

Mark 11:27-12:17

Last week in our study of the Gospel of Mark we saw Jesus coming to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for what would be His last time.

As He came into the city if you remember He sent two disciples to go and get a colt the foal of a donkey from a neighboring village and He told the disciples that if anyone asked they were to simply say “The Lord has need of it” and those who asked would let it go.

And just as Jesus said that is exactly what took place and then as the Lord entered the city riding on a donkey that had never been ridden before, the people praised Him...they laid out their coats on the road and cried out “Hosanna” and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

And then the Lord we are told came into the city and looked around and He visited the temple area and I believe the Lord was making mental notes and if you remember last week we said that the Lord was looking for spiritual fruit in the lives of the people...As the Lord truly inspected the lives of the people and the religious leaders no real fruit was found.

The next day we were told the Lord was on His way to Jerusalem and he saw a fig tree that had leaves on it and the Lord was hungry...From a distance all signs pointed to Him finding some fruit but when He came close He found none and as a result if you remember the Lord cursed the fig tree...Later in the text we saw that the fig tree had withered.

And then the Lord came into the temple area and this was one of the few times the Lord is seen being angry as He went through the temple and turned over the tables of the money changers and the sellers of doves and He cried out saying the people had made the Lord's house into a den of thieves rather than a place of prayer.

As we studied we talked about how the court of the Gentiles (The place that those who were not Jewish could worship) had been converted into a marketplace and it wasn't a marketplace that was being used to help people to worship God but instead those selling were taking advantage of those who came to worship as they sold doves and changed money for incredibly high prices.

Finally as Jesus exited the city again if you remember He came back past the fig tree He had cursed and we were told it had withered from the roots and was now dead...and we talked about how this fig tree can be a representation of both the Jewish people here in the narrative before us and of us today who name the name of Christ.

The Lord is always looking for spiritual fruit in the lives of those who follow Him...If we exhibit none the Lord has a way of allowing us to wither and dry out and bring us to the end of ourselves and we should just take note that there are consequences when we choose to live the wrong way.

Sadly the picture of the fig tree and it withering became prophetic in some ways as the nation of Israel withered away after rejecting their Messiah...One day the Lord will revive His people Israel and work in them greatly but for now, for the most part they have withered.

One final comment to just set the stage here is that we should understand that the religious leaders are now decidedly against Jesus and they have been for some time...and coming into the temple and driving out those doing business there was a great insult to their authority.

Let's see what happens if we look at verses 27-28 which say ²⁷Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. ²⁸And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

So Jesus is again seen in the temple area and you can imagine that all eyes were probably on Jesus as He was walking through...some probably admired Him greatly for standing up to the establishment...it was a rare occasion that anyone would stand up to those who had power.

Now when it says here the chief priests, scribes and elders we should just understand that this is referring to the religious establishment. The chief priests were known as the Saducees, the scribes were known as Pharisees and the elders were those who were prominent and powerful men in the community...Together many believe this was what is known as the Sanhedrin...a group of 71 individuals that really ran the country especially when it came to religious duties.

These men had a responsibility in their lives to make sure things were going properly according to the law, it was their job to snuff out any false teachers or those that were leading the people of Israel astray...It was also their job to keep the Romans who occupied their nation happy...Remember the Romans would have been on high alert doing

this time as the city of Jerusalem swelled in number due to the Passover celebration.

And so these men with the wrong heart I would say came to Jesus and began to demand who gave Him the authority to do the things He was doing. In their minds no one should have any kind of authority unless they had personally authorized it...Essentially they are saying to Jesus "Who do you think you are?"

You know I think you and I can be a little like these leaders of the Jewish people...We can also struggle with the authority of Jesus in our lives...Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a battle with the Lord's authority in your life? Have you ever found yourself wanting to do something or to go a certain direction in life and you found the Lord was against you and had other plans?

When you do you know that there can be a battle that takes place...and I want to just remind you today that the plans that God has for your life are far greater and richer than anything you could ever dream up on your own.

In my own life I fought submitting to the Lord's authority in my own life for quite some time...I came to Jesus and I was so thankful to be saved but when it came to giving myself to His desires for my life I fought for many months...During that time I wasn't content in life, I wanted things that I knew weren't good for me, I ended up finding myself in rebellion at times.

But when I came to the end of myself and I said "Lord you can do whatever you want and need to in my life" I found a great peace in my life and a great contentment.

Perhaps you are here today and you in a way are asking the same thing as the leaders of the people of Israel were...Perhaps in your own life you are saying “Who gave you authority over my life?”

We should understand that when Jesus died for us He purchased us and redeemed us from the life of sin that sentenced us to death and separation from God forever...we no longer belong to ourselves but instead we have a new Master.

You and I should understand that the Father is the One that gave Jesus authority...The Father was the One that led Jesus as He went through life...The Father was the One that approved of Jesus and simply said from heaven while Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration “This is my Son, listen to Him”

Let’s see how Jesus responded if you look at verses 29-33 which say **²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: ³⁰ The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”**

³¹ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ³² But if we say, ‘From men’ ”—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. ³³ So they answered and said to Jesus, “We do not know.”

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

How many of you are familiar with a boomerang? Now I’ve had boomerangs in my life when I was a kid and I can remember going out

into the yard next to my parents house and throwing it as hard as I could and I could never really get it to come back to me but if you throw a boomerang just right it will actually go out and come back to you...and here as Jesus responds its really the perfect boomerang situation as the religious leaders instead of being answered are given a question of their own.

And really Jesus is here exposing their hearts that they aren't right, that their motives are impure and Jesus is not going to be bossed around and told what He will and won't do.

So the Lord responds by asking them what their thoughts were about John the Baptist and whether what He did was something that originated from man or if God had given him the ministry that he performed.

Notice that the men all came together and you can imagine they are having a little conference here and essentially they are stuck between a rock and a hard place...I can imagine Jesus watching them and smirking as they desperately worked through how they should properly answer.

They really had two ways they could answer...The first option was that they could say that it came from heaven...the problem with that though is they hadn't listened to John as He ministered to the people...Do you remember how John had spoken to the Pharisees and Sadducees?

Over in Matthew 3:7-9 the Word says this of John ⁷ **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the**

wrath to come? ⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as *our* father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

So to say that his ministry came from heaven simply wouldn't work for them.

And then the second option they had was to say that John's ministry was from men...Again though they had a problem for many in the land of Israel knew of John's ministry and had a firm belief that God had sent him...in reality we should remember that John was really the last of the old testament prophets...a man sent from God to prepare the way of the Lord.

Notice it says here that they were afraid of the people and how they would respond if they said John was sent from men...It's always a hard place to be when you start to worry about what others are going to think. The fear of man can cause many people to react poorly to what is happening around them.

To just conclude this section I wanted to ask have you guys ever seen a politician squirm? When someone asks a question that person is seen deflecting and refusing to directly answer what's been asked of them? That is very similar to what is happening here with the Pharisees as either way they answer they come out on the wrong side.

And so as any politician does they refuse to answer the question and simply came back with the weak answer that they did not know...and really this exposed that their hearts weren't in the right place and they had no real standing to ask Jesus by what authority He was doing

things...and so Jesus then responds by saying if you can't answer then I don't feel the need to answer either.

You might think that this was the end of the conversation but moving forward here the Lord is going to speak a parable to the religious leaders and of course it will be about them and they by the end of the parable will know Jesus is speaking against them.

I am reminded that for all the hatred of the religious leaders towards Jesus that He still loved them and cared for them. Jesus was often very hard on those who thought themselves to be religious...He knew the best way to reach them was to confront them and He did so regularly. True love for an individual will at times say the hard thing.

I am also reminded that even as Jesus was hard on these men He was also tender and merciful towards them when they came with the right attitude and heart and we see that in the Lord's interactions with Nicodemus as this man came to Jesus in humility asking sincere questions and eventually we see Nicodemus an unashamed believer in Jesus.

So let's see what happens here as this develops if you look at chapter 12 and verses 1-2 which say **Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. ² Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers.**

A parable just to briefly explain is really the telling of a story that used everyday occurrences that people were familiar with to then bring

about spiritual truth...As a person had a heart to understand, as they sought out the truth, as they applied what they knew, they would then be able to see what the Lord was teaching.

The most familiar of these parables is probably the parable of the sower and the seeds and you can read about that over in Mark 4.

So in this parable that the Lord tells He begins by speaking of a man that planted a vineyard and as he did so we can see from the text that he did the very best job that he could...He probably invested a good amount of time, energy and money into putting a hedge around it and then he put in a wine vat and built a tower for it...Really he provided everything that was needed that the vineyard might produce a great crop for him.

He then leased the vineyard to those that would take care of it and went away into a far country...Then when the time came, he sent servants to receive of the fruit of the vineyard from those that were taking care of it.

This whole scenario was a common thing to have happen in their culture...Someone with wealth would buy land, they would plant crops and they would provide everything needed to see success...they would then lease out the land and those who tended the land would farm it and send some to the owner as payment.

What was uncommon in this situation is what takes place in verses 3-5 which say this ³And they took *him* and beat him and sent *him* away empty-handed. ⁴Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully treated. ⁵And again he sent

another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. This really didn't make sense...**To beat the servant that had come and then to throw stones** at another wounding him and then killing another that came was unheard of...**And to do so on multiple occasions just heaped up the penalty** that would one day come on them when the owner inevitably came back and handled the rebellion of the workers.

It would seem in the parable that the workers were acting inappropriately, **they were really almost stealing the vineyard from the owner.**

Look at verses 6-8 which say this ⁶**Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'** ⁷**But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'** ⁸**So they took him and killed *him* and cast *him* out of the vineyard.**

Finally the owner had the thought that he would send his only son, the one that he loved **and he thought that when the son came surely they would honor** the agreements that had been made and they would do things properly.

The vinedressers though when they saw the son came to the horrible conclusion that if they killed the son then the inheritance would be theirs and they did just that killing him and casting him out.

Verse 9 says this and then we'll talk about how this applied to those who were listening as the Lord spoke to them...It says ⁹**"Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy**

the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. After much patience, after sending many servants and then his son the vineyard owner would have had enough and he would have come and taken out the vinedressers...I mean really this owner had demonstrated incredible patience hoping those who were in charge would do the right thing.

There was a longsuffering on the part of the owner, he was patient with those put in charge of taking care of his vineyard and yet they had done what was really unthinkable. A land owner responding this way was fully reasonable and understandable at this point...it was just and it was righteous to respond in such a way.

Take a quick peak with me down at verse 12 and then I'll apply some things here and explain the parable...Verse 12 says ¹²**And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away.** Just understand that as the chief priests, the scribes and the elders heard what Jesus said in the parable they knew that He had spoken against them...and how did they respond? Well they had a heart just like the vinedressers did in the parable in that they wanted the Lord dead.

How did they know Jesus had spoken this parable against them? Well my opinion is that the leaders knew that God had spoken of His people as a vineyard and that goes back to the old testament...and just for an example listen to what we have in Isaiah 5:1-7 a passage many were quite familiar with. It says this

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard

On a very fruitful hill. ² He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine.

He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected *it* to bring forth good grapes,

But it brought forth wild grapes.

³ “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected *it* to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?

⁵ And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug,

But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it.”

⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.

He looked for justice, but behold, oppression;

For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

It was common for the people of Israel to know that they were seen in the eyes of the Lord as a vineyard...and the religious leaders as they listened to Jesus could put two and two together and know that He was speaking of them, that they in a way were the ones that had been given authority over God's people and were to not only take care of them and oversee them but also to see fruit produced that could then be given to the Lord.

The religious leaders had a big problem in their lives though...The problem was that so often throughout the old testament and even to the day of Jesus the leaders had rejected those God sent to them.

We might think about the prophet Jeremiah and how he was sent to the southern kingdom of Judah and how he spoke against them and called them to repentance repeatedly and do you know if you read the book of Jeremiah how many people listened? A big fat nobody for the most part.

What about Moses as he was with the people? They constantly complained and we do see them rebelling against him and against God on repeated occasions.

The word says this over in 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 which says ¹⁵ **And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.**

Even in the New Testament when Stephen was proclaiming the gospel and was then stoned for it the following was said in Acts 7:51-52 which says ⁵¹ **“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,**

What about John the Baptist...the one Jesus had just asked them about...they rejected his work as well as he prophesied of the Lord and John even at one point said of Jesus that He was the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

The people of Israel had a history of rejecting those who were sent to them to collect fruit from the vineyard...they had a habit of rejecting those sent from God and the Lord here was challenging them in this parable to think about what is going to happen one day for the hardness of their hearts.

God had been patient with His people, He had ministered to them for centuries even though they clearly rejected Him...He still loved them but if they refused to surrender to His authority and Lordship they would find themselves on the losing side of history.

Let me make just one more point here but look with me at verse 9 again which says ⁹**“Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.** Notice that the owner will one day come and destroy the vinedressers and then give the vineyard to others...I think you and I are a byproduct of this very thing happening...As the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah they faced a great disaster in their lives as Jerusalem was literally destroyed in 70 AD...and the book of Acts really records that as the Jews rejected Jesus and Lord then turned to the Gentiles and began to speak to them and minister to them and use them as they placed their trust in Jesus.

History proves it out that for the time being the kingdom for the most part has been given to others and those others are you and I...One day the Lord will turn back and minister to His people Israel once again

but until that time they largely miss out on the blessing of knowing their Messiah.

So Jesus has said all these things to them, the religious leaders are understanding that it was spoken against them and now let's look at verses 10-12 as the Lord was still speaking to them...These verses say **¹⁰Have you not even read this Scripture:**

**'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.**

**¹¹This was the Lord's doing,
And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"**

**¹²And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude,
for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they
left Him and went away.**

As Jesus finished speaking to them He brought up a scripture that would speak to this situation...and this is found over in Psalm 118:22-23 and this Psalm may ring a bell for if you remember just last week in our study as Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on a donkey they people quoted this very Psalm saying "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"

It's interesting that the very same Psalm that speaks of the triumphal entry of Jesus also speaks of the simple fact that the cornerstone would be rejected...and Jesus surely is the cornerstone of our faith. Now the cornerstone was the most important part of a building back in biblical times as it would be the first stone set and then all the other stones of that building would be set accordingly...without the cornerstone you would find whatever it was you were building to

quickly be out of plumb, to be wonky in its construction thus making it susceptible to falling apart and coming together improperly.

And so it is with Jesus...He is the cornerstone of our faith, the One that we follow and live for, the one that you and I are to build our lives upon...Sadly the Jewish people largely rejected the most important piece of their history, they rejected Jesus the One who fulfilled so much prophecy and accomplished so much on their behalf.

So clearly this parable spoken against the leaders here and it was given I believe to try and get their attention.

Well we have one more small section here we are going to cover tonight as once again the leaders are trying to catch Jesus in His words and this time it will come from two groups of people who would never have worked together but in this case they had a common enemy.

Look at verse 13 which says this ¹³**Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words.** So these two groups were really like oil and water...The Pharisees were loyal to the law of God, they hated that the Romans had any jurisdiction over them, they looked for a Messiah to come who would liberate them.

The Herodians on the other hand actually worked with the Romans to promote the authority of the Romans in the city of Jerusalem, they were sympathizers to the cause.

So these two would not normally work together but as Jesus was gaining in popularity, as the people had hailed Him as their Messiah they both became concerned.

And so here they are together and notice it says here that they were testing Jesus with the words that they said to Him...In other words their motives weren't pure, they were looking for a way to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing.

Let's see how this plays out in verses 14-15 which say ¹⁴When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? ¹⁵ Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?"

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it."

How many of you have ever met what we would call a "kiss up" before in your life? Or have you ever heard the term "buttering someone up?" Well that's what we have before us here as they speak to Jesus they are looking to compliment Him and flatter Him and in doing so you know how it is...there can be a tendency to put your guard down.

And so they try to soften Jesus up and then they ask...should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?

And notice that Jesus saw right through them seeing through their hypocrisy and He asked for a denarius or a Roman coin to be brought to Him.

Now I have to just point out that this question they asked Jesus was really a brilliant question and it could be called a GOTCHA question as they are really putting Jesus into a very hard situation.

You see if Jesus responded that they needed to pay taxes to Caesar guess who would become angry? All the religious folks in Jerusalem

and most of the common people as well for they hated it that they had to regularly pay taxes to the Roman government...

If Jesus responded that they needed to pay many would probably disagree and choose not to follow Jesus any longer essentially putting the people against the Lord.

On the other hand if Jesus said not to pay taxes then the Herodians would run right away and let the Romans know that this new teacher in the land is encouraging the people to refuse to pay what they owed...this would have easily led to the arrest of Jesus.

So the Lord is put into a tight spot and in response the Lord simply asked to see one of the coins and then look at verses 16-17 which say **¹⁶ So they brought it.**

And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”

¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

And they marveled at Him.

So the coin is brought and Jesus simply asks whose image is on the coin? And the answer to that of course is Caesar’s...the Lord then says if it’s Caesar’s then give it to Him...and while you are at it Jesus says “you should also give to God the things that belong to Him.”

And the people we are told marvelled...why would they marvel? Well Jesus has essentially stuck it to those that asked this difficult question.

I want you to notice here that Jesus says that they should pay their taxes and you and I of all people should be honestly paying our taxes...I'm not advocating you pay more than you should but if the government says we should pay a certain amount we should do so.

You and I enjoy the benefits of the American government as broken as it is...We enjoy wonderful roads in this nation and if you don't believe me go to most other countries in the world and you will find out ...For the most part you and I enjoy the safety of our police departments and fire departments and we enjoy the parks that are around us and so we should pay our fair share of taxes. If you don't like what your government is doing and how they are spending your money then run for office and make changes once you win.

Paul said this in Romans 13:6-7 which says ⁶**For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.** ⁷**Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.** So yes, it is scriptural to submit to the governing laws and pay the taxes that we owe.

Now there are limits to the government of course and I'm not advocating we submit to every law especially those that go against the highest calling in our lives which is to honor the Lord and His word...the moment our government tries to tell us to be silent about Jesus we have a higher duty to honor God and proclaim His Word.

So pay your taxes, honor the government, pray for your leaders for sure...but then the Lord gets to the bigger point He was making when He said to give to God that which belongs to God.

Did you know that you and I bear the image of our Creator? I know we are fallen in our nature at this point because of Adam's choices but you and I and all of humanity bear the image of God upon us...We were created by our maker and as such what is it that rightfully belongs to Him?

Well, our whole being belongs to Jesus, we exist for His pleasure we should remember and if Jesus has paid for us and we bear the image of God we should willingly give ourselves to His calling on our lives.

So much of humanity misses out on actually living for what they were created for...and really you can only properly live as you honor Jesus with your life and you give yourself to His calling in your life.

The Lord is again bringing this to those that were questioning Him and the real issue in their hearts was that they needed to submit to the authority of Jesus and give themselves to His calling in their lives.

And maybe today as we close you need to correct the way you respond to Jesus...Maybe today you name the name of Jesus but you haven't really given yourself to His calling on your life...I would simply tell you that you are missing out and the best thing you can do is submit to His work in your heart. Don't be like the religious leaders who looked for any and every reason to reject Jesus...instead look to embrace the Lord and to give yourself to the one that placed His image upon your life.

Let me pray for us as we close tonight.

Mark 11:27-12:17 “Who Gave You This Authority?”

Cross References

Chapter 11

Verses 29-33

Matthew 3:7-9

Chapter 12

Verse 9 (verse 12 also discussed)

Isaiah 5:1-7

2 Chronicles 36:15-16

Acts 7:51-52

Verses 16-17

Romans 13:6-7