

BIBLE STUDY

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“HE DOES MARVELOUS THINGS!”

Mark 12:1-17

Mark 12:1 *"And he began to speak unto them by parables. A [certain] man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about [it], and digged [a place for] the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country."*

Jesus often used parables to teach about the kingdom of God. On this occasion he used one to expose the evil intentions of the religious leaders. This parable about the vineyard is really the history of the Church. Jesus spoke this in front of the so-called religious people of the day. It is important for us to see ourselves in this, as well. By parables means “parabolically,” denoting the way Jesus spoke, for He uses only one parable. These scribes, Pharisees, and priests, probably, would not even understand that He was telling them of their failures, because their hearts were hardened. They could not receive the truth. A man planted a vineyard, a very elaborate one with a fence, a winepress, and a watchtower. Then the man leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and went away. The man who planted the garden was God. Just as God put Adam and Eve into the garden of Eden to dress and keep it, God entrusted this symbolic vineyard, here, to the physical house of Israel. God, Himself, protected them from their enemies. God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob left this group of Israel His law to go by. He promised if they would keep His Commandments, He would bless them. God left it in the hands of His people and went to heaven (far country). These husbandmen were His people. Those listening to Jesus would’ve been familiar with these details. Isaiah the prophet told a similar story about a vineyard that represented Israel. Instead of producing good grapes, it yielded worthless ones, so the Lord threatened to destroy it. In Jesus’s parable, he added an important character: the vineyard owner’s son.

Isaiah 5:1-7

1 *Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:*

2 *And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.*

3 *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.*

4 *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?*

5 *And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:*

6 *And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*

7 *For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.*

Mark 12:2 *"And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard."*

Mark 12:3 "And they caught [him], and beat him, and sent [him] away empty."

Mark 12:4 "And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded [him] in the head, and sent [him] away shamefully handled."

Mark 12:5 "And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some."

At harvest time, the owner sent servants to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard. These “servants” would stand for the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist. But on each occasion when the servants were sent, the farmers treated them shamefully, brutally beating and even killing them. God sent these prophets to warn His people of what would happen if they did not keep His Commandments. The husbandmen were to produce fruit. Christians must produce other Christians. A person is judged by God by the fruit he produces. The Jews would not accept these prophets, and they beat them and killed many of them. These prophets' messages were rejected. The Jews did not grow in the Lord from these prophets at all. We know that was still continuous rejection of the judges and prophets that God sent to warn the Jews. With every blessing for obeying God's commands there was a curse if they were not obeyed. God's patience with His rebellious people was one of the great mysteries. God forgave them and started them out again, over, and over; but they continued to go away from God instead of toward Him. This is a vivid description of how the leaders of Israel had abused God's prophets in the past. Though he sent them to warn his people to keep his covenant with them by pursuing righteousness, they refused. They owed God “fruit” their obedience. But they scornfully mistreated and killed God's prophets, demonstrating their scorn for God himself.

Mark 12:6 "Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son."

Mark 12:7 "But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our's."

Mark 12:8 "And they took him, and killed [him], and cast [him] out of the vineyard."

Finally, the owner sent his son to the farmers. Surely, they would honor their master's own son! But instead, the wicked farmers saw killing the owner's heir as their opportunity to win the inheritance. Thus, Jesus revealed the intentions of the Jewish leaders to rule Israel without the Messiah. God's love was so great for a world caught up in sin that he sent His only begotten Son. He said to Himself, "They will not reject my Son". He had tried everything else He knew to do to save these ungrateful people. Now, He would send His Son. This was the very God who took on the form of flesh and dwelt among us. Surely God's beloved chosen family would believe Him.

1 Timothy 3:16 "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

Instead of those chosen of God accepting the Son of God and reverencing Him, they rejected Him and plotted to kill Him. There was overwhelming evidence who He was, but they did not accept it. The voice from heaven calling Jesus God's Son should be enough. The feeding of the 5000 should have told them who He was. The opening of blind eyes, the draught of fishes, any of these things should have told them who He was. There were thousands of miracles. Probably, they knew who He was, and just did not want to turn over their power to Him. Jesus foresees the treatment He will receive. He will be cast out of the vineyard. Hebrews speaks of Jesus suffering “without the gate.”

Hebrews 13:12 "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

Mark 12:9 "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others."

The farmers, though, were foolish to think the owner would sit idly by and do nothing. He would justly execute them and give the vineyard to others. We see from this that God the Father had had enough at this point. He had done all He could to save His chosen people, but now they had killed His beloved Son. The Jews would be passed over now and the message would go to the Gentiles. God had made a way for the Gentile believers to be saved. God took the vineyard from the Jew and turned it over to the Gentile believers who accepted His Son as Saviour. Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 may well be a partial fulfillment of this statement. This speaks of God's coming judgment on the leaders and the temporary shifting of his kingdom program from Israel to the church.

Romans 11:25 "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

Mark 12:10 "And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:"

Mark 12:11 "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

The scribes, priests, and Pharisees had rejected Jesus, and God started a new Church with Jesus as the Cornerstone. The building of this house with Jesus as the Cornerstone was God's work. The ways of God are so wonderful (marvelous) they are beyond our understanding. Peter tells about how we, Christians, fit into this building. We, Christians, are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. We dwell in God, and He dwells in us. Jesus then quoted the Psalms, identifying himself with the rejected stone that will ultimately be the preeminent stone in God's kingdom work the cornerstone. Marvelous" is used in the sense of "remarkable" or "striking."

1 Peter 2:4-5

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Psalms 118:22-23

22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

Mark 12:12 "And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way."

Their rejection of God's agenda couldn't prevent him from accomplishing his plan. The leaders knew Jesus was talking about them, but because they feared the crowd who held Jesus in such high esteem the leaders left him alone and continued their plotting. This is so strange that they were more afraid of the people than they were of God. They even realized this parable was about them, and they did not repent. They went away waiting until they had a better chance to move against Him.

Mark 12:13 "And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in [his] words."

Since the crowds were amazed at Jesus, the leaders wanted to find a way to put him at odds with them. They wanted to force Jesus to say something that would turn the people against him, so they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to him. The Pharisees were conservative religious Jews. Herodians were Jews who were loyal to Herod and loved causing others to pay Caesar taxes. These religious and political groups had little in common except a shared desire to take down Jesus. Mark tells us their intentions were wicked and they were plotting together to see if they could trap Jesus. Jesus was too smart for them and turned the tables on them every time they tried to trap Him. Jesus always replied with questions they couldn't answer themselves.

Mark 12:14 "And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"

Mark 12:15 "Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see [it]."

The Pharisees and Herodians began with flattery. They praised Jesus for his truthfulness and for the fact that he would give an unbiased answer. Their calling Jesus Master was a lie because they did not consider Jesus as their master at all. They were saying Jesus was truth. If they really believed that they would not be trying to trap Him. If they didn't believe it, they were lying. Jesus had taught to not be a respecter of person. They were trying to defame Jesus, not to build Him up. They were really trying to tear Him down. If Jesus said to pay Caesar, the Jews (religionists) would be offended; and if He said not to pay, then Caesar and these Herodians (politicians) would be mad. They weren't going to catch the Son of God off guard by sweet-talking him, but they tried. Then they posed their question: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? They were no doubt gleeful, assuming they had placed Jesus in a no-win situation. If he answered, "Yes," the crowd would be furious: They hated their Roman overlords. But if he said, "No," the Pharisees and Herodians could announce that Jesus was promoting sedition, since the Jews were required to pay taxes to Rome. Jesus saw right through them. Though they feigned interest in hearing his answer, he knew it was all hypocrisy. Jesus had them completely figured out. He knew they were hypocrites, saying one thing and meaning something entirely different. He knew that all of this was a plot to get Him in trouble. His request for a penny was so that He could trap them. They were merely testing him for their own gain. So he told them to show him a denarius, the Roman coin used for paying the tax.

Mark 12:16 "And they brought [it]. And he saith unto them, Whose [is] this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's."

Mark 12:17 "And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him."

The image on the coin was that of Tiberius Caesar, the Roman emperor. Jesus answered them, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." He was teaching it's appropriate to give to Caesar that is, to the government what belongs to him. When government is functioning legitimately, it provides beneficial services to those living under its rule. So, all citizens should rightly pay taxes to fund government services like police protection and adequate roads. The Christian citizen likewise has obligations to government, but there are limits. Allegiance to God is primary. A believer, as part of their witness, is expected to do both without neglecting either, where possible.

Romans 13:1-7

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Galatians 6:9-10

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Jesus makes it clear, though, that our commitment to the state is not our only commitment. We also have a commitment to God since we bear his image. Our commitment to God is greater because, though the state's authority is limited, God's authority is comprehensive. Christians should not only support government "naturally" with taxes, we should also support government "spiritually" with prayers. By attempting to entrap Jesus, the Pharisees and Herodians demonstrated that they were not pursuing God's agenda but their own. They were utterly amazed that he had outsmarted them again.

1 Timothy 2:1-4

1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

1 Peter 2:13-17

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

QUESTIONS

1. In verse 1, Jesus began to speak to them by _____.
2. Who was the man who planted the vineyard symbolic of?
3. Who was the vineyard symbolic of?
4. What did he "built a hedge about it" mean?
5. Who was the husbandmen?
6. This servant that God sent was symbolic of whom?
7. When God sent people to help His chosen people, what did they do to them?
8. Who was the last one God sent to them?
9. Who did God send His beloved Son for?
10. What did God do to those who rejected His Son?
11. What happened to the stone that the builders rejected?
12. Why did they not lay hold on Jesus then?
13. What natural enemies came together against Jesus?
14. What name did they call Jesus that they really didn't mean?
15. If Jesus said to pay taxes to Caesar, who would He have offended?
16. What did Jesus tell them to show Him?
17. Jesus said render unto _____ the things that are _____ and unto _____ the things that are _____.