

# Mark 12

Today's reading is Mark 12. We're already into the last week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion. Since this is a longer chapter, this study will hit the highlights of the chapter instead of going verse-by-verse.

Let's get to it!

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## 12:1-12

Jesus gives only his second parable of the book. This one uses the relationship between the owner of a vineyard and his tenants. If you read almost any commentary on this passage, you will hear that God is the owner of the vineyard, the Israelites are the tenants, the servants of the owner are the prophets, and the son of the vineyard owner is Jesus. However, this interpretation does not do justice to the context. In the passage before this one, Jesus is asked a question by the ruling Jews concerning his authority. Jesus answers by asking them a question about the identity of John the Baptist. The ruling Jews fail to answer his question. With that in mind, I suggest that the roles of the parable that follows need to include John. And so I suggest that the roles be assigned as follows:

- Jesus is the owner of the vineyard. (Which also addresses the topic of "authority" asked of him in the previous passage.)
- The tenants are the Israelites.
- The servants of the owner are the prophets.
- John the Baptist is the son whom the tenants kill.
- Jesus is the owner who will come and destroy the tenants.

This interpretation explains why the ruling Jews would have wanted to arrest Jesus after he had completed speaking it against them; Jesus has just told them that he is going to destroy them for how they treated John.

## 12:13-17

Too often Christians take Jesus' statement in 12:17 out of context and apply it thoughtlessly to the relationship we are to have to the state. However, when interpreting this passage, take into consideration that, when he is asked a "gotcha" question (such as in chapter eleven), Jesus never gives an answer we would consider to be serious. He is dismissive when asked "gotcha" questions; replying to "gotcha" questions with "gotcha" answers.

That being said, Jesus does imply that it is not wrong for the state to level taxes against Christians. He also implies that paying taxes does not imply that a Christian is looking to the states for that to which he or she should look to God.

## 12:18-27

Once again, Jesus is asked a "gotcha" question. This time he is asked the question by a group of people known as the Sadducees. These are the modern-day equivalent of Liberal Arts Religion Professors. They did not believe in the resurrection, miracles, angels, demons and the afterlife. They believed the 5 books of Moses were authentic

and discounted the rest of the Old Testament. Tweed jackets with leather in the elbows.

Oddly, the question they ask Jesus sounds a lot like the theoretical-but-impossible questions I get asked by people either out to prove a point or who are trying to sound intelligent to impress a member of the opposite sex.

And, like he did with the previous “gotcha” question, Jesus still won’t play the game. He knows the Sadducees are asking what they are asking to make Jesus’ belief in the resurrection look silly in the minds of “enlightened” folks such as themselves. Jesus goes on the offensive and does nothing less than prove the existence of the resurrection from a book of the Old Testament the Sadducees claim is authentic.

### **12:28-34**

I’ll go out on a limb and say that I think this scribe falls into the same category as the previous two groups of people who have asked Jesus “gotcha” questions. Why? Because no matter how Jesus answers the question, the scribe could claim that Jesus had gotten it wrong... for some intellectual complex reason.

And, once again, Jesus is not about to play the game. He says that, yes, there IS a “most important” commandment, but the second most important commandment also needs to be mentioned along with the most important.

As Lutherans, we can see both “tables” of the Law summarized and validated in what Jesus says. Most important in the life of any Christian is their love for God. But also necessary in the life of a Christian is their love for people. It’s interesting to note that the Church suffers to maintain the proper balance. Throughout her history she has veered in one direction (monasticism) and then another (social gospel).

The scribe agrees with Jesus’ answer to his “gotcha” question and praises him for being close to the kingdom of God. Agreeing with Jesus is a good thing.

### **12:35-37**

Jesus quickly (in good Markan fashion) teaches that the Christ is eternal. He is the Son of David (his descendant, born in time) and he is David’s Lord (eternal, divine). This is as pithy a teaching on the two natures in Christ you could have.

### **12:38-40**

Good thing meaningless piety doesn’t exist anymore. Jesus simply says that people who use their walk with his Father to advance themselves in the social order will not do well at the end of the age. God is not a means to cultural ends.

### **12:41-44**

No one would have noticed this woman. Several things stand out about her offering:

- She did not make a big show about how much she gave.
- It was between her and God... and it stayed that way.
- Her giving would cause her to sacrifice or go without in other areas of her life.
- While it goes too far to say that in giving her two last coins to the treasury she was telling God she was relying on him to give her her next meal, it can be said that she did not worry about the concerns of life that Jesus taught his disciples not to worry about.
- What she did was not a show; it was real.