

# The Authority of the Son (12:1-44)

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## I. THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS (12:1-9)

### A. Overview

Jesus is still in the Temple precincts, after cleansing the Temple, when he addresses the delegation of chief priests, scribes, and the elders who challenge his authority to disrupt the Temple commerce.

He tells them a parable - the *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* (also called the *Parable of the Rejected Son*).

This parable narrates the history of Israel. The story stresses that God has been patient with his wayward people throughout the ages, but there comes a time when His patience gives place to judgment.

The parable is addressed to the leaders and rulers in Jerusalem, not to the Jewish people as a whole.

### B. Parable / Allegory

Mark calls this story about the Wicked Tenants a parable, *although this parable, linked up as it is with the **Song of the Vineyard** in Isaiah 5:1-7, exhibits an allegorical character which is unique among the parables of Jesus. The whole parable is evidently pure allegory* (See *The Parables of Jesus* by Joachim Jeremias).

- A **parable** in general has one main point in contrast with
- An **allegory** in which every detail has some symbolic meaning.

**Read:** Mark 12:1-9

**[1] And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the wine press, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country.**

**[2] When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.**

**[3] And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed.**

**[4] Again he sent to them another servant, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully.**

**[5] And he sent another, and him they killed; and so with many others, some they beat and some they killed.**

**[6] He had still one other, a beloved son; finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'**

**[7] But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'**

**[8] And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.**

**[9] What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others.**

### C. Symbolism in the Parable/Allegory

- The **vineyard** represents Israel dwelling in the walled city of Jerusalem;
- The **tower** is the Temple;
- The **owner of the vineyard** is God whose patience and long-suffering is divine;
- The **tenants** symbolize the leaders and rulers of Israel to whom God has entrusted his vineyard;
- The various **servants** (messengers) represent the OT prophets repeatedly sent by God to call for repentance;
- The **beloved son** is Jesus;

- The inevitable punishment represents the ruin of Israel; **He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others.**
- The **other tenants** represent the Gentile Church, or possibly the Twelve Apostles.

#### D. Meaning of the Parable

Jesus tells them the story of a man who planted a vineyard and went through the elaborate preparation necessary to protect it and to harvest its fruits and produce wine. Any Jewish listener would think immediately of Isaiah 5:1-4, **the Song of the Vineyard.**

Jesus directs this parable not to the Jewish people but to the leaders who are listening, and they understand it this way as well (v. 12).

In the parable Jesus not only predicted his death at the hands of the Jewish leaders, but also related them to leaders in past generations who had killed the prophets.

He depicted Israel as the vineyard under the control of the Jewish leaders - the wicked tenants. God is the owner, and the servants he sent to gather the vineyard's harvest are the prophets - both earlier and later prophets.

Jesus was the owner's **beloved son**, whose murder at the hands of the tenants prompted the owner to exact punishment.

## II. THE PARABLE OF THE REJECTED STONE (12:10 - 12)

Jesus follows up the parable with quotes from Psalm 118:22-23, the Hallel psalm sung by worshippers entering the temple. Indeed, it is the very psalm sung at Jesus' own procession to the temple (Mark 11: 9-10).

It is a kind of mini parable.

**Read:** Mark 12:10-12

**[10] Have you not read this scripture: `The very stone which the builders rejected**

**has become the head of the corner;**

**[11] this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"**

**[12] And they tried to arrest him, but feared the multitude, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them; so they left him and went away.**

“Psalm 118 foretells the bitter irony of Holy Week: Jerusalem’s leaders (**the builders**) will reject their Messiah (**stone**) despite his divine mission (**the Lord’s doing**), while his work will be called marvelous by those who recognize him with the eyes of faith.”

“The psalm is implying that the older Temple will be replaced with another, where the rejected Messiah will serve as the honored cornerstone of the new edifice” (See ICSB – note on 12:10-11).

### III. CAESAR, GOD AND TAXES (12:13-17)

Early in his Galilean ministry Jesus came into conflict with the established teachers and observers of the law. The five conflicts that took place there climaxed in the plot of the Pharisees and the Herodians to destroy him (Mk 3:6).

Now, in Jerusalem, another series of conflicts sets the stage for the culmination of this plot in the passion and death of Jesus.

- The first of these conflicts was evoked by the parable of the wicked tenants; the second is a dispute over paying taxes to Cesar.

**Read:** Mark 12:13-17

**[13] And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to entrap him in his talk.**

**[14] And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"**

**[15] Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it."**

**[16] And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's."**

**[17] 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.**

### **E. Pharisees and Herodians**

The Pharisees and Herodians are two opposing groups within ancient Judaism. Although they have far different political views, they join forces in their plot to destroy Jesus (Mk 3:6).

The Pharisees opposed the Roman rule and occupation of Palestine, whereas the Herodians were sympathetic to Rome's government of Israel through their Herodian dynasty.

### **F. The Question**

***Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?***

The Pharisees and Herodians first compliment Jesus on his virtue and fearlessness in speaking the truth. Then they try to trap him with their question – a real “hot potato” regarding the legality of paying taxes to Rome. **Lawful** refers to the law of God!

Jesus is asked if his interpretation of the law of God permits paying the tax or not - a tax that constantly reminded the Jews of their subordination to Rome.

The trap was set.

- If Jesus answered that the tax should be paid, the Pharisees (who were the Jewish nationalists) would reject him as a collaborator with Rome.
- If he said it should not be paid, the Herodians would report Jesus to the Roman government on charges of treason.

Recognizing the trap, however, Jesus raised the question from the political plane to the spiritual.

- According to Jesus, the Roman coins has Caesar's image stamped on them, and so they belong to Cesar.
- Likewise, every human heart has God's image engraved on it, and so we belong to God.

***"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."***

It was no longer an issue of which laws should be obeyed – the tax should be given to Caesar and everyone, including Caesar, should give themselves back to God.

### **G. The Testing of Jesus**

***"Why put me to the test?"***

- Testing the Lord was a sin for which the Israelites were often chastised.

In fact, by testing Jesus the Pharisees and Herodians are playing the role of Satan, who tempted Jesus in an effort to derail his messianic mission (Mark 1:13).

They will reject Jesus, but God will set him as the cornerstone of a new people, replacing the temple.

### **H. Relationship between Church and State**

The principle Jesus states here forms part of the basis of Catholic teaching on the relationship of Church and state.

Several things are implied in Jesus' answer:

- First, the civil government has a certain autonomy and rights. Jesus does not consider civil government an evil soon to be abolished by the in breaking of God's rule.
- Second, however, there is no white washing of imperial Rome either, for emperor worship is idolatry, and the temptation of the State is always to assume more power than rightfully belongs to it.

Other New Testament writings elaborate on Jesus' principle, affirming both:

- our duty to respect civil authority (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:1-6) and
- our overriding allegiance to God wherever a civil authority over steps its bounds or imposes laws contrary to the moral law (Acts 5:29; Rev 13: 1-18). See CCC 2238-2242.

## **IV. THE RESURRECTION (MARK 12:18-27)**

### **A. Overview**

The third dispute is with the Sadducees, who deny the reality of life after death. The Sadducees were wealthy, priestly aristocrats who managed the affairs of the Jerusalem Temple.

- Though small in number, they exerted a powerful influence on the people.

They based their teaching on their claim that the Law, that is, the first five books of the Bible – the *Pentateuch* (Gk) or *Torah* (Heb) - teaches nothing about the resurrection and that the later appearance of the doctrine was a deviation from the authentic word of God.

- They flatly rejected the rabbinic oral tradition, which would have made them more open to the doctrine of the resurrection.

**Read:** Mark 12:18-27

***[18] And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying,***

***[19] "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the wife, and raise up children for his brother.***

***[20] There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no children;***

***[21] and the second took her, and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise;***

***[22] and the seven left no children. Last of all the woman also died.***

***[23] In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife."***

***[24] Jesus said to them, "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor 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] And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, `I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?***

***[27] He is not God of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong."***

## B. The Question

The Sadducees approach Jesus with a loaded question designed to prove that belief in the resurrection leads to absurdity. In this context, the Sadducees' riddle about the much-married widow was both legalistic and cynical.

Using an example taken from the book of Deuteronomy (25:5-10), they interpreted it in a way meant to reduce to absurdity any belief in the resurrection, and thus humiliate Jesus.

They argue from the provision Moses made for the continuance of the family name when a man dies leaving no children (Dt. 25:5). They propose the extreme case of a woman who had seven successive husbands, none of whom produced any children.

In the supposed life of the resurrection, which they assume will restore all human relationships, whose wife would she be?

Jesus asserts that his questioners know ***neither the scriptures*** nor ***the power of God***. He then elaborates on these points in reverse order.

## C. The Power of God

First, though the resurrection is bodily, it is also a transformation into angelic glory in which union with God is the primary relationship and earthly relationships are entirely secondary.

Marriage is characteristic of the earthly life. In Ephesians 5:25-32 it is a symbol of the union of Christ with his church; when the reality is consummated, the symbol disappears.

Those who rise from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. They will still be male and female but they will be like the angels, not in the sense that they are disembodied spirits, but that they have a glorious and eternal existence like the angels.

With this answer Jesus affirms several points denied by the Sadducees:

- There is life after death,
- There is a bodily resurrection, and
- Angels do exist.

#### **D. Ignorance of the Scriptures**

Second, the Sadducees do not understand “***the scriptures***.” It is not that they are unfamiliar with the scriptures - some of them may have even memorized the Pentateuch (*Torah*) - but they do not understand the God who is revealed in the scriptures.

Since the Sadducees restricted Biblical authority to the Pentateuch, Jesus draws his argument from one of the books of the Pentateuch, namely Exodus (3:6), to demonstrate that the resurrection is foreshadowed in the Pentateuch.

They have entirely missed the point of God's words to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:6; 15-16):

***And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."***

What they failed to grasp is that for God to be the God of *someone* such as Abraham, that person must first be in a relationship with God, and therefore alive. For ***he is not God of the dead but of the living***.

Therefore for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob there is life after death.

## Reflection and Application

### V. THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT (12:28-34)

Overhearing Jesus' response to the Sadducees about the resurrection, **one of the scribes** approaches Jesus with another question.

This conversation is very different in tone from the preceding disputes. The scribe's question here seems more honestly motivated than the preceding ones.

He notices how well Jesus had responded to the previous question on the resurrection. So he seeks his wisdom on another live issue that was debated among scholars of the day.

**Read:** Mark 12:28-34

***28] And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"***

***[29] Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;***

***[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] And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he;***

***[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 oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."***

***[34] And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to***

**him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any question.**

### A. The Question

**"Which commandment is the first of all?"**

The Torah was full of commandments – 613 of them - and it was common in scribal discussions to look for the one overriding commandment or principle that would summarize the complexity of the Mosaic Law.

In other words the scribe was asking, "What does God really want us to do?"

### B. Jesus' Response

Jesus responds by quoting the *Shema* (Hebrew for "**hear!**"), taken from Deut 6:4-5, the devout Jew's daily prayer.

**'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.'**

The call to **hear** is not simply a call to listen but also an exhortation to respond. If the God of Israel is truly God, the only God, the One who created the universe, then we must respond accordingly.

The command to love the Lord with one's whole being is rooted in the fact that the Lord is one. There is only one God, the Lord. He claims our total allegiance. **Heart, soul, mind,** and **strength** are simply Jewish ways of expressing a consecration of one's whole being to the Lord.

### C. How to Love God!

To **love** God is to have a profound reverence and affection for him, to give ourselves over to him and to desire to please him above all

else. Jesus is spelling out what he had said earlier about giving to God what belongs to him (12:17).

Jesus uses four terms that, taken together, signify not distinct faculties or parts of the human being but the different ways of referring to the whole person.

#### D. The Heart

The **heart** (*kardia*) was considered the core of a person, the source of one's intentions, decisions and actions.

To love God with all our heart does not simply mean to have affection for God but also to love God wholeheartedly, from the depths of our being.

- **Love** is putting another person first; seeking another's good rather than our own, and serving the one we love.
- To **love the Lord your God with all your heart** means to make God absolutely first, completely subordinating yourself to him.

#### E. The Soul

This soul (*psyche*) is our whole self as a living being, that which Jesus said we must be willing to give up for his sake (8:35) and which he will give up for our sake (10:45).

#### F. Mind

Jesus adds the term **mind**, to the text from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, to emphasize that even our thoughts and reasoning must be animated by love for God.

#### G. Strength

The last phrase, **with all your strength**, emphasizes that love for God is not a sentiment that arises spontaneously, but a commitment that calls for every ounce of our energy.

- How can such love without measure be possible?
- Only by our first knowing and experiencing God's love for us (Rom 5:5, 8; 1 John 4:11).

## H. The Second Commandment

***'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'***

The scribe had asked only about the *first* commandment, but in his answer Jesus includes what he considers the second – ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."***

This is not part of the Shema, it is a quote from Lev 19:18.

It indicates that for Jesus the love of neighbor is inseparable from the love of God. *"There is no greater commandment than these"* – that is, to answer the question of the greatest commandment only by the love of God is to overlook an essential implication of one's love of God, the neighbor.

Jesus is the first one known to have explicitly combined these two commandments. But they are the foundations underlying the first three and last seven commandments of the Decalogue respectively (Ex 20: 2-11, 12-17).

## VI. A QUESTION ABOUT THE CHRIST (MARK 12:35-37)

Since Jesus wins admirers even among those who try to trap him with questions, his enemies decide not to ask him any more questions.

So Jesus himself takes the initiative and poses a question about David's son.

### A. Christ - the "son" of David

It was common in Scribal teaching that the Messiah would be descended from David. This was based on many Old Testament

texts but especially on those psalms that were chanted during the enthronement of each new king of the Davidic dynasty, especially Psalm 110.

Later, this psalm was used as a promise of the Messiah-King to come.

**Read:** Mark 12:35-37

***[35] And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"***

***[36] David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet.'***

***[37] David himself calls him Lord; so how is he his son?" And the great throng heard him gladly.***

### **B. Christ the Messiah-King**

In those few words, Jesus showed his listeners that their long-awaited Messiah, descended from David, would be higher and grander than anything they had imagined.

He told the people that the Messiah, the fulfillment of all their hopes, would not simply be a man like the Kings and priests they knew. He would be much more. He would be both Messiah and **Lord!**

Thus, the Messiah must be more than merely the son of David!

In psalm 110, David foresaw the greatness of the Messiah by calling him **Lord**, a title associated with Israel's Kings. Jesus is the son of David in his humanity, and thus David's successor, while he is also the divine Son of God, and thus David's superior Lord (CCC 202, 668).

### C. Jesus' Argument from Psalm 110

The force of our Lord's argument from this passage is as follows: David was universally recognized as the author of this psalm, which was acknowledged by all as referring to the Messiah; but the psalmist addresses the Messiah here as his superior; therefore the Messiah must be David's superior and not merely his "son" or descendant.

## VII. SHE GAVE EVERYTHING (12:41-44)

**Read:** Mark 12:41-44

***[41] And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.***

***[42] And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny.***

***[43] And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.***

***[44] For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living."***

### A. Background

In the outer temple area there were collection boxes at 13 stations around the court of the women.

Jesus sees a poor widow making her way to the collection box, after a number of wealthy donors who have made little effort to conceal the size of their offerings. The woman has but two of the smallest coins in circulation. In our currency they would be pennies.

## B. Out of her Poverty

The disciples would have been impressed, no doubt, at the large contributions being made by the wealthy, measuring virtue by quantity.

But Jesus has a lesson for them!

He calls his disciples to himself – Mark's signal that important instruction is about to take place – and makes a solemn declaration: ***this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors.***

The others had ***contributed from their surplus***, but this woman contributed ***from her poverty***. The others were content to give God some of their overflow - having provided sufficiently for themselves – and impress other people in the bargain.

The heroine of the story, then, is the poor widow who gave her *all*. Let the disciples raise what objections they might have about the folly of a poor woman giving away everything she had.

This is precisely the point!

For at this particular moment in Jesus' life, standing as he is in the courtyard of the holy place where man gives himself to God and God to man, the woman typifies the folly Jesus himself is about to commit - to give his *all* for the ransom of many (10:45).

The disciple Jesus admires will, like the poor widow, give all though he may not be noticed by anyone but the Lord. It is just such "little" people like the poor obscure widow who make the headlines God reads.

## Preparation for Week 10 – Mark 13

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- Read pages 256 - 273 of *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy.
- Read carefully and prayerfully Chapter 13 of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.
- Review and answer *Study Questions* on Chapter 13 (page 57) of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.