two distinct sections in the passage. The first section starting in verse thirty-five and ending in verse thirty-seven, where Jesus addressed a belief. The second starting in verse thirty-eight and ending in verse forty, where Jesus addressed a lifestyle. Turn your attention to the first section with me, and we will examine the first danger of reading your Bible.

Danger #1: The temptation to make yourself the authoritative judge of truth.

Remember now that the teachers of the law in the Jewish religion are extremely well trained. These teachers of the law would have been taught doctrine from their family since their youth, studied in some intense schools as they grew up, and spent the majority of their days as adults examining the Scriptures. These teachers knew the Word of God well. So, Jesus asked them a question about an obvious teaching: "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?" The teachers of the law must have been confused, perhaps thinking, *this question is too easy—the whole Old Testament recognized the Messiah would be a descendant of David.*

These thoughts would have been correct. The Old Testament proclaimed the Davidic sonship of the Messiah multiple times:

Psalms 89:3-4 says, "The Lord said, 'I have made a covenant with My chosen one; I have sworn an oath to David My servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever and build up your throne for all generations.'"

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 says, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light that has dawned on those living in the land of darkness... For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this."

Jeremiah 23:5-6 says, "The days are coming," said the Lord, "when I will raise up a Righteous Branch of David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our Righteous Savior."

We could go on and on but the testimony is clear: the Messiah will be a son, or descendant of David. Pay close attention to the descriptor *son, or descendant*, of David, which denotes the Messiah, as all other sons of human parents, will be fully human. Right? Yes, of course, Jesus' audience would have known this truth. However, the danger is revealed when Jesus referenced another messianic text, then asked a follow-up question.

Jesus referenced Psalm 110, a coronation psalm, which would have been used at the enthronement of the new Davidic king. (On a side note, the preface Jesus gave to this reference is important and intentional. He says the psalm was indeed written by David but during his writing he was speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' comment is a powerful recognition of the Scriptures' inspired composition.) The Psalm of David stated, "The Lord [God, the Father] said to my Lord [Jesus, the Messiah]: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" So, Jesus pointed out: David said that the Messiah is his Lord and at the right hand of God almighty. Therefore, the Messiah is more than just human. Jesus' follow-up question drove home his point, "David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" Jesus pushed them to recognize that the nature of the Messiah is more than just the human son of David. The Messiah is also divine. The Messiah, then, has a complex identity: he is fully man and fully God. The mystery and majesty of the incarnation, God taking on flesh, is absolutely beautiful and utterly confusing.

The teachers of the law could not answer Jesus. They had no way to understand how the fully human, great grandson of David could also be fully God and superior to the great king. Yet, they could not deny it, for they knew the reference was a direct quote. Take a look at this optical illusion created by Edward H. Adelson. You see the two tiles labeled with letters. At the top, you see the dark grey tile labeled "A." At the bottom, you see the light grey tile labeled "B." Are they actually different colors? Now, take your hands and use them to block everything on the right and left of those two tiles. Position your hands so that you can only see the strip of the picture which contains both tiles. Do you see that these colors are actually the same? Well, this happens quite frequently when viewing optical illusions. Your mind is trying to make sense of what it sees from the previous knowledge base of experiences stored up in your mind. The green cylinder is casting a shadow over the "B" tile. You know from past experiences when a color is in a shadow the lack of light usually darkens the appearance of the color, therefore your brain helps you to see that color as it actually would be, if it were not in the shadow. Thus, the "B" tile appears to be a little brighter. The same is true in reverse for the "A" tile. The "A" tile is not in the shadow, but in the light. Therefore your mind might only make slight color adjustment to the image. So, you see the color a little darker than the light might make it appear. Your brain is trying to make sense of the image while using the current base of knowledge you have from past experiences.

Your brain will also do this when encountering ideas, philosophies, and beliefs. In the case of this passage in Mark's gospel, the teachers could not comprehend the Messiah being both fully God and fully man, so they decide to fit the Messiah in to something that makes sense to them. Instead of taking the psalm 110 passage as a reality which displays the mystery that God is divine and human, these religious leaders want to deny the divinity of Christ and make the Scriptures understandable to them. Well, that is at least one possibility. Though perhaps it wasn't a difficulty of understanding, which caused them to deny the divinity of Christ. Perhaps, they understood the meaning of Psalm 110, but did not like the truth that the Messiah was fully divine. Since Jesus was calling himself the Messiah, they certainly did not want to affirm him to be divine. In this case, the denial of the truth is due to preference. They disliked the truth and therefore deny it. Regardless of the motivation of the teachers to deny this truth, the answer to this danger is the same. Rather than making themselves the authoritative judges of truth, Jesus desired for the teachers of the law to humbly submit themselves to the authoritative Word of God.

This danger was not just present for the teachers then, the danger is also present for us today. You may not be comfortable believing in a God you can't fully understand, and therefore deny his truth in the Bible as authoritative. However, I think it is far more likely for all of us to place ourselves over the authority of Scripture because we do not like the truths presented in the Bible. As I begin to name some of the truths we deny because of our preferences, please know that it is ungodly to hate people who engage in these sins. God calls these issues sin because he loves us and knows that sin, in any form, lead to our harm and ultimately our destruction. Similarly, we cannot address these sins in ourselves or in others, without the same godly love which is designed to lead people to repentance.

Ignoring God's leadership toward repentance and instead choosing our preferences, we have decided that we can deny the authority of God's Word in our lives. We see that the Word of God forbids lying, yet a small lie every now and again seems okay to us. We see the Word of God forbids lazy work, but we think it is okay as long as we are keeping up with our other co-workers. We see the Word of God forbids getting drunk, but pushing the line every once and awhile couldn't be that bad in our eyes. We see the Word of God forbids lust therefore forbids watching pornography, but we argue that no one is being hurt simply from looking at some screen. We see the Word of God forbids homosexuality, but we believe that times have changed and in the present it's okay. We see the Word of God forbidding selfishness, pride, sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry. We see the Word of God calling out sin in our lives, but we do not like it. So, we decide to place ourselves over the authority of Scripture and be disobedient, rather than submitting ourselves to its teachings. I do not say this as the righteous judge. By contrast, I sit in the same seat as you, a convicted sinner. I plead with you as I also plead with my own soul, submit yourself to the Word of God.

This submission will make no sense, without knowing Jesus. Without knowing the love and grace of Jesus, we think that these are a list of rules to please God. But, when you know Jesus, following him is known to be the most joyous way to live your life. Living a life in submission to Scripture becomes the joyful outflow of knowing the good, loving, creator who has your best intentions in mind.

The answer to the first danger is to submit yourself to the Word of God, trusting that even when it is difficult to understand, or you do not like it, God's Word remains pure, good, and true. Now, lets turn our attention to the second section of the passage and the second danger.

Danger #2: Living a life which is not in accord with the Bible.

This danger is usually an example, or an effect, of falling into the first danger. Verse thirty-eight and following says:

As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

Little background research is needed to see the disgusting character of the arrogant religious leaders, who believe that because they know the Scriptures well they are more valuable than everyone else. They think that Bible intake elevates their value, or importance. Therefore, since they are above Scripture, they live a life which is not in accord with the Scriptures. Other, less important people, should submit themselves to the teachings but not them. These teachers think their dress should reflect their greatness. They think the way others greet them and seat them at events ought to reflect their greatness. They think they are able to exploit the helpless. And, surely, they think they ought to be able to boast of their knowledge in their lengthy prayers. It is so wild to think the very Scriptures they pride themselves on knowing so well actually instruct a person into a character and lifestyle which is the complete opposite of their current mentality.

The sincere leader of God's people should note the truth submitted by John Ortberg, "The goal is not for us to get through the Scriptures," as if some level up of importance occurs when you finish the Bible in a year. Instead, Ortberg said, "The goal is to get the Scriptures through us." The Scriptures should be used to transform us not to raise our importance over others.

APP: Jesus' answer to this danger is to watch out for religious leaders who are arrogant and hypocritical, but his warning should also be applied to our lives. We also must recognize that the temptation to allow Scriptural knowledge to puff up into arrogance, should be checked and guarded against constantly. We are not excluded from experiencing this temptation. Therefore, we must come humbly to the Word of God seeking to be changed by it. Doing this requires reading the Scriptures diligently and prayerfully, all the while seeking transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our passage this morning, we see that Jesus rebuked the teachers of the law for placing themselves above the authority of Scripture. From this text, we know God commands us to submit ourselves to the teachings of Scripture. Prayerfully, I desire we all respond now by asking God to transform our lives so that we live in accordance with the Scriptures. After I pray, if you desire to, please come forward and pray with someone, or alone, about the struggles you might be having in regard to one of these dangers. If you remain in your chairs, I invite you to reflect upon what area of your life Jesus might be putting his finger on today, and asking you to submit that area to him.