

The Gospel of Mark

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Chapter Twelve

Mark 12:1-6

And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. (2) "At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. (3) "They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. (4) "Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. (5) "And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. (6) "He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

An allegory is a communication devise in which elements of it are representative of some other reality. A metaphor is a figure of speech that states something is like something else, like "the whole world is a stage". This parable of Jesus is obviously an allegory and He did not often use such although He is previously recorded by Mark as doing so in Mark 4:2-20 concerning the parable of the sower of seeds. In this allegory the vineyard is Israel, the owner is God, the tenants are the Jewish leaders, the servants are the prophets, and the only son and heir is Jesus. The wall, winepress, and tower do not have separate significance.

Mark does not identify the people to whom Jesus is speaking but their reaction in verse 12 surely identifies them as leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin as they clearly understood the meaning of this parable. The details of the parable are similar to the events as they occurred in this area and in this era. The land was usually worked by tenants who did not own the land and the physical details would also have been very familiar to those hearing the parable. Since the workers of the land were working on a crop-sharing basis they would have been expected to pay the owners when harvest came according to some prearranged agreement. The landowner sent his slave to collect the produce owed him but the workers of the vineyard repudiated the deal and sent away the slave. The owner sent another slave but the workers wounded him in the head and treated him shamefully. The owner then sent another slave but the workers killed this one. The workers then were continually escalating their wrongful treatment of the ones sent by the owner. This cycle of sending a slave and the workers mistreating and even killing them continued until the owner had one remaining recourse. He would send his beloved son for he thought that they would surely not mistreat him.

Mark 12:7-11

"But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' (8) "They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. (9) "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the

vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. (10) "Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; (11) THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?'"

But the workers recognized the son as the heir of the owner and so probably inferred that the owner had died and they could then take ownership of the land by killing the son. The parable then states that the workers killed the son and throw him out of the vineyard. This final aspect probably should not be allegorized for Matthew and Luke gave the son being killed after he is thrown out of the vineyard. Mark states that Jesus answered his own question although Matthew states that the "they" answered the question:

*Matt 21:40-41 "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" (41) They *said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons."*

The reason for the difference in response to the question is probably because Matthew was writing to a predominantly Jewish audience and he wanted them to know that they knew what really should have been done. The allusion of the parable is to:

Isaiah 5:1-7 Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. (2) He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. (3) "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. (4) "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? (5) "So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. (6) "I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." (7) For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

The parable states that the owner shall come and destroy the workers and give the vineyard to others. The quotation is from: *"The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. (23) This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. (24) This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it."* (Psa 118:22-24) Jesus clearly applies this quotation to Himself. This application was clearly used in early Christianity such as in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7. The corner stone was rejected by Israel but accepted by God as the chief corner stone in the heavenly sanctuary and to be made obvious at the Parousia.

Mark 12:12-17

And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away. (13) Then

*they *sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. (14) They *came and *said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? (15) "Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." (16) They brought one. And He *said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." (17) And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him.*

The people listening would have been familiar with the writings of the prophets and so the meaning of this parable would have been clearly understood by them. They wanted to kill Jesus then but their fear of the crowd made them withhold their anger so they left Jesus there and went away. But they were not through with Jesus! There could hardly have been a greater difference in political views between two parties! The Herodians insisted that, at this time in history, the Jews should be under the rule of Rome. The Pharisees wanted freedom from the Roman yoke. But these two parties were agreed on one mission: get rid of Jesus. Mark does not tell us when or where this event took place but it probably was on Wednesday and in one of the temple courts. Mark clearly states the goal of this strange coalition was to trap Jesus. They prefaced their question with a clearly false flattery for they did not admit that Jesus was truthful and partial to none. The statement was mainly meant for the crowds to hear that they thought Jesus was not aligned with either of the members of the coalition. Since A.D. 6, the Jews had been required to pay a tax into the emperor's treasury. The Herodians thought that the tax should be paid for they were all for the rule of Rome. The Zealots refused to pay the tax because paying it was an admission of submission to Rome. The Pharisees disliked paying the tax but did not actively rile against it. The question was designed to make Jesus take sides with either the Herodians or the Zealots. If He proposed that they should not pay taxes to Caesar then He could be arrested. If He said that it was lawful to pay taxes then He was abrogating His apparent claim to be the Messiah. The Herodians secretly supported Herod for an overthrow so they were hypocritical in their support of Rome.

Jesus made the answer that they were not expecting. He did not say that the claims of Caesar and of God are equal for God owns everything. However any claims by the government that do not go against the Word of God are legitimate. A comprehensive understanding of the relationship between state and the Christian can be understood based upon this verse and the following:

- *Rom 13:1-7 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (2) Therefore whoever resists authority has*

opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (3) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; (4) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (5) Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. (6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. (7) Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

- *1Tim 2:1-6 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (2) for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (3) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, (4) who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*
- *1Pet 2:13-17 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, (14) or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. (15) For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. (16) Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bonds/aves of God. (17) Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.*

Luke records that the people either misunderstood Jesus or deliberately distorted what He said: *And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." (Luke 23:2)* Their lies led to His crucifixion.

Mark 12:18-23

*Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) *came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, (19) "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. (20) "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. (21) "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; (22) and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. (23) "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."*

Now some Sadducees came forward to test Jesus. They did not believe in an afterlife and certainly not in a resurrection and that is why they are "sad-you-see". Luke also records this belief: *"For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." (Acts 23:8).* Not much is known about this group. They were a small group of wealthy, sophisticated people who primarily lived in Jerusalem. At the

destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. they disappeared from history. In the NT they are only mentioned 14 times whereas the Pharisees are mentioned about 100 times. This is the only mention of them by Mark. They accepted only the written scripture and they maintained that there was no definitive teaching about the resurrection in the OT. The Pharisees considered the oral traditions equally authoritative with the written scriptures and accepted a teaching about a resurrection. They presented Jesus with a hypothetical case involving an application of the levirate law from Moses:

Deut 25:5-6 "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. (6) "It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

The function of this law was to maintain the family name and to protect the widow. The case is so ludicrous that it may have been used as a Sadducean joke against the Pharisee doctrine of the Resurrection.

Mark 12:24-27

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? (25) "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (26) "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob'? (27) "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

In His reply to them, Jesus accused them of ignorance of both the Scriptures and of the power of God. Since the Sadducees did not believe in life after death, their case is obviously not rooted in any of their theological understandings. Jesus then taught them about the function of humans after death. There will be no marriage process in the afterlife but rather the people will have a function similar to that of the angels in heaven consisting of fellowship with God and service to Him. The Sadducees also did not believe in angels so their ignorance covered all these areas addressed by Jesus. Since there will not be death any longer, there is no need for a levirate law.

The second point of Jesus relates to the power of God and He addresses this in verses 26 and 27. His reference to the burning bush is from Exod 3:6 and He probably chose this text because it is from a part of the Pentateuch considered most authoritative by the Sadducees. The main point is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long been dead at the time quoted by Moses and yet God said that He is the God of all three, not that He was their God. Thus all three had physically died but were still alive at this time and hence God will raise their bodies at the Resurrection to participate in all that glory. The situation also raises the concept of the covenant God and therefore to His faithfulness. Jesus told them that they were greatly mistaken.

Mark 12:28-33

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" (29) Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD;

(30) AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' (31) "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (32) The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; (33) AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Matthew also writes about this event:

Mat 22:34-36 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. (35) One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, (36) "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

This scribe then may also have been a Pharisee. The rabbis counted 613 individual statutes in the law with 365 being negative and 249 positive They spent a lot of time trying to determine which among all of these were the weightiest and so this is the origin of his question. Jesus quoted from two OT verses:

- Deut 6:4-5 *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (5) "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*
- Lev 19:18 *'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*

In the Leviticus verse, the neighbor is not a Gentile but another member of the Israelites. These two verses then bring together the understanding that God is one and that His love extends to all of His covenant community. Jesus is known to have extended this meaning as reported by Luke 10: 25-37 as He gave the parable of the "good Samaritan". The teacher omitted the divine name of the Lord in verse 32 as they avoided the pronunciation of God's name. The teacher adds that the love of God is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices and such is in keeping with OT prophets:

- 1Sam 15:22 *Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*
- Hos 6:6 *For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

But the actual practice of Judaism at this time set the law and sacrifices equal with love so the teacher was more correct and perhaps was stating that Jesus was more correct than His contemporaries.

Mark 12:34-37

When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions. (35) And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? (36) "David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES

BENEATH YOUR FEET." (37) *"David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him*

Only Mark records the response of the teacher of the law and the reply of Jesus that was apparently intended to prompt the teacher to further study the subject matter. There is no record of whether this man became a member of the KOG. All present were so amazed at the success of Jesus in turning His accusers from their testing questions that nobody else would question Him. Mark then informs us that Jesus asked the next question as He was teaching in the temple. It was commonly accepted that the Messiah would be a descendant of the family of David (Isa 9:2-7; 11:1-9; Jer 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:15, 17, 22; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11) so Jesus, asked how that could be. Rather than waiting for an answer, Jesus replied to His question by quoting from *"A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."* (Psa 110:1.) How can the LORD also be David's son? Jesus stated a miracle in that the Messiah is a descendant from David but also in a more exalted role as the Son of God. He is his son by descent and thus younger in age but also superior to David and therefore his senior in rank. The crowd enjoyed seeing Jesus stump their teachers and also give such a riddle that none of them could understand.

Mark 12:38-44

In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, (39) and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, (40) who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." (41) And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. (42) A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. (43) Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; (44) for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

Jesus is not condemning all of the scribes but many of them were seeking honor for themselves instead of God for whom they professed to serve. This could equally apply to deacons, elders, pastors, and other religious leaders of our day. These scribes had long white robes with fringes that almost reached to the ground. They also had special seats in the synagogue in front of the ark containing the sacred scrolls of the Law and Prophets. Their seats were placed so that everyone could easily see them. They were also addressed with special titles such as "Father", "Master", and "Rabbi". Jesus is condemning them for seeking such honors for themselves. These people had special places of honor at banquets and they took advantage of widows. Jesus condemned their long prayers that were done only for appearance.

Jesus then sat and watched as the people came to put money into the treasury. The teachers were not allowed to be paid for their services so they received monetary

rewards from the treasury. This event took place in the court of the women where both men and women could attend. There were thirteen trumpet-shaped containers used for the purpose of putting in collections. He saw many rich people put large sums in the containers but what really got His attention was what a poor widow put into a container. She put in two small copper coins amounting to a cent. These were the smallest coins in circulation at the time. Mark does not report how Jesus knew the exact nature of her gift but this event was so important that Jesus called His disciples to come so He could teach them the true lesson of giving. The rich gave out of their surplus but she gave all that she had on which to live as she showed a total dependence upon God and the truth that God owns everything. The Christian measure of giving is not 10% but 100%. This is indeed a lesson that needs to be understood by every Christian especially today. She was not giving so that all could see what she gave. She thought that she was giving in secret and probably was ashamed that she could only put in the two coins. But God saw and blessed the event as Jesus taught a valuable lesson to His disciples. All of us need to learn from this lesson.