

The Importance Of The Imago Dei in a Culture Infatuated With Image, Icons, and Idols

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Preacher: Drew Arrington

[0 : 00] If your eyesight is poor, you may not know that I am not Matthew.

And for that, I apologize, but I am not sorry. My name is Drew Arrington, and unlike Matthew and Jeff who preceded me last Sunday, I am not a PCA teaching elder.

But rest assured, I am an ordained minister in a sister denomination called the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. My wife and I, well, skipped a little bit.

I am currently serving, however, as a chaplain in the United States Army like Jeff. Let's see. Yes, my wife Allison and I, along with our three daughters, moved here last spring from Clarksville, Tennessee.

And if you ask them, they will tell you that is the absolute best place to live in America. Most of it has to do with a lot of really great friends and a school that they adored.

[1 : 08] But our family greatly appreciates the fellowship and appreciation that you have extended to us as the CMPC family.

And my wife and daughters are all in the process of joining this wonderful church. So thank you for that welcome. Well, that's enough about me.

After all, you didn't come here to learn about who I am and my family, but you came here to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. So with that in mind, let's shift a little bit and start looking at today's passage.

So Matthew has been leading us through an exposition of the Gospel of Mark. And it's my great honor to pick up that study following a break for Advent and Christmas.

And this week, we find ourselves in the 12th chapter of the Gospel, where we consider a passage that contains a deep truth of significant importance for those of us that are being transformed into the image of Christ.

[2 : 13] Well, the events of Mark chapter 12, 13 through 17 occur in the middle of Passion or Holy Week, which is that week leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The week began on Sunday with Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, not on a majestic war horse, but on a lowly, borrowed donkey.

On Monday, he cursed a deceptive fig tree and cleared the temple of profiteers, placing obstacles in the path of those who came to praise God.

On Tuesday, leading up to our passage, Jesus' disciples saw the withered fig tree in the morning light as they were entering back into Jerusalem.

They would then go to the temple where Jesus would critique the religious leaders using the parable of the evil vineyard tenants.

[3 : 15] Today's passage records an exchange between Jesus and some of those same religious leaders later that afternoon before he and the disciples would head out to the Mount of Olives for the Olivet Discourse.

So I alluded to a deep truth embedded in this exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day. However, as I was studying, I realized that that deep truth is often missed, not just by common readers of Scripture, but also by many commentators.

And in many ways, there missing this deep truth is like the white witch's inability to understand the deep magic in C.S. Lewis' beloved classic, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

Thinking she understands the deep magic, Jadus exuberantly accepts Aslan's offer to trade his life for the life of Edmund the traitor.

She does so because she expects that with the Grand Lion out of the way, she can secure her reign as the undisputed sovereign of Narnia. Unfortunately for the white witch, her faulty understanding leads to her tragic end.

[4 : 35] And it is my hope that by God's grace and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, that will not be our end this morning. Instead, that we may avoid the twin traps of viewing this passage as an encouragement for the separation of church and state, or the endorsement of obedience to the fulfillment of the civil magistrate, both of which are great concepts, but both of which miss the deeper and more important truth in this exchange.

Rather, it's my prayer that we may lay hold of that deep truth that we and a culture infatuated with image, icons, and idols desperately need.

But before we go any further, let us pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Please join me. Almighty God, creator of our world and all that is in it, you did not choose to remain silent and distant, but instead inspired men of old to record and encapsulate your word for us within the pages of scripture.

Just as your Holy Spirit has preserved your divine proclamations, we ask this morning that he press that saving and preserving salve deep into our hearts and minds, that we may be comforted and conformed to the image of Christ our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grant us this, we ask, according to your faithfulness, for the glory of our Savior and the good of his bride, the church. Amen. Well, if you've not already turned in your Bibles, do so now or open your worship guide or direct your digital device to the word of God recorded in Mark chapter 12, verses 13 through 17.

[6 : 30] And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians to trap him in his talk.

And they came and said to him, Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or should we not? But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, Why put me to the test?

Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. And they brought one. And he said to them, Whose likeness and inscription is this?

They said to him, Caesar's. Jesus said to them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

[7 : 41] And they marveled at him. Well, in this short passage, which, by the way, is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, we see the discernment and disarming wisdom of Jesus in response to the plotting of desperate and deceitful men.

As such, Christ's response here is an example and an encouragement for his church as we live in and engage a culture infatuated with image icons and idols.

But before we examine the discernment of Christ's response and the disarming wisdom of Jesus, we need to take a moment and look at the plot of these desperate and deceitful men in the first two verses that we read.

See, this is a plot. It is a deceitful and desperate plot by the religious leaders to entrap Jesus, to catch Jesus, to snare Jesus in his words.

They're setting up these highly impossible situations, trying to present him with yes or no answers in order to trap him in what he says because so far they've not been able to trap him in what he's done.

[9 : 04] We see that this is a plot born of desperation and we see hints of that desperation in the awkward alliance here between the Pharisees and the Herodians.

These are two groups of religious leaders on opposite ends in first century Jerusalem. you have the Pharisees who find, who established their position and find pride in the idol of self-righteousness, being strict adherence to the law of God as interpreted by man and having tons and tons of additional requirements placed upon themselves and the people.

Then on the other side, you have the Herodians who weren't so much religious in nature but political, looking towards the icon of Herod for security and stability.

So why would these two disparate groups join together in desperation to find some fault with Jesus? Image.

their image as being the leaders was threatened by the presence and the proclamations of Jesus Christ. We saw that the last time Matthew delivered a sermon from Mark about the wicked tenants of the vineyard.

[10:47] And those leaders left understanding that Christ was upsetting the status quo. He was tarnishing their image as the leaders in first century Jerusalem and Israel.

But that desperation born of the awkward alliance was also united in deceitfulness. We see here the flattery in the early parts of verse 14.

And there are some commentators who have suggested that this wasn't flattery. This was just the normal way that people would exchange with a leader. And I could almost buy that except for the fact that Luke in the parallel passage says that these men pretended to be sincere.

They pretended to be sincere when in fact they were flattering him and bringing to him a false concern. They weren't really concerned about whether or not they should pay taxes to Caesar. In fact honestly they came from different positions on the issue. The Herodians would say yep absolutely because it's going to strengthen the Herod family and be politically expeditious for us to do so.

[12:06] And the Pharisees even though they would have not liked to pay the tax would have paid the tax because it meant stability and they could remain in power. So they had different positions but they had the same practical practice that they would pay the tax but they came to Jesus and said should we pay this or should we not?

But you know this is not a story this story of desperate men deceitfully engaging others is not isolated to first century Jerusalem.

It's a tale older than the deep magic of C.S. Lewis in fact if we understand scripture right it's perhaps even older than the creation of the earth itself as we understand that Satan in an act of desperation deceived other angels into rebelling against God because he felt that his image was more important than that of God.

We see this deceit and this desperation in the life of Abraham not once but twice when he fails to recognize Sarah as his wife but instead says no no no no let's keep the image that we're not married because it'll be safer for me.

We see this deceit and this desperation and in the life of Jacob who deceives both his brother and his father in order to secure the position that God had promised him and then suffers that same deceit and desperation at the hands of Laban when he seeks one of his daughter's hand in marriage.

[13:57] and we could go on and on about the desperation and the deceit exhibited by the kings of Israel and Judah including King David who was a man after God's own heart.

History books are littered with men and women who are desperate and in their desperation deceive others.

In 1920 a guy by the name of Charles schemed about \$15 million over a period of eight months. He really did steal as Jeff pointed out last week he really did steal your grandma's inheritance and life fortune.

He was so successful that that's now known as a Ponzi scheme after his last name and people today have engaged in Ponzi schemes that benefit their own lavish lifestyle.

We think of the Elizabeth Holmes the Sam Bankman Freeds people practicing deceit to desperately gain something that they feel is theirs.

[15:17] Jeff pointed out last week we have also the Harvey Weinsteins in the world today that use their power to deceive in order to gratify their own desires.

Let us not forget the breaking news of the George Santos who use in their desperation use deceit as a way of grasping power and influence.

but it's not just the history that we read it's not just the headlines it's our lives it's our encounters with desperate and deceitful people people that violate our trust abuse the authority that God has given them maybe it's the people that maliciously misrepresent what we believe or who flagrantly flaunt our cherished values.

Well before we get too personal and too far down that rabbit hole let's get back to the text into verse 15 where we encounter the discernment of Christ's response.

See here Jesus Christ instead of becoming angry he lovingly responds to desperate and deceitful men.

[16 : 51] And how? How is he able to lovingly respond? Well first he is extremely socially aware. He understands what's going on. It says in our text today he says he knows knowing their hypocrisy knowing that they were coming to trip him up.

Matthew says knowing their malice Luke says knowing their craftiness Jesus was extremely perceptive and understood the social happenings around him and what the society was going through and he was not caught off guard.

He was able to lovingly respond to these men. But also too Christ has a very penetrating perception.

He is able to peer through the actions the actions that may have seemed sincere but weren't sincere. He was able to look straight into the heart of each and every one of the men that were present there questioning him and trying to trap him.

We also see that Jesus challenges his conspirators and he does this out of love not only for the conspirators but also love for the observers.

[18 : 10] You see Jesus could have very easily just dismissed that and said okay show me the narrators but no he said why do you test me? He pointed out to those desperate men hey I know what's going on here and it wasn't just out of love for them that he pointed out their deceitfulness it was for the love of those nearby.

He said you know what this is not normal you are not doing this out of a great concern for yourselves or for the people you're doing this to entrap me why? In doing that he demonstrated love for the onlookers because they then were cued in that this is not the way you should treat people and other and not way that you should engage in deceit.

And then we see a deflating delay and this is a deflating delay through a very simple request. He said hey bring me a denarius. That may seem like a not a great point in this passage but the denarius was a Roman coin.

It was a Roman coin that represented about a day's worth of work and they were in the temple and you may not know but in the temple you don't use a Roman coin.

You pay your tithes, you pay your offerings, you buy other offerings with the shekel, not the denarius. So with the worth of the denarius, there's very likelihood that would not be present in the temple and then Jesus would have time not only to think but others would have time and the situation would begin to dissipate.

[20 : 04] So after some time we'll get to the point where the denarius return or comes to the temple but in the meantime we could take time and talk about Christ's response here and how he lovingly responded in a situation where we're tempted oftentimes to not.

We could spend the rest of the sermon talking about that but we're not because we are after a deeper truth and I will entrust you to take a look at that this afternoon on the Lord's Day and consider how your exchanges with others might be shaped by Christ's example.

But instead we are going to look at how at the text we're going to look at the disarming wisdom of Christ in these last two verses.

Now I don't know if you caught it but a couple of months ago the former vice president Mike Pence gave an interview with David Muir and if you watched that I think the most fantastic question and response was recorded in that interview and David Muir asks a question he says now Mr.

Vice President this is a very simple question to answer yes or no should Donald Trump be president again? and Mike Pence demonstrating great awareness and discernment doesn't miss a beat and he says David that's for the American people to decide.

[21 : 55] And you see what he did he avoided the yes no and he found a third answer that deflated the situation and that's what we see Jesus doing here.

he doesn't bite on the yes no answer. He doesn't bite on answering in a way that would entrap himself that would anger half the population and elate the other half or vice versa.

Instead using his divine discernment he is able to avoid that entrapment and to offer a third way. So we see the tension mounting as the denarius arrives there in the temple and you can almost see the Herodians and Pharisees coming out and say we got it we got it here waiting to hear Jesus answer and finally say ha ha we gotcha.

but then Jesus very quickly gains the upper hand through a very simple question that I've alluded to already he says whose inscription is on this?

Whose image and inscription are on this coin? and they say ah well Caesars you got to think that at that point the Pharisees and the Herodians were probably thinking oh no this is not going the way we were thinking it was going to go and then we see in verse 17 two very rapid momentum shifts right you see Jesus saying oh okay well then why don't you give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar and you can hear him saying oh yeah we got him we got him and then he says and give to God that which belongs to God and then they say ah we don't have him in fact the word there is they were amazed at him and they weren't amazed at him because they said wow this guy is really wise and what great truth and man we could talk about this forever on the next

[24 : 20] Sabbath meeting no that word amazement is more like perplexed man how did he get out of that one again we had this crafted tight there was no way out or it was a sense of frustration ah we've already tried this once before and it didn't work it's not working now we have to go back to the drawing boards we gotta find a better question a more tighter question one that he can't weasel his way out of if you've been paying attention maybe you're like that this morning you're like wait a minute where's this deep truth you've been talking about you haven't mentioned anything about it well it is here in Christ's response when you ask the Pharisees and the Herodians he says hey whose image is on the coin they say

Caesar's and he says okay well give to Caesar the things that bear his image if I can take the liberty and give to God the things that bear his image and what do we know well and that may be missed in today's society but it would not have been missed by those religious leaders they would have seen immediately the direct connection between Caesar's image on the coin and man's image or God's image and man going all the way back to Genesis 1 that we read this morning and that the authors of our confession of faith also alluded to so what I would like to do as we conclude our look at this passage is to end with a brief exploration of how the deep truth of the imago

Dei the image of God on man significantly impacts our view of self others in our cultural engagements so in your bulletin you have the commentary quote or commentary on Genesis by John Calvin a quote there where he highlights how the imago Dei shapes our understanding of ourselves and this is what he wrote men are indeed unworthy of God's care if respect be had only to themselves but since they bear the image of God engraven on them he deems himself violated in their person thus although they have nothing of their own by which they obtain the favor of God he looks upon his own gifts in them and is thereby excited to love and to care for them what an amazing quote about the importance of the image of

God embossed on each and every one of you that it is and through this quote we understand that while God while created in God's image we ourselves aren't gods it's not that we're gods that God loves us it's because his image his goodness his likeness is in us and that is what draws him to us that is what he finds loving you know unfortunately we've got a lot of modern thinkers and influencers today like Oprah and Deepak that want to say that we are gods you know we just have to find our inner God and it's not that it's the image of God that Calvin highlights Calvin also highlights an important observation that Jeff helped us see last week that we all need the shepherd the shepherd

Jesus Christ to rescue us the question is but why should God rescue such a rebellious and wandering people because he's attracted to his image in us that image that is imprinted on every individual human being when we understand that that it's nothing within us but it's only God's image that he bestowed upon us that should lead us to a great sense of humility as we engage the world around us well secondly the image of God imprinted on all human beings is the basis of human dignity and value now there's a lot of questions today about where do we find what what makes us different why are we so valuable and the writing from

[29 : 36] R.C. Sproul in We Are Not Germs is very helpful he says the creator who possesses infinite value and worth has stamped us with a value and dignity that is derivative of his own value and dignity lose that idea and you have lost any transcendent foundational reason to treat human beings any differently than you treat a dog a dolphin or even a weed notice that human beings are valuable because they possess not because they possess autonomy over their bodies not because they are in control of their own life not because of their ability to live independent of the womb not because they can live independent of parents or independent of family or independent of medical care and assistance it is not our personhood that gives us value rather although faded and marred by sin it is the derivative value and dignity of

God stamped on all of us that elevates us above every other aspect of creation we give up on that and there is no distinction there is no reason why we should treat any human being differently than we treat a dog or a dolphin or a weed finally it is the image of God the imago Dei that drives our engagements with a culture infatuated with image icons and idols and we may be tempted to deride ignore or discount modern day Pharisees modern day Herodians modern day tax collectors or even the Johns in our life but understanding that the imago Dei is universally born by all human beings challenges that let's say that again we are tempted to discount people because of their sin because of their appearance because of their preferences because of their beliefs because of the way they look because they didn't brush their hair the way that we think they should brush their hair but if we understand the imago

Dei the fact that it is not Caesar's image impressed on a coin but God's image and the derivative value of his dignity and worth that is stamped on each and every human being not just those of us in the pews in the chairs this morning because we know that God is at work in our hearts and has transformed our hearts but even those that are outside of our confession those that are outside of the community of faith they too have the image of God stamped on them that is what John Stott communicates in the quote I believe it's on the back of your bulletin says that man is in the image of God means that man as a whole person both physically and spiritually is in some sense like his maker just what the nature of that likeness is we are not told but we are told what really matters even as sinners we bear

God's image well if that's true then we the rescued lambs who are being remade into the image of Christ have a responsibility to cherish the imago Dei that remains even in the most vile of sinners even in the Harvey Weinstens even in the Elizabeth Holmes Sam Benkman Freeds even in the George Santoses even in the homeless person that you pass at various intersections even in the lives of those who would trample upon our most held and cherished beliefs and values now just as Herod had the right to and valued the imprint of his image on the denarius so too does God have a right to and highly values his image imprinted on all of us by God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit may we come to value the imago Dei in our fellow believers may we cherish that same image in those that are outside of our communion and may we allow the image of God to inform our engagements with a culture that is truly infatuated with image icons and idols amen let us pray gracious heavenly father we thank you that you have indeed stamped us with unestimatable worth not because we are stamped with your image oh God may that enliven our hearts this morning and encourage us father to love our neighbors whether they be those in this church building or those outside of it that we might find within them your image and love them because of that it's in [35 : 32] Christ's name I pray amen for to