

A couple of years ago the Harvard Business Review published a study entitled, “Consumer Warning Labels Aren’t Working.”

That headline is reporting what we already know. The report reads in part,

Warning labels are everywhere. They alert us to the risks of eating unhealthy foods, smoking cigarettes, taking prescription drugs, driving cars, using power tools, and performing many other activities. Ideally, these warnings provide requisite risk information, allowing people to decide for themselves whether an activity or a product’s benefits outweigh its risks, whether to take those risks, and, if so, with what precautions.

But are our current warnings effective? Do they convey sufficient information for individuals to balance the risks and benefits? Our answer is a resounding “no.” Our reasoning is that the present system fails miserably at distinguishing between large and small risks. A way to understand this is what we term wolves and puppies. Wolves are rarely seen but may eat your sheep — and perhaps you as well, according to the fable of the shepherd boy. Puppies occasionally nip, but when they do, the results are rarely serious.

The problem with our present warning system is that it shouts “Danger!” for both wolves and puppies. Such a system is of little value; people quickly learn to ignore warnings since they encounter vastly more puppies than wolves. The result is that when a wolf is truly present, people pay little heed.

Exactly right.

There are many puppy warnings.

We run into so many pointless Warning Labels in a day—on a battery-‘Don’t use as Toothpaste’; on a wheelbarrow-‘Not intended for Highway Use’; on a baby stroller-‘Remove Child before folding.’

We run into so many pointless warnings that the real ones—the ‘wolf’ ones are ignored.

Jesus is delivering a wolf warning this morning. We must listen to this warning. This label we ignore to our peril.

Whenever Jesus says, “Beware!” We should do just that. He is not in the habit of offering pointless warnings.

We would do well to heed to stop, consider and weigh carefully his warning.

PROP: Beware of corrupt leaders; trust Jesus.

Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

If you have been here, you know that Mark chapter 12 has been an extended verbal sparing match. Jesus vs. the Jewish religious elite. Jesus faced the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians and the scribes.

Each of these groups did not just come to him, they came at him. They came at him because he was

beloved by the people. Because he was gaining a hearing amongst the crowds.

The religious leaders felt threatened so they went on attack. It did not go well. Today, Jesus goes on the counterattack.

Jesus not trying to score rhetorical points he is delivering warnings to protect anyone willing to listen. His aim is to unmask corrupt leaders.

He asks a question they cannot answer.
He shouts a warning we cannot ignore.

Let's all join Jesus once again in the temple as we gather with the crowd closely to hear the man who taught with unheard of authority.

“And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, “How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?

³⁶David 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.” ’

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

And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” Mark 12:35-40

PRAY

He asks a question they cannot answer.
He shouts a warning we cannot ignore.

1. His Question (Mark 12:35—37)

What he asks to our ears is confusing, vague and somewhat nebulous. I think as we look at it, we will be able to answer his question, but the interesting thing about the question is WHY he asked it.

Vs. 35,

“And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, “How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?”

You see he is going after the scribes. They are held in high esteem. They were that culture’s rock stars, NFL quarterbacks and movie stars all rolled into one. The scribes fancied themselves as the highest authority in the land. They made sure everybody understood that.

They were supposed to be the teachers of Israel and Jesus is showing the crowd that they didn’t know what they were talking about.

And Jesus calls them out.

Jesus calls them out by asking a question that he knew that scribes were vexed by and could not answer. And in asking it—he is going to make them look stupid.

Look again at the question,

“How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?

That means that the scribes taught that Messiah would be a descendent of David. We know this is true in many places in the OT, most famously Micah 3.

Here is what the scribes could not explain—

Vs. 36,

³⁶David 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.” ’**

³⁷David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?”

Jesus quotes Psalm 110—a psalm written by David and as he speaks of the coming Messiah he says, ‘the Lord said to my Lord.’

To make it easier to understand we might render this phrase—God said to Messiah, sit at my right hand.

You might be asking—What is the question again?

David called Messiah, ‘my Lord.’ And you might think, what is the big deal?

David should call his descendent, ‘my son’ not ‘my lord.’

That makes sense. A Grandfather does not call a grandson—‘master’ or ‘sir.’ The scribes could not understand why David referred to his great/great grandson as lord instead of son.

We can understand why.

The scribes had no category for one who would both be the Son of God and David’s lord.

We know that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. Jesus was both the Son of God (not created—eternal) and the Son of David (born of Mary).

The scribes would not believe that the Messiah would be divine, just a man. Their problem was they imagined the Messiah to be the hero that they thought they needed most.

They thought they needed a revolutionary general a la George Washington.

They expected Messiah to be a man who came to give the nation of Israel freedom from her great enemies. They had no expectation that the Messiah would be divine. The Messiah came to deal with more than the Romans. There were greater foes to destroy. They had no clue that he would come to release mankind from his great enemies—all evil, all sin, all death.

Jesus is David’s lord because he existed before and after him.

Why is he showing the crowd just how much the scribes don't know?

Because the scribes presented themselves as constantly studying the OT and the authoritative interpreters on earth for God. They demanded that the people obey their word.

Jesus is saying—they don't know what they are talking about.

And Jesus, in front of the crowd shows that these vaunted scribes were limited and feeble and not the all-wise, all-powerful folks they portrayed them to be.

How did the crowd take that?

And the great throng heard him gladly.

They ate it up. They loved it. Their haughty teachers were getting schooled.

Jesus was not just trying to make these guys look stupid—he was showing the people how very dangerous they were.

They didn't know even a basic question—and more than that—what they do isn't always right.

Dishonest, unscrupulous spiritual leaders are among the most lethal people on the planet. We all expect some degree of deceit and dishonesty when we deal with those who occupy the corridors of power.

We are on our guard when we hear politicians speak or when we see an infomercial or when we hear a pitch from a financial planner that sounds too good to be true.

But so often, people are not on guard enough to when it comes to spiritual leaders. Treacherous spiritual leaders are lethal because people entrust something much more valuable than money or representation. They entrust their eternal souls.

These scribes that Jesus was confronting didn't care a whit about the people they were supposed to serve. They cared most about themselves.

Crooked spiritual leaders are lethal.

Jesus calls this warning out to all of those gathered around and to us too. His warning is meant to arm us all from the clutches of deadly spiritual leaders. All of us need to heed this warning.

His question showed that the scribes did not know all that they said they did, now he warns them and all of us.

We've heard him ask a question they could not answer. Now he shouts a warning we cannot ignore.

2. His Warning (Mark 12:38-40)

Vs. 38,

Beware of the scribes,

Notice, he does not warn them against dictators, Romans, drunkards, prostitutes, murderers but against corrupt leaders.

These scribes did not deny the truth or authority of the scriptures. They believed the God of the Bible. They believed that God created all things from nothing. They believed that everyone had to obey the scriptures without exception.

They believed all the right things about the scriptures—but they used their position to take advantage of everyone they could. Instead of loving and serving the people, they loved and served themselves.

Yet they were corrupt. And Corrupt spiritual leaders are lethal.

What did the scribes do?

Jesus gives us characteristics of corrupt spiritual leaders.

- *Corrupt leaders are out for themselves.*

Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces...

The scribes loved the trappings of power and did what they did to gain adulation from the masses. They were leaders to become famous and respected.

Beware leaders who are more about their image and reputation than the people they serve. Beware leaders

who will not protect people because it might make them look bad in the public eye.

That is what the scribes did.

They had no thought of the needs of the people they thought only of their own needs. A biblical leader must think first about the people than his own personal ambitions.

Corrupt leaders are quick to take credit and slow to protect others. The scribes were did what they did for themselves and not for others.

The scribes were corrupt. They loved themselves.

Not Jesus.

But Jesus is the perfect foil. A foil is a character in story who is in sharp contrast to someone else. These scribes were perfectly foiled by Jesus.

Corrupt leaders are ambitious to be thought of well by everyone. Not Jesus. He had not one ounce of selfish ambition. He came with no personal agenda. He came to do the will of his father in heaven.

If there was anyone who had the right to respect it was Jesus. He came not to be respected by to be rejected.

In not too many hours after this interchange, he would be clothed in a robe but to be mocked. He would get the attention of the crowds by dying for the people.

If anyone had the right to be out for himself—it was Jesus.

He was uncreated and created all things.
He faced with every temptation and never sinned.
He held all power and might.
He was God.

And yet—Jesus was in it for others. He came to earth for the good of all who would come to him.

Beware of corrupt leaders! Follow Jesus without reserve.

Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

Corrupt leaders go out to get respect.
Jesus came down to be to be rejected.
Corrupt leaders go out use people.
Jesus was used up for his people.
Corrupt leaders go out to be revered.
Jesus came down to be despised.
Corrupt leaders go out to be served.
Jesus came down to serve.

Jesus is the only leader you can trust without reserve.
There is no human leader that you can trust like you trust Jesus. You never have to wonder if he is using you.

Corrupt leaders are out for themselves.

- *Corrupt leaders are proud.*

Vs. 39,

³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts

Corrupt leaders show partiality to those who can do something for them or get something from. The scribes only associated with Jerusalem's rich and famous. They are at the right parties. They know the important people. They had box seats at the big game. Having the places of honor at feasts is the modern-day equivalent of working constantly to be in the spotlight.

Jesus is warning us—watch out. Corrupt leaders do not associate with those they consider lowly or beneath his station. He is better than that.

Corrupt leaders have no time for:

- The needy
- The helpless
- The widow
- The poor
- The weak

The scribes used their positions to be wined and dined by all the movers and shakers of Jerusalem. These leaders did not have eye for the lonely, the needy, the helpless or the poor.

Not Jesus.

He could have come demanding complete loyalty. He had every reason to exalt himself.

He was God the Son!

And yet he was humble. He was meek and gentle. He laid aside his rights. He associated with the lowly. He did not look to be honored, he willingly took the place of dishonor.

He deserved the best but received the worst.

He had the place of dishonor. He was treated as a slave and a criminal. He was the supreme object of scorn.

Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

Corrupt leaders go out to get respect.
Jesus came down to be to be rejected.
Corrupt leaders go out use people.
Jesus was used up for his people.
Corrupt leaders go out to be revered.
Jesus came down to be despised.
Corrupt leaders go out to be served.
Jesus came down to serve.

Jesus is the only leader you can trust without reserve. There is no human leader that you can trust like you trust Jesus. You never have to wonder if he is using you.

Corrupt leaders are out for themselves
Corrupt leaders are proud.

- *Corrupt leaders are greedy.*

Vs. 40,

⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

This is almost exactly what Isaiah said,

[1] Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees,
and the writers who keep writing
oppression,
[2] to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their
right, that widows may be their spoil,
and that they may make the fatherless their
prey!
[3] What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the ruin that will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help,
and where will you leave your wealth?
[4] Nothing remains but to crouch among the
prisoners or fall among the slain.
For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still." Isaiah
10:1–4

How did they devour widow's houses?

It was typical in that day for a man with any kind of property or estate to handle all the financial decisions. The women of that day were not viewed as co-equals,

and so when their husbands died they were vulnerable to corrupt leaders.

Under the guise of offering help, the scribes would come in and rob them blind. Because women had no voice or recourse they could do nothing.

They would leave the widows destitute. These scribes had no conscience. They would take from anyone they could even if they were vulnerable widows.

Not Jesus.

Jesus constantly gives.

Jesus the infinitely wealthy one gave it all up willingly for the sake of others and became unspeakably poor. He had everything and gave it up for the good of the helpless.

He takes up and protects the cause of the helpless.

He is infinitely generous. No one has given anything that approximates what he has given. Jesus came to give, give, give.

Jesus gave up—

- Glory
- Comfort
- Power
- Throne
- Life

To enrich the poor. To give life to the dead. He is constantly looking to bless more and more and more.

Jesus is the only leader you can trust without reserve. There is no human leader that you can trust like you trust Jesus. You never have to wonder if he is using you.

It is a trap to trust human leaders more than you trust Jesus. A great and common trap. We can be more apt to trust those we can look in the eye and 'get a feel' for. But that is a trap.

Trust NO ONE like Jesus.

No one.

One sign that someone has trusted in human leaders too much in the past is when they get disappointed, burned (they always will) they lash out in anger and trust no one.

Even the best human leaders will fail you—Jesus never will.

Corrupt leaders go out to get respect.
Jesus came down to be to be rejected.
Corrupt leaders go out use people.
Jesus was used up for his people.
Corrupt leaders go out to be revered.
Jesus came down to be despised.
Corrupt leaders go out to be served.
Jesus came down to serve.

And corrupt leaders will not go unpunished.

Some of the most frightening words in all of Mark for leaders are these, **They will receive the greater condemnation.**

Corrupt leaders will be punished more severely. It is not for no reason that James says,

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” James 3:1

Corrupt leaders will receive a grave and terrifying punishment personally from Jesus.

Jesus will personally deliver justice to all corrupt leaders. It may seem like they are able to get away with SO MUCH but they get away with nothing. He will pay them back.

Our Lord does not sleep, nor does he slumber, he will not hold back his hand forever. Corrupt spiritual leaders will get what is coming to them.

Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

The reason we are following Jesus around through the book of Mark is so we can be reminded that he is worth following.

- Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

Human leaders will disappoint you and let you down. You MUST NOT invest ultimate trust in a

human leader or you might lose your way. Even the best leaders stumble and fall or get sick and die.

ONLY Jesus can withstand the weight of all your expectation, hope and faith.

ONLY Jesus can make promises and always deliver.

ONLY Jesus can protect you from all foes.

ONLY Jesus is worth giving your life for.

Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

There is a corollary for leaders here. Spiritual leaders are not God.

Recently a good friend of mine came across me after a hard day and he asked how I was doing. He knew I was low.

That friend said, "You know you aren't God. Do your best and let God work."

A Good reminder.

Not that I think I'm God, but leaders can hold their responsibility so tightly and work so hard and forget they serve Jesus too.

We all have leaders to follow but ONLY trust Jesus.

Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

What are the characteristics of spiritual leaders?

- *Spiritual leaders point to Jesus and not themselves.*

Years ago two Americans came to London and went to hear two of the famous preachers of the day. After the first, they said, "What a preacher!"

Then they heard the good Mr. Spurgeon. After hearing him open the word they exclaimed, "What a savior."

Spiritual leaders do not lead you rightly if they do not constantly point you to Jesus. Spiritual leaders are going to constantly say—

Look to Jesus NOT look to me.
Trust in Jesus NOT trust me.

- *Spiritual leaders look to serve and not be served.*

True spiritual leaders will lay their lives down in ways in ways that people will never know. They will toil in prayer and serve in secret. They will look to elevate others.

They will look to serve and not be served.

I hope this warning straight from the mouth of Jesus is not one you ignore. Trust NO ONE like you trust Jesus.

PRAY

"Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever." Rev. 7:12

