



Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



Rev Alan Johnston

There are all kinds of warnings in life. Most products we purchase have labels warning about improper use. I found a great list of these kinds of warnings. Believe it or not, these are all real:

- a label on a snow sled which says: "Beware: sled may develop high speed under certain snow conditions."
- a fishing lure, with a warning that reads: harmful if swallowed.
- A warning on an electric router made for carpenters cautions: "This product is not intended for use as a dental drill."
- A warning label found on a baby pushchair cautions the user to "Remove child before folding"
- A container of underarm deodorant says, "Caution: Do not spray in eyes"
- An inflatable bed we bought recently warns, "Do not eat..."
- A cardboard car sunshield that keeps sun off the dashboard warns, "Do not drive with sunshield in place"
- And my personal favourite on a bag of airplane peanuts, "Caution may contain nuts"!

We can laugh about these, and think, who would be foolish enough to need such warnings? But apparently someone did something goofy enough, or some lawyer, thinks somebody is, or will be, foolish enough, or should we say, stupid enough, to think about eating an inflatable bed, or driving with the sunshade in place. Some warnings are silly some are very important because we might never have realised the danger involved but for the warning.

Today's reading contains two warnings for the people who would listen to Christ and perhaps it is possible for us to take and apply these same warnings to ourselves today. The warnings come after Jesus has told those who would listen that the religious leaders could not be trusted since they taught inaccurately and taught only to suit themselves and to protect themselves. There is the pride of the scribes and then secondly there is the pride of the rich. Let's first of all deal with the issue that creates the headline in the NIV, "Whose son is the Christ?"

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? ³⁶David 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.” ³⁷David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Now these scribes were supposed experts in the Old Testament. They were given great respect among the people because of their devotion to biblical knowledge and understanding. They knew the prophecies which indicated that the Messiah would come of David's seed. They believed what the Scriptures taught that the Messiah would be of the house of David and would sit on David's throne. Now Jesus, using their own Scripture, questions why these scribes believe that the Christ is merely the son of David. Verse 36

" 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.”

Here Jesus quotes from Psalm 110. The scribes recognized this Psalm as a Psalm of David and as a Messianic prophecy. In other words, this psalm spoke of the coming Messiah. Then Jesus gets to the point.

³⁷David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

The scribes were looking for a nationalistic deliverer. They expected someone like a David to be ushered forth for this time in history. This would be God's chosen one, God's anointed one. Because of what the Old Testament said concerning the Messiah coming from the lineage of David, they expected Him to be merely a physical descendant of David. But the thought of the supernatural never entered the picture. He would simply be a man. So when Jesus said, "David himself calls him Lord" He threw the scribes into a theological dilemma. How could the Messiah be both David's son and his Lord? The scribes had never thought of that. The truth is, the Messiah could not be both David's son and his Lord if He were merely human. It would take a divine human being to do that. The scribes had no answer. They had never thought of the Messiah in terms of being a supernatural being. Yet, that is just what Jesus was. The Jews were looking for a human deliverer. But what the world needed was a divine Saviour. The Jews wanted freedom from the yoke of Rome. But what the world really needed was deliverance from the bondage of sin. A human leader could perhaps give them political freedom, but it would take a divine sacrificial lamb to give them spiritual freedom.

In saying what He said, Jesus was revealing the truth about His nature. Now Jesus was a physical descendant from David. As a matter of fact, as you trace the lineage of Jesus you find that on both sides of the family He descended from David. Joseph was a descendant of David and so was Mary. This is important to understand because Jesus really was not physically descended from Joseph. His physical descent had to be traced through Mary because He was divinely conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit without the benefit of Joseph. Therefore, Jesus was both divine and human - divinely conceived by the Holy Spirit in a human vessel, Mary. The Son of Man would come forth to be proclaimed Lord of All.

Romans 1:3 and 4 says, regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

According to the flesh, Jesus was a descendant of David. But according to the spirit of holiness, He was declared to be the Son of God and the resurrection proved it. The message is clear: Jesus is saying that the Messiah is both human and divine.

He is both physical and supernatural. He is both David's son and David's Lord, and indeed He is the Lord of all.

³⁸As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

"Watch out for the teachers of the law," warns Christ. He didn't warn them about thieves and prostitutes and drunkards and murderers and racists and grasping capitalists. They'd have nodded gravely at such warnings. He didn't warn them about Gentile dogs and Roman soldiers. They'd have appreciated being reminded how wicked such people were. No doubt friendship with such men brought its own snares, but Jesus never singled out such people. He raised no warning voice against them. He confined his warning to one group alone, the religious men of the nation; "Watch out for the teachers of the law."

Who were these men? They were the scribes, the lawyers and teachers of religion, the ones we have been spending the last few weeks thinking about. They were formalistic, worshippers of the fathers in Israel, self-righteous men. They attached such weight to the traditions of the rabbis that they practically regarded them as having more importance than the inspired writings of the Old Testament. They followed with an exacting strictness hundreds of rules and regulations which they considered to be the essence of true religion. Why does Christ warn his disciples about them? Because all the nation considered them to be the models of religion, and Christ could see the subtle influence they might have over the disciples once fame and power became theirs in the church. As one of the Australian Anglicans from the Sydney diocese says, "When you make a man a bishop you put a mitre on his head and remove his backbone." Jeremy Paxman says that the Church of England is an organisation which thinks anything can be settled over a cup of tea, but the Lord Christ takes the conduct and influence of religious people very seriously.

The teachers of the law were impressive figures with their flowing robes and prominent seats in the synagogues and in the feasts. They could pray publicly for ages. How religious they seemed, but it was concerning these men that Jesus warned his disciples. Now before you draw too many unhealthy parallels with the religious leaders we have today I want to encourage you to do something this morning. Rather than beware of our religious leaders I want to encourage you to pray for them. In particular for the Rev. David Clarke minister of Terrace Row in Coleraine. As I am sure you are aware on Tuesday night Rev. Clarke was elected as the next moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. This is a position I believe he is well able to fill and I am certain he will ably represent our church. However, as followers of Jesus Christ and Presbyterians, he needs our prayers. Not simply when he takes up the office in the first week in June at the general assembly but from now on.

This is the time the press organizations will want to do their interviews and their articles. This is the time that they like to label the new moderator and in fairness they like to seek out controversy in the moderator elect's views on certain issues. David Clarke will be under pressure and he will need the precious council of God's Holy Spirit. He needs our prayers and our support at this time for not just himself but for Hazel and the girls too. He needs God's help to say the things God would have him say and to be God's representative in many varied circumstances. He needs to be able to correctly represent Jesus Christ and the church of Jesus Christ. He needs God's protection to remain a

humble servant of Jesus Christ when we as a church and the press will elevate him to a position where temptation to see yourself as more important than you are is a very real temptation.

Jesus warned against the leaders that had fallen to this temptation and he did not have a good word to say about them. It is not about us – it is about Jesus Christ and him only. So please pray for David Clarke the man, the husband, the father and the minister as he prepares himself for a very busy and tiring year. Pray too for the congregation of Terrace Row as they face a year without their pastor.

There is however as I mentioned a final warning contained in the passage. Look again at verse 41:

⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. ⁴³Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Since the day and hour I arrived in Hazelbank I have been encouraged in the way you as a people give your money to the Lord and I want to encourage you never to lose sight of to whom it is that you give. I have absolutely no idea who gives what and I never ever want to know. In one of my former congregations I was aware of who gave what because it was recorded in the statement of accounts at the end of the year. One day I remember looking through it out of interest and was startled to realize the person who gave God the most was someone who didn't own their own house, whose wife was chronically ill, who actually lived in rented accommodation from the church and yet he was the highest giver to the Lord's work. The reason I am telling you this is not to glorify this person but to help you understand that I too like Jesus have had the amazing privilege of watching the widow's mite fall into the collection plate and I have been humbled by it.

What was the fundamental difference between these men and this woman? The fundamental difference between them was not one of gender or income or fame; it was the difference between their hearts. What's going on in our hearts makes all the difference. When we write our cheques to the Inland revenue they couldn't care less whether we did it with due appreciation for the benefits we get from our taxes or through clenched teeth. As long as the cheque doesn't bounce and it's for the correct amount they are content. That is not how it is with God.

2 Cor. 9 v 7 and 8: Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

1 Cor. 13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

God can do great things with little things given to him. Remember back in Mark chapter 9 we read :

⁴¹I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

This poor widow as she so privately brought her insignificant offering to God couldn't dream that almost two thousand years later what she did would witness to a Presbyterian congregation thousands of miles away from the temple, and that she would become one of the most famous people in the world. When millions of millionaires will be lying in their graves she'll be living on in the memories of God's people and enjoying the presence of her Saviour. At his right hand are pleasures for evermore. The Day of Judgment will reveal it all. It will square all the accounts - She will be exalted in that day.

I remember reading this story some time ago. There was once a missionary who was the son of a widow, who went to work for Christ in West Africa. He was not there long before he contracted an illness and died. His brother was left at home and he came to his mother and said to her, "Mother I want to go and take my place where my brother once worked. I will preach to my brother's people. I will tell them of my mother's and brother's God." And she bade him farewell and off he went to West Africa, and before long he too became ill and died, and his grave lies next to his brother's. When the news reached home that she had lost her second son many from her church came to see her and to sympathize, and often she wept with them and they tried to comfort her. "You understand my tears," she said. "I am weeping not that I have two sons dead in West Africa but because I don't have a third son I can send there."

My friends beware, beware the pride of the scribes that you do not become caught up in that same pride but also beware the pride of riches because both will drag you far from the kingdom of God.

Let's pray together.