

A Study of Mark – Lesson 34

Mark 12:1-17 The Tenants, The Tax

12 ¹ Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: / “A man planted a vineyard. / He put a wall around it, / dug a pit for the winepress / and built a watchtower. / Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers / and moved to another place. / ² At harvest time / he sent a servant to the tenants / to collect from them / some of the fruit of the vineyard. / ³ But they seized him, / beat him and sent him away empty-handed. / ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; / they struck this man on the head / and treated him shamefully. / ⁵ He sent still another, / and that one they killed. / He sent many others; / some of them they beat, / others they killed.

⁶ “He had one left to send, / a son, / whom he loved. / He sent him last of all, / saying, / ‘They will respect my son.’

⁷ “But the tenants said to one another, / ‘This is the heir. / Come, / let’s kill him, / and the inheritance will be ours.’ / ⁸ So they took him / and killed him, / and threw him out of the vineyard.

⁹ “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? / He will come and kill those tenants / and give the vineyard to others. / ¹⁰ Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture:

“‘The stone the builders rejected / has become the cornerstone; / ¹¹ the Lord has done this, / and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

¹² Then the chief priests, / the teachers of the law / and the elders looked for a way to arrest him / because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. / But they were afraid of the crowd; / so they left him and went away.

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¹³ Later they sent some of the Pharisees / and Herodians / to Jesus to catch him in his words. / ¹⁴ They came to him and said, / “Teacher, / we know / that you are a man of integrity. / You aren’t swayed by others, / because you pay no attention to who they are; / but you teach the way of God / in accordance with the truth. / Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? / ¹⁵ Should we pay / or shouldn’t we?”

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. / “Why are you trying to trap me?” / he asked. / “Bring me a denarius / and let me look at it.” / ¹⁶ They brought the coin, / and he asked them, / “Whose image is this? / And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” / they replied.

¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, / “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s / and to God what is God’s.”

And they were amazed at him.

Vocabulary

1. **Parable:** A moral or religious story.
2. **Vineyard:** A place where grapes are grown.
3. **Pit:** A big hole in the ground. A mineshaft.
4. **To dig**, dug, dug: To break up or remove dirt or earth.
5. **Winepress:** Tool used in making wine.
6. **Watchtower:** Tall, thin building for housing guards, observation point.
7. **Imperial:** Belonging to a king, or emperor.
8. **Hypocrisy:** Two-faced. Pretending one thing while doing another.
9. **Image:** Picture or carving.

10. **Cornerstone:** A vital person or thing. The major corner where two walls are joined.
11. **Swayed by others:** Persuaded to believe what others believe.

Questions

1. Since the vineyard parable is a story about others, who are the characters?
2. Name the groups of peoples who were questioning Jesus and giving him a hard time?
3. Why do you think the chief priests were afraid of the crowd?
4. Why does verse 17 help those who believe in separation of church and state?
5. Why do you think so many churches are named *Cornerstone*?

Notes

1. Passover Week has begun. These passages could be considered as *Monday* of the week. Crowds from all over the world have come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. All male Jews over the age of 12 were to come to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. If they lived out of the country, they traveled at least once in their lifetime.
2. Passover: The festival is in remembrance of the Exodus, when Moses led the children of the Hebrews (Jews) out of slavery in Egypt. It is called *Passover* because the angel of death passed over the homes of the Hebrew slaves, but killed the firstborn of all the Egyptians. The angel had told Moses to be sure each Hebrew home had the mark of a lamb's blood over the door, and the angel would pass over and not cause death there.
3. Characters in the Parable:
 - Owner of the vineyard is God.

- The Cultivators stand for the rulers of Israel.
- The Servants that were sent were the Prophets.
- The Son is Jesus himself.

Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, The Daily Study Bible Series, p. 281

4. All the Jews knew what a vineyard looked like. They understood the walls around the vineyard, the winepress and all that might be there. They also knew the value of the product.
5. The parable tells us of Jesus himself. He thought of himself as a Son of God, not as a servant. He also knew he would die.
6. Three kinds of taxes were required to be paid:
 - a. The ground tax demanded one-tenth of all grain and one-fifth of the wine and fruit produced. This was paid partly in kind and in money.
 - b. The income tax was one percent of a man's income.
 - c. The poll tax was levied on all men from fourteen to sixty-five, and all women from twelve to sixty-five. The amount was very small, but it was paid simply for the privilege of existing.

Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, The Daily Study Bible Series, p. 285

7. Jews resented the Roman soldiers who occupied their land. They did not want to be part of the Roman Empire, but wanted to be a free country. They knew Herod was deeply supported by Rome, and they resented that also.

