

## The King in the City: The Proof and the Path

Mark 12:35-44

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In 1858, adventurer and acrobat Charles Blondin moved to Ontario with the goal of becoming the first person to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. And after a year of planning and waiting for the right weather, on June 30<sup>th</sup> in front of 25,000 thrill-seekers Blondin set up the cables for the show.

Finally, at 5pm the cable was ready, and Blondin stepped out to the cheers and cries of a bloodthirsty crowd many of whom had bet money he would fall to his death. Children cried, people passed out and others hid behind their hands not able to actually watch as Blondin walked out on the swaying cable.

Then, when Blondin got to the center, where the rope was most unstable, he abruptly sat down. It looked like he would fall. But then he took some twine from a pocket and lowered it to the Maid of the Mist which was right below. And someone on the boat attached a bottle of wine which he pulled up and drank before crossing to the Canadian side. On his way back he stopped again in the middle and took a camera out of his backpack – not a phone, but one of those pinhole cameras with a tripod and a sheet to put over your head. And he took a picture of the crowd.

Everyone was amazed! And Blondin's fame shot across the province. But only 25,000 had seen it so many doubted it was true. As a result Blondin decided to return and do it again, and then every week for the summer to ever increasing crowds. And on each pass he added something new. He hung from the wire one handed, he crossed wearing a burlap sack over his head, and once he even brought a small stove in a wheelbarrow and cooked himself an omelet.

But as the summer was drawing to a close Blondin decided he needed a grand finale. And so he put an ad in the paper offering a thousand dollars – a ton of money back then, to any volunteer who would allow him to carry them on his back.<sup>1</sup>

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We are back in Mark 12 today so grab your Bibles. We will be picking it up in verse 35. And as you find that, just to bring us up to speed, it's still Tuesday of Holy Week in the text. It's two days before Jesus is arrested and three before He is crucified.

And Jesus spent Tuesday in the temple talking with people who didn't believe in Him. First the chief priests and the teachers challenged His authority. Then the Pharisees and Herodians tried to expose His political agenda. And then the Sadducees and scribes hit Him with some theological questions.

And all this time Jesus was on the defensive – sort of. Of course His answers were so penetrating that the section ends saying “No one dared ask Him anything else.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-daredevil-of-niagara-falls-110492884/> (Accessed Nov 11, 2021)

And that's where pick up today. And for the first time Jesus goes on the offensive. He asks a question to those who will not believe. So would you stand with me in hunger and expectation of hearing Jesus speak. Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read Mark 12:34-44]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

It is amazing how even though life has never been more different than it is right now, still nothing has changed. We can still divide people into the rich and the poor; there are still liberals and conservatives; we still have the religious and the secular.

And as such Jesus' question cuts through all the diversity of humanity from all time and shows us that following Him isn't about leaning left or right, or anything else. Christianity is about trusting to following Jesus as He walks to the cross.

And the cross confounds every human rubric we can imagine. In the cross we get the radical justice of God fulfilled in the loving sacrifice of God. God shows Himself to be holy and righteous and at the same time loving and merciful. And it's through the cross that broken sinners can return to the relationship with our Creator we were designed for in the beginning. That's what all this is about.

And there simply isn't a framework that can encompass it. In the cross God is neither conservative or liberal. He isn't religious or secular. He's not a traditionalist or a progressive. Jesus is something else. And if we will follow Him then we will become something else as well. That's where Jesus is going.

But how He gets there is strange. So first He asks a question about something King David said a thousand years earlier. And then we get a cute story about a generous old lady. And this is Jesus' proof for the skeptics and path for those who want to follow.

So let's look first at the proof Jesus gives in verse 35.<sup>2</sup> Jesus asks:

"Why do the teachers of religious law claim that the Messiah is the son of David? For David himself, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, 'The LORD said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at My right hand until I humble Your enemies beneath Your feet.'

Since David himself called the Messiah 'my Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?" (Mark 12:35-37)

So Jesus is quoting from Psalm 110 which was one of the most accepted Messianic prophecies in Jesus' day. Everyone knew this Psalm. And everyone believed the Messiah would come from David's line.

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<sup>2</sup> Outline adapted from Tim Keller <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/jesus-versus-5473/> (Accessed Nov 10, 2021)

But the controversial part then is how David refers to the Messiah. He says “The LORD said to my Lord.” Now in Hebrew the first ‘Lord’ is all capital letters which means YHWH. So it’s God speaking to the Messiah; to David’s descendant. And David is listening in. And David tells us what God says. But it’s weird how David does this.

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So for example if Spencer was talking to my son Corban, and I was listening in and telling you what he said. I would say “Spencer said to my son.” I wouldn’t say “Spencer said to my lord” – that would be weird.

And that’s Jesus’ point. David would never refer to one of His descendants as his Lord. He would always say his son unless somehow this descendant was greater than him, which in Hebrew tradition never happened. A father was always greater than a son, even if the son became the king. So what David says only makes sense if David’s son is also God’s Son.

And that’s Jesus’ point. So everyone in the first century knew the Messiah was coming. And everyone knew he would be David’s son. But their Messiah box was too small. They wanted a Messiah who would deliver them from their enemies of the moment – the Romans. But God’s Messiah was frying much larger fish. He was going to defeat humanities enemies of all time – sin, death and evil.

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Now stop there for a second. Jesus is talking to skeptics – people who don’t believe in Him. And this is the proof He gives. He quotes a 1000 year old Psalm that points to Himself being more than just man. But why not do a miracle? Or why not make a logical argument nobody could refute? Why this?

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Jesus does this because by pointing to Himself Jesus’ proof transcends time and culture. His proof is just as good today as it was 2000 years ago. So in 1 Corinthians Paul says:

[The gospel] is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense. (1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

Paul’s point is that every culture has a different way to measure truth. For the Jews it was all about the miracles – show me something supernatural and I will believe. For the Greeks it was all about logic. Make me a watertight argument and I will believe.

For our culture it is all about the science. If it can be scientifically proven then I will believe. But the fact is miracles, logic and science don’t convince skeptics.

Jesus walked on water and fed thousands and yet many Jews were able to leave unconvinced. And there is tons of logical, and even scientific evidence for the resurrection and yet many Greeks were unconvinced. And so are we.

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So Jesus did perform miracles. And He still does. And so, if you want to believe there is lots here that will speak to you. And similarly, there is tons of verifiable history in scripture, and logical explanations for the life of Jesus so there is room to be both a believer and an intellectual.

But none of those things are the primary thing Jesus gives as proof of His veracity. The big thing Jesus gives is Himself. Jesus is the proof. He says look in scripture at what the Messiah is like and then look at who I am. And if you see me for who I really am you will see that I am both David's son and God's Son.

This is primarily what God gives us. Not a miracle. Not a logical proof but a person. God gave Himself. And so if you want to meet God you need to get into the text and let it speak. Don't make it say what you want it to say. Let Jesus speak for Himself. But watch out because the Jesus you will find there is not tame.

Jesus is huge and powerful and full of conviction. And yet in all this He is gentle and not abusive or intolerant. He's so big we can never get our minds around Him. But He never apologizes for not defending His actions. He doesn't answer to us. And this is what God gives us as proof. Jesus says I dare you to study Me. Dig in and then, if you are willing to believe, see if there is any way to understand Me other than that I am both son of David and Son of God. That's the proof.

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Now here's the path, and it's strange. This isn't the spot for a story in Mark. It's Holy Week. It's the triumphal entry. It's teaching about the end of time – that's chapter 13. It's the turning of Peter and Judas and then it's torture. There are no other stories here. And yet at the very center we get some heart-warming narrative about a generous widow. What does this have to do with anything?

It turns out everything.

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You see if you want to believe but are struggling then this is what you need. So maybe you've been around church for a bit but stuff has happened recently and it feels like God is so distant you aren't even sure He's there. Or maybe you've been hit with some arguments that have you questioning your faith. If you want to believe but are struggling, then this widow is brilliant.

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There are two things here I want to bring out here. The first is the context we need to see to understand. So perhaps you've heard someone preach this text, and it went something like this: "When you give, just be aware, that Jesus is watching you." Great right? It's all about guilt and control.

And that is exactly what the Pharisees were doing. In verse 40 Jesus says:

They shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished.  
(Mark 12:40)

So it's a bad idea to use this text to guilt people into giving – I'm not going there. And that's because God has a special spot in His heart for the poor.

So God doesn't have favorites, it's just that He likes some people more. And this is kind of a joke, but not really. You see this is hard for a bunch of rich Canadians to hear, but if you are sick or poor or widowed or orphaned or powerless or abused you have a special in with God that other people don't have.

And we see this all over the Old Testament. God loves to be a father to the fatherless and a husband to the husbandless. He loves to defend the needy and weak. He loves justice for the oppressed. And that's because God's doesn't just empathize with them, He associates with them. Read the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup>

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But Jesus shows us that none of this has changed. So in another text Jesus tells us what is going to happen when He returns. And He tells us a story about the sheep and the goats – you know this story. And to the goats He says: I was hungry and you didn't give Me anything to eat. I was a stranger and you didn't invite Me in. I was in prison and you didn't visit Me." And things go poorly for the goats.

But to the sheep Jesus says:

The King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these My brothers and sisters, you were doing it to Me!' (Matthew 25:40)

The sheep care for the poor and minister to the King. And it goes good for them!

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Now Jesus isn't saying that if you help the poor then you go to heaven. That would be works salvation. But Jesus is saying that if you've got no room in your soul for the poor, then you've got no room in your soul for Him, because God associates Himself with the poor.

Now this flips everything we know on its head. We all want to be rich and healthy and strong and powerful, but Jesus says:

God blesses you who are poor,  
for the Kingdom of God is yours. (Luke 6:20)

Now why? Why is this a blessing? It's because the poor and oppressed and sick and weak know that they can't trust themselves. They have to trust God. And it's when we trust God that we win at life. This is how to be blessed Jesus style.

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So Jesus is in the temple with His disciples now, and He looks over and sees everyone giving their gifts. And some rich guys dump in a lot. And then this woman comes and gives 2 copper coins – the smallest coins in circulation. These are like Canadian pennies. They aren't worth anything. But they carry weight with Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> See Lev 19:9-10; Deut 15:10-11; Ps 82:3-4; 140:12; Prov 14:31; 19:17; 31:8-9; Is 58:6-10 for example

You see Jesus isn't short on cash and so He isn't impressed when rich guys drop big bills in the plate. And that's because what actually carries weight with Jesus is trust. And trust is what this woman gives.

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Now we have talked before about how rich we are. All you need to make the top 10% of the richest people on earth is \$24,000 a year – do you make more than that? And to make the top 1% you only need \$75,000. So we are loaded.<sup>4</sup>

But this means, if you take Jesus seriously, then we are at a disadvantage when it comes to getting in with God. Jesus thinks it's harder to have faith when you're rich. And that's because God wants us to trust Him, and wealthy people like to trust ourselves.

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So let's make this practical. Most wealthy people have never been in a spot where our giving meant we have to eat less – right? Most wealthy people have never lived in a smaller house in order to accommodate their giving. Most wealthy people haven't been forced to choose not to get new clothes because we were giving – we give and then buy the new clothes too. And that's because most of us give out of our surplus. That's the trap wealthy people can fall into.

But this woman isn't like that. She gives all she has. And what it amounts to is giving over control of her life to God. She isn't taking into consideration what she is going to eat. She isn't worried about where she is going to retire. She gives it away.

Now how can she do this? Isn't it foolish? Well here's the thing, it's actually easier for her to do this than us because the two pennies she's got aren't actually enough to buy food or take care of her housing anyway. And that's the unfair blessing part. It's simply easier for the poor to get into heaven.

But that's not the point of this passage. Jesus has been talking to the skeptics, and now He's talking to His disciples who want to believe but are struggling. And Jesus' point is to show His disciples and us to path to abundant life. You see the reason we struggle with belief is not that we need to see one more miracle or learn one more argument about the resurrection. What we need is to choose to trust God like this woman.

And contrary to what people say trust can't actually be earned – it has to be given. If you are determined not to trust me there is nothing I can do to change your mind. And it's the same with Jesus and He's been trustworthy in every way. Now He has never said He will explain why He does what He does – “why” is above our pay grade.

But He has given all the miracles and logic and science we need to make faith reasonable. The only question is will we follow Him to the cross? Will we trust Him like this woman? Will we give over control in our lives to Christ?

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So assuming you want to do this, how do we do it? Because it's hard!

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/> (calculate how wealthy you are from a global perspective)

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Here's the answer: We need to go where Jesus tells us to go. We need to get into scripture and see who Jesus is. And that's because the proof Jesus gives isn't a miraculous sign or an airtight argument. He gives us Himself. Jesus is both son of David and Son of God.

Now from here Jesus demands that we trust Him, but here's the crazy thing about Jesus. As you dig into Him you find out that trusting Jesus doesn't mean trusting a tyrant. Our God is such a unique God. There is no other like Him.

Our God doesn't just love the poor, He became poor. He possessed all the wealth of heaven but chose to be born in a manger to impoverished parents. He was powerless and penniless. And then ultimately He allowed Himself to be stripped naked and hung on a cross. He gave up all His control for us. There is no other god who loved like this.

And Jesus did this to pay our debts and clothe us in His righteousness, and to melt our hearts. He loved us so we could give up our control and trust – not a tyrant but a friend.

Now Jesus knows this is hard, but this is the evidence He gives that transcends time and culture. He gives us Himself. And He says if you want to really live the only way to do it is to follow Me. So will you lay down your control to win?

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Several people accepted Charles Blondin's offer of a thousand dollars to be carried across the falls. And as they all stood there at the edge of the rope he asked them "Do you believe I can carry you to the other side?" And they all said "yes." But then when he selected a man to be the winner the man backed down. And one by one every man backed down until Blondin was there by himself. Nobody would get on his back.

And so Blondin turned to his manager, Harry Colcord, and said "it has to be you." And as Harry climbed on his back Blondin gave him this command: "Look up, Harry... you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin. Until I clear this place be part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do we will both go to our death." And then with Harry on His back Blondin walked to the other side.

Friends, Jesus wants you to trust Him and to give Him the control of your life. He wants control of your finances and your health and your sexuality and your relationships and your very life itself. And any attempt to balance on your own will sound like logic to human ears but only result in your demise. That's the path.

And the evidence He gives that He is worthy of this trust is not a miracle or an argument but Himself. He is the God who left heaven to walk in your shoes, and He loves you. So will you trust Him enough to get on His back?