

## Mark 12, Part 1

When we get to Mark 12, we have a vineyard, and we have a parable (which is a story intended to get the attention of the listener).

Jesus is not speaking here to interested children. He's speaking to his enemies who are challenging him every step of the way. And so instead of taking them head on, he tells a story about a vineyard to make them think.

(Remember the context that we looked at in Mark 11 – it's Passover, and Jesus has just come into the temple precincts and observed the religious leaders (who should have been good shepherds) taking advantage of the poor worshippers who have traveled to make a sacrifice to God, by charging them exorbitant prices for sacrificial animals, along with a high currency exchange rates. And these are the people who want him to be gone, because he is a threat to their income, their power, and their lavish way of life.

Verses 1-5 (verse 1 - it was common in the OT to call the nation of Israel "God's vineyard." So they would have been very familiar with the setting and implications of the story; see Isaiah 5:1-2,7).

Notice how the tenants treat the messengers – with each messenger, the violence increases:

First man – they beat him and sent him back empty handed

Second – they hit him over the head and treated him shamefully (they humiliated him)

The third messenger is killed, along with "many others" who come after him.

(You see what's happening? This is human nature - whenever faced with a truth we don't want to hear, there's something in us, if we are bent on disobedience, that resists more and more vigorously. They're called defense mechanisms. Denial, rationalization, justification, overt or passive aggressive behavior. All to defend what the sinful heart wants to do).

And so do you see what's going on?

Time after time, day after day, God has sent his messengers, the prophets – to the leaders of Israel to call them into account for their lack of faithful leadership (Jeremiah 7:25-26).

And like the messengers of the vineyard owner, they were repeatedly ignored, mistreated, and killed.

For example –

- The prophet Jeremiah was beaten on multiple occasions, thrown in a pit and stoned
- Ezekiel was murdered after a sermon
- Zechariah was stoned in the temple courts
- Isaiah was put into a log and sawn in half (Heb. 11:37)

But the tenants are being unfaithful; but God has not given up – so we read in **verses 6-8**

The owner of the vineyard sends his son, and the tenants kill him too. And again, they ramp up their violent response, because not only do they murder him; they refuse to give him a proper burial – an act of outright scorn and shame. (Do you think the meaning may be coming into view for the hearers?)

Verses 9-11 - (10 – this is a quote from Psalm 118 – one of the five psalms that was sung during Passover Week, which was being sung all around Jesus as he was speaking and

turning over tables, so it was extremely relevant to the moment. Jesus takes one of the key themes of the Psalm and says, “This song is written about me! Your Messiah is here! I am the one everybody is singing about. And he moves to a building illustration by saying, “I am the cornerstone of the new building, but I have been rejected by you builders).

Verse 12

So – do you see the point? They thought THEY were in control – to the point of murdering those who opposed them.

And here is our good God, who is constantly sending us messengers of all sorts – because life will never let you believe you are the owner.

No matter how hard you try to control the vineyard, life will never let you. (You say, “I’m even going to punish, kill the people who disagree with me.” The more you do that, the less control you have.

**I read this week: The twin sister of hubris is ignorance**

Believing you are in charge, that you call all the shots in God’s world (God’s vineyard), is the most ignorant thing you could ever believe – because you are NOT in charge. Even if you had the power to kill every messenger who disagreed with you – you are still not in charge.

Remember Pharoah, remember Herod – large and in charge, right? Set out to kill all the male babies who would be a threat to me, kill all of the firstborn. And what did God do? Down by the river, Moses’ mother puts him in a little basket and Pharoah’s daughter picks him up and raises him in Pharoah’s palace, and over in a cattle stall, Jesus is born.

I’m just tell you – if you think you can tend God’s vineyard in such a way that says, “I’m going to do it MY way.” It will never work!

Life won’t let you. You know why? Because you aren’t the owner – God is.

And life is a messenger constantly coming at you saying, “You’re not in charge. You’re the tenant.”

You’re conscience isn’t yours, your creativity isn’t yours, your sexuality isn’t yours – you’re intelligence isn’t yours, your relationships aren’t yours – they are gifts from god to you.

And when you try to get into the driver’s seat, you’re like an 8 year old that gets behind the wheel, and you can’t even see over the top of the steering wheel.

But I love this: here’s our loving Lord, willing even to send his one and only Son, and the Lord says in his mercy, “I don’t just give you one chance, I keep sending my messengers.”

Are you listening? What are you doing with it?

Let me ask you – who are the messengers that God is sending you, and you’re just beating them up, kicking and hitting them, treating the shamefully?

They may be people – even critics – but the people are actually a messenger to you from God saying, “You are not in control of your life.”

And underneath all of that is someone who really loves you enough to tell you the truth.

Old people used to talk about **providential messengers** – it’s a tragedy or near tragedy, a disappointment or frustration, an

unfulfilled dream - that God sends into your life. And what's the purpose? What is the message? You are not in control of your life.

And God says, "I need you to give me the wheel back."

So how are you treating the messengers – are you beating them up, or listening.

Does God sound hard in his punishment? Of course he does. This story is absolutely meant to scare them, because that's the only way to do an intervention with people who are in denial.

You see the point? You can either accept the Son, or you can treat him like an enemy.

And here's what will happen – you'll either be crushed by the stone, or build a whole new life on the stone.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And yet here's what you've got to see – God loves you so much, that he is willing to send messenger after messenger to you. Even more – Jesus was willing to die for you. He was willing to be treated as the enemy for you.

And yet – here's the warning – his grace is amazing, but it won't last forever. When we continue to willfully reject him, his patience eventually comes to an end.

So question – who are the messengers in your life? The people who love you, the circumstances around you. And two – are you listening? Because messengers don't keep coming forever.

Okay – next part –

In verses 1-12, Jesus tells a story to get their attention. They, in turn, come back with riddles to get his.

Verse 13-15a

So now we get into some questions where the religious leaders turn to get the attention of Jesus (we'll look at two today).

In this first one, what happens is we have these two groups of people, the Pharisees and the Herodians, who hate each other.

Why? First of all, the Pharisees were the **religious purity group** who hated Roman rule. They wanted nothing to do with Rome, they hated the fact that they had to pay taxes to the Romans government.

And then you have the Herodians, the political power group, and some of you may remember when Jesus was born, king Herod was the king, and like Herod they are friendly with Rome because that's where they get their power from. So they were fond of Roman rule.

So you have the Pharisees who want nothing to do with Rome, and the Herodians who are friendly with Rome – they hate each other, but they hate Jesus more.

You ever heard the phrase, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend"? That's what you have here.

So they come to Jesus, and they ask a question based on taxes. (Interestingly, 2000 years ago they were debating taxes. Some things never change, right?)

So they bring a question to Jesus about politics. They bring out a hot issue to smoke him out, and they are convinced they

have him one way or the other, where he will tick off one of the groups – and this Jesus you think is something, is really nothing – because they want him to lose favor with the people. So they approach Jesus as if he were a political candidate, seeking to back him into a corner with a question that has two equally bad alternatives.

And you'll notice they set up the question with a load of sarcasm and false praise. (They come at Jesus with the sandwich approach – they just butter the bread on both sides:

“Teacher - you have so much integrity, you're not swayed by others, you teach the truth”).

They were dripping with sarcasm. (Even though what they said was true, right? You judge impartially, you respect everyone, you always tell the truth . . .). They got that part right. But praise wasn't their intention.

15b-17

You know, when politicians get a hot question, they usually give you this run around. But not Jesus. He gives them an answer that defies categories.

So here's what we have:



A denarius was a day's wage for a common laborer. It was a small silver coin. It was minted by the emperor. Only the emperor had the authority to

mint gold or silver coins.

On one side of a denarius was the image of Caesar, in this case, Caesar Tiberias; on the other side was an image of a

Roman deity. So it had an image on it and the Jews hated that, because their allegiance was to God alone.

First, they hated paying taxes, and secondly they hated paying taxes with defiled, image-laden currency.

Jesus says, “Bring me a denarius.” And he says, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marveled at him."

Now, there's two parts to that answer. Mankind has a human obligation, number one; mankind has a spiritual obligation, number two.

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." In other words, Jesus is saying, "Yes, it is right to give taxes to the one who's collecting them," in this case, Caesar Tiberias. It's his image on it. It's his inscription on it. This stuff, this money belongs to his domain. "Absolutely, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Let me tell you what this means to you and I. We're citizens not only of heaven, which we are, but we're also citizens of the earth, of this state, of this city, and that means God wants us to pay taxes.

Now I'm waiting for the gavels to be flying, but that's Scripture folks. You render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Paul the apostle put it very clear in Romans 13. He said, "Let every soul be subject to governing authorities. For there is no authority except that which is appointed by God, and the authorities that exist have been ordained by God."

He says give honor to whom honor is due, and "for this reason," he said, "we also pay taxes." That means we give honor to mayors, we give honor to governors, and we give

honor to the president, and those who rule this country. You render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

But the second part: "Give to God the things that are God's."

Caesar has right to collect your money; God has the right to collect your worship. He has the right to collect your allegiance. He has the right to collect your submission. Give to God the things that belong to God.

As Creator, as the Giver of life, he's the one that we give all to. We worship him with heart, mind, soul, and strength.

You pay your taxes to Caesar (because you drive on his roads, right?); and you give your life to God. And they marveled at that.

And here's where we see the wisdom of Jesus –

**WRITE THIS DOWN: Jesus avoids political simplicity.**

What does he do? He avoids political simplicity – he'll not be controlled by "this or that" thinking (which is the wisdom of God here).

He avoids the extremism they are trying to push him to.

He does not do what they ask him to do, which is give a nice, simple yes/no answer

And so we know, Jesus is incredibly clear about many thing – the way, the truth, the life – our relationship with God

But when he's asked a question relative to the state or to politics, he doesn't give a simple yes/no answer.

He gives a both/and answer – it's a balanced answer.

Think about it - he resists what's on the coin, and he accepts what's on the coin.

He resists political simplicity.

We have to resist this kind of thinking: Jesus is for that program, not that program.

We have to resist – "All Bible believing Christians – that's **who** they vote for."

I just want to say – be very careful with that. I know some very conservative candidates, and I don't agree with everything they espouse. And I know some very liberal candidates, and I don't agree with everything they espouse. **One of our very wise young adults said to me just yesterday as we were discussing this text, "There are people with good intentions and bad intentions on both sides."**

This creeps over into church sometimes. In church, I grew up with very strong "either/or" thinking. And it didn't bring people together, it drove a wedge between us. It caused us to label one another instead of seeking common ground.

But here's what I've learned as I've matured – the people I typically disagree with – they raise questions that make be better. And Jesus sees value in both perspectives.

You see how Jesus resists political simplicity?

Jesus was a revolutionary! But he's not the kind anyone had seen before in history.

They tried to push him into a corner – either Caesar or God. And Jesus doesn't flow with that. He says, "If Caesar's picture

is on it, it belongs to him, and God's, it's under his authority. (Caesar is not Lord).

So Jesus the Galilean is envisioning a revolution, but a different sort of revolution. You see what he's doing?

He's not saying, "Believe whatever they tell you." And he's also not saying, "Revolt and don't pay your taxes."

He's promoting something totally different -and that is reasonability, respect, giving honor to whom honor is due.

He doesn't want us to drop out of the political process (he says "pay your taxes"), but he wants us to engage it in the right way ("God is God" and not man).

Another thing he's doing – he's also reacting to the extreme camps of his day.

A group called the Essenes totally removed themselves from society and lived in caves (They are the ones who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls). The other was the Zealots, who would put a knife in the back of political leaders they didn't like.

He says, "There's a better way!"

So practically – what does this mean?

1. Where are you so quick to judge an entire group/label every person in the group unfairly, without hearing from them?
2. Where would it be in your best interest to seek more understanding and information to more fairly inform your viewpoint?

Example – one of ladies said she spent the holidays with her family, and her dad expressed his opinions on politics. And

when he was finished she said, "Dad, I hear you, but let me give you some things from the other side of the aisle, from the impact on healthcare you may not have considered." And he listened, and when finished, he said, "I didn't realize any of that. Thank you."

That's how I believe Jesus would have operated. But to force people into polarizing categories, that's not what he would do.

Because to do so would mean – everybody in that camp, is always right, on every issue, without fault, without error, without room to be wrong, and without room to grow

This is foundational to how we operate at Gracepoint. In circle we get things done, because we first respect each other and 2, we care about each other's views, and 3 we know we are fallible and probably have something to learn. We are human, God is God. He is not me, he is the ultimate authority, and I go to him for the answers.

Here's what I've learned – some of the best people, people that push me, make me better – are people who are not at all like me.

This doesn't mean you abandon your position, you just say "well it doesn't matter." It does matter – but what they have to offer matters too.

(And in this world – that's not what we're seeing – but regardless, it's up to us to model the style of Jesus). Because now you have a chance to make another better as well.

So Jesus has come to bring a revolution. That is to deal with real suffering, poverty, real injustice, real hunger and

brokenness. But he will not do it the way anyone has ever done it before.

Example – I worked with an eldership that was dealing with a particularly knotty issues, and there were strong convictions around the table. We made the decision to come back the next week, let everyone go around the circle and share their position and no one could respond – this was a listening exercise. Afterward, we went around the circle again and each was asked to share what he had learned from others. Once that was over, we talked about common ground. Here was the outcome:

1. We all expressed our convictions.
2. We listened to the strong conviction of others.
3. We learned something – a perspective, an insight, a window into the heart of the person
4. We reached a position we could all get behind which was a reflection of our common wisdom, the wisdom of the group.

I've got to say one of the most rewarding experiences of ministry for me.

In the end, Jesus shows us that the world will ultimately not be changed through politics – it will be changed by Christians trying to save their country by pointing people to Jesus.

(It's how hundreds of years of slavery was changed in the Romans empire – one human being made in God's image, respecting another).

And so the king – who doesn't have a quarter in his pocket, who has to borrow a quarter from someone else – has more

power than the king who holds all the quarters. Isn't that amazing?

Earthly power wants to hold all the coins; and the King of Kings wants to give them away.

Okay, last part. Verse 18

So the Pharisees and the Herodians had their shot at Jesus and failed. Now a group called the Sadducees take their shot at Jesus and see if they can trip him up.

The Sadducees were the religious liberals of the day, and here's what we know about them:

1. They were less numerous than the Pharisees, but possessed political power and were the Jewish governing body.
2. They only accepted the first 5 books of the OT (where the Pharisees accepted them all).
3. They did not believe in the resurrection, the afterlife, or angels and spirits. They put all their stock in the "here and now." They didn't believe in future life, so it was all about the here and now. That's why most of them were wealthy, and when Jesus turned the tables over in the temple, they were the most angry, because it cut into their profits).

And so – verses 19-23

So what we have here is a hypothetical.

Let me say – there are questions people ask for information's sake because they want to learn. But then there are questions people ask to confuse, or to accuse.

And if you watch any of our political talk today, if you watch the way a lot of people yell and curse at each other, most people don't ask questions because they really want to learn, they ask questions to confuse people or make them look stupid.

We need to be people who are willing to learn, even if someone is speaking we don't agree with. We've got to learn to listen – not throw insults and ask questions to confuse.

So here's this hypothetical, but they think they have the perfect question – either way he answers is wrong.

And here's the background to the question:

They're referring to a law in the book of Moses, in Deuteronomy, chapter 25, called the law of levirate marriage.

The law was given to protect the widow. It was to protect the land and the name of that family, so that if a husband dies and leaves no offspring, and that wife is left, she has no claim on the land in future generations. And so a brother or a kinsman, a relative, could marry that lady, and then the family name is preserved, and the inheritance is passed on from generation to generation for that woman. It's to protect her, her offspring, and the family name.

So – a man has seven sons. A widow ends up marrying all seven to have an heir, but she never does. All of them die. Now comes the question – who will she be married to in the resurrection? (Which they don't believe in anyway – these are guys are snakes).

Verses 24-27

Jesus, knowing their intentions, hits them with two realities:

FIRST – you don't even know the scriptures.

(And this is what's incredible – there are other scriptures in the OT that point to resurrection, but he takes a passage from Exodus, the second book of the OT that they believed, and he says, “you don't even know the scriptures you claim to believe).

And you've got to imagine how deep this cut them -because they consider themselves to be masters of biblical interpretation. They pride themselves in knowing the law of Moses from front to back. They have read it, studied it, memorized the first 5 books of the OT. They have devoted their lives to it!

And so he chooses a passage from their own playbook – Exodus 3:6 from the story of the burning bush – and makes a case for the resurrection.

And it's so amazing, because it's based on two little words, “I am.”

Here's his argument: “God did not say, “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” He said, “I AM” the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Which means what, folks?

Hundreds of years later, they are still alive!

Which means – he is not the God of the DEAD, but the God of the LIVING. They are living on!

[So will we know one another in heaven? The answer is, “Yes!” In heaven, Abraham is still Abraham, Jacob is still Jacob, and Isaac is still Isaac]. We will still be ourselves. We will be recognizable as we are.



And then confronts them again (because they don't believe in angels) – that in heaven we will be like angels! They didn't know the scriptures!

(And I need to say this, because it's important - He doesn't say we will BE angels.

Make sure you get that right, because you know what a lot of people's definition of what hell would be? A lot of people's definition of hell would be wearing a diaper on a cloud with a harp with little wings for eternity.

That would be terrible. No, the Bible teaches that we will rule over angels.

I know a lot of people what to think, "Oh, God just got another angel." Don't get your theology from It's a Wonderful Life. (Love the movie – but there is no Clarence up there who's trying to earn his wings). We get our theology from the word of God, and that's what Jesus is saying.

He's saying – in the resurrection it's going to be better than you could ever imagine.

We will have this glorious and eternal existence like the angels – where we become deathless. We will be immortal.

They don't know the scriptures.

And lastly – he shows them that their view of marriage fails to consider the POWER of God. They deny God's power by assuming that life in the next world is just like it is here on earth.

So as we wrap up, notice that Jesus says, "There's not going to be marriage in heaven." Now, does that sound exciting to you?

My guess is for most, probably not. That in heaven, we'll all just be friends. Sounds kind of bland, right?

But – that can't be what he's saying, because he says, "You don't know the power of God."

No – Jesus is not talking about a lesser life, he's not talking about a bland life. He's talking about the POWER of GOD to do something so amazing, what we know on the earth can't even compare.

He's not saying that marriage – with all that love, and all that power, and all that intimacy – is going to be less than what's on earth. NO!

In the resurrection, the love we have with one another will be so much greater than what we experience on earth, it won't even look anything like it.

It's like traveling to see the mountains – folks from Mississippi, "I love to come up here and see the mountains – and they're this side of Pickwick – and you go through the flat lands of Arkansas – and you see the Ozarks – and they're so beautiful. But then you go through the plains of Oklahoma, Kansas – and you come to the Rockies, and they don't even compare. (By the way – keep driving, and come to Alaska – and you'll say, "What mountains in Colorado?"

So I want you to consider a couple of things here:

1. This is good news! Because in Jesus' time (and in many parts of the world today), a woman is "given in marriage."

Which means – she has no say so. The father “gives or arranges the marriages,” and the groom “takes” her. For such a woman forced to her life with a man she didn’t love, would this not be absolutely liberating?

2. Secondly – marriage is such a limited contract – “till death do us part.” (Remember the pictures I showed you at the beginning. Humans – great grandparents – earthly families – live on only in memories and old photo albums that eventually fade away. But in heaven, those relationships last for eternity. You see the beauty of it?)
3. And I just love this: in the resurrection, there will be no more single people, no more widowed people, no more divorced people, no more lonely people. Because in heaven, Christ is the bridegroom!

And the knowledge we will have of God and one another, will make the best marriage in all the world look like nothing by comparison.

That’s the promise of the future. Not life BELOW earthly marriage – but INFINITELY ABOVE IT.

The Bible says, “No eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard what God has prepared for those who love him.”

As much as we love our spouses now, we’re going to an even higher level with them in the resurrection, where there will be no sin, no snarkiness, never a harsh word spoken, no hurt feelings, no separations, no staying up all night angry, no sickness, no funeral, no death to depart.

The resurrection will be better, than even the greatest marriage in earth!

Isn’t God good?

And so I want to close with this – in Christ, we have so much to look forward to.

Are you ready? Are you ready? (group of men studying – tears in eyes – thinking about their eternity)

Are you ready?

I love something that Teresa of Avila said –

“The first moment in the arms of Jesus, is gonna make a thousand years of misery on earth like one night in a bad hotel.” If you understand that – you can face anything.