

# Mark 12.1-17

## RENTERS OF A VINEYARD (Matthew 21.33-46; Luke 20.9-19)

<sup>1</sup>Jesus then told them this story:

A farmer once planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it and dug a pit to crush the grapes in. He also built a lookout tower. Then he rented out his vineyard and left the country. <sup>2</sup>When it was harvest time, he sent a servant to get his share of the grapes. <sup>3</sup>The renters grabbed the servant. They beat him up and sent him away without a thing. <sup>4</sup>The owner sent another servant, but the renters beat him on the head and insulted him terribly. <sup>5</sup>Then the man sent another servant, and they killed him. He kept sending servant after servant. They beat some of them and killed others. <sup>6</sup>The owner had a son he loved very much. Finally, he sent his son to the renters because he thought they would respect him. <sup>7</sup>But they said to themselves, "Someday he will own this vineyard. Let's kill him! That way we can have it all for ourselves." <sup>8</sup>So they grabbed the owner's son and killed him. Then they threw his body out of the vineyard.

<sup>9</sup>Jesus asked, "What do you think the owner of the vineyard will do? He will come and kill those renters and let someone else have his vineyard. <sup>10</sup>You surely know that the Scriptures say,

'The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all. <sup>11</sup>This is something the Lord has done, and it is amazing to us.'

<sup>12</sup>The leaders knew that Jesus was really talking about them, and they wanted to arrest him. But because they were afraid of the crowd, they let him alone and left.

## PAYING TAXES (Matthew 22.15-22; Luke 20.20-26)

<sup>13</sup>The Pharisees got together with Herod's followers. <sup>14</sup>Then they sent some men to trick Jesus into saying something wrong. <sup>14</sup>They went to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are honest. You treat everyone with the same respect, no matter who they are. And you teach the truth about what God wants people to do. Tell us, should we pay taxes to the Emperor or not?"

<sup>15</sup>Jesus knew what they were up to, and he said, "Why are you trying to test me? Show me a coin!" <sup>16</sup>They brought him a silver coin, and he asked, "Whose picture and name are on it?" "The Emperor's," they answered. <sup>17</sup>Then Jesus told them, "Give the Emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to God." The men were amazed at Jesus.

**THE STORY OF THE TENANT FARMERS: (1-8)** A parable about a landowner and his tenants.

1. He leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country: This sort of tenant farming relationship was a common practice in Jesus' day, especially in the region of Galilee. Archaeologists have discovered records of this same sort of dispute between landowners and tenant farmers.
2. "In a day when title was sometimes uncertain, anyone who had had the use of land for three years was presumed to own it in the absence of an alternative claim." (Morris)
3. That he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers: Because Jesus spoke to a Jewish audience, they were be aware that the vineyard is used in the Old Testament as a picture of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). Therefore, the vinedressers represent the rulers of Israel and the vineyard represents the people of God as a whole.
4. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed: The vinedressers didn't buy the vineyard, and did they make it. A generous owner allowed them to work in his vineyard, yet they turned against the owner, and one day had to answer for it.

5. Again he sent them another servant . . . And again he sent another . . . and many others: How patient the owner is! He sends messenger after messenger, even though they are all abused and mistreated. How many messengers of God have we rejected?
6. Because the owner of the vineyard was not present right at the time, the vinedressers doubted and mocked his authority. They would find out soon enough that even though they couldn't see the owner, his authority was still real. When we think God is too distant to really exert His authority, we will be proven just as wrong.
7. This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours: How foolish the vinedressers are! They apparently thought that if they killed the owner's son, then the owner would just give up and let them have the vineyard.
8. So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard: This parable tells us that Jesus knew He was the Son - the Son of God - and that He knew that He would be killed soon.
9. The Son was the final messenger. There would be no other. Either they would accept the message of the Son, or face certain judgment. "If you do not hear the wellbeloved Son of God, you have refused your last hope. *He is God's ultimatum*. Nothing remains when Christ is refused. No one else can be sent; heaven itself contains no further messenger. If Christ be rejected, hope is rejected." (Spurgeon)

#### **(9-12) JESUS APPLIES THE PARABLE.**

10. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? The vinedressers were foolish enough to think that if they only killed the owner's son, the vineyard would be theirs. Jesus draws the correct point - they rejected messenger after messenger, finally rejecting the Son, so their day of reckoning will come (He will come and destroy the vinedressers).
11. Have you not even read this Scripture: Jesus instructs them from the "Hosanna Psalm" (Psalm 118:22-28), because the Messiah has been officially presented to Israel. The hostility of the Jewish leaders shows that He is being rejected, even if He was initially greeted with hosannas quoting from Psalm 118.
12. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone: Jesus is often likened unto a stone or a rock in the Bible. He is the rock of provision that followed Israel in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4). He is the stone of stumbling (1 Peter 2:8). He is the stone cut without hands that crushes the kingdoms of this world (Daniel 2:45).
13. They knew He had spoken the parable against them: They were cut to the heart, and convicted by the Holy Spirit. They reacted to the conviction of the Holy Spirit by *rejecting*, not by *receiving*. They plotted to murder Jesus instead of repenting before Him.

#### **GOD AND CAESAR. (13-15A) THE PHARISEES TRY TO TRAP JESUS WITH A QUESTION ABOUT TAXES.**

14. They sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words: Public opinion kept them from laying hold of Jesus, so now they try to turn the tide of public opinion against Him. Using a clever question, they want to make Jesus appear to side with the Roman government against the Jews.
15. We again see the Pharisees and the Herodians working together (last time was in Mark 3:6). Former enemies come together because of Jesus, but it is because they both *oppose* Jesus and want to destroy Him.
16. 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: Jesus knew enough to not regard this flattery from His enemies. Sometimes our enemies flatter us because they want to hurt us. Sometimes our friends flatter us because they want to be kind and helpful. Either way, it is a mistake to put too much stock in what others say about us, either good or bad.

17. Charles Spurgeon said to pastors, "It is always best not to know, nor wish to know, what is being said about you, either by friends or foes. Those who praise us are probably as much mistaken as those who abuse us." Benjamin Franklin said, "The Devil sweetens poison with honey."
18. "Here is a fair glove drawn upon a foul hand . . . There are those who will smile in your face, and at the same time cut your throat." (Trapp)
19. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Since the year 6 A.D. the Jews were forced to pay taxes directly into the emperor's treasury. Some Jewish patriots (like the Zealots) refused to pay this tax, because they did not want to recognize Roman rule as legitimate. Most others grudgingly paid it, but everybody hated it. It wasn't just the *money*, but also the *principle* of paying your Roman oppressor.
20. There were three taxes imposed by the Romans on Judea. The first was the *ground tax*, which was 10% of all grain and 20% of all wine and fruit. The second was the *income tax*, which amounted to 1% of a man's income. The third was the poll tax, paid by men aged from 12 to 65 and women from 14 to 65. This was one denarius a year, about a day's wage for a working man.
21. "It is important to appreciate the emotional trauma which pervaded the issue of the tribute money ever since it had first been imposed on the Roman province of Judea in A.D. 6." (Lane)
22. Shall we pay, or shall we not pay? They seemed to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He agreed the tax should be paid, then Jesus seemed to deny the sovereignty of God over Israel, and He would lose popular support. If Jesus agreed that the tax should not be paid, He would openly declare Himself an enemy of Rome, and be treated like a revolutionary.
23. We can almost see the smug, self-satisfied smiles of the Pharisees and the Herodians as they skillfully threw this question on Jesus. They thought they put Him in a classic "no-win" situation, *but you can't put Jesus in a no-win situation.*

#### **(15B-17) JESUS ANSWERS THE QUESTION ABOUT TAXES.**

24. Why do you test Me? We should never say that Jesus taunted His adversaries in an ungodly way, but He did let them know that they could never win against Him.
25. Bring Me a denarius that I may see it: On the denarius they showed to Jesus, there would be a head of Tiberius, the reigning Roman Emperor. Around his head was written the abbreviation for "Tiberius Caesar, the Divine Augustus." On the back was the title "Pontifex Maximus," declaring Caesar the "high priest of the Roman Empire."
26. As Jesus held the coin, He knew the government of Caesar would soon pierce His hand and crucify Him - and He still said, "pay your taxes."
27. Whose image and inscription is this? Essentially, Jesus said "You recognize Caesar's civil authority when you use his coins, therefore you are obliged to pay him the taxes he asks for."
28. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's: If we take advantage of the benefits of governmental rule, we are obliged to submit to government, as long as it does not infringe on our service to God. Simply said, Jesus tells us to pay our taxes. The Apostle Paul repeated the same idea in Romans 13:6-7.
29. "Jesus is saying that we are citizens of heaven and earth at the same time." (Morris)
30. Had the Jews rendered God His due, they would have never had to render Caesar anything - the fact that they were under Roman domination was due to their own departure from the Lord.
31. And to God the things that are God's: Just as it is important to render to Caesar, we must also render to God the things that are God's. The coin belonged to Caesar because his image was stamped on it. We should give ourselves to God because His image is stamped on us.

32. Give the coin to Caesar, but give your life to God. It may be fitting for you to die for your country, but only God is worth living for.
33. Jesus' answer tells us that Caesar does not have all authority; there are things that should be rendered to God alone. When the State treads on this ground that belongs to God, we are duty bound to obey God before the State.
34. "This answer is full of consummate wisdom. It establishes the *limits*, regulates the *rights*, and distinguishes the *jurisdiction* of the two *empires* of *heaven* and *earth*." (Clarke)
35. And they marveled at Him: They marveled, but they did not change. In fact, they twisted this wise answer of Jesus into a lying accusation against Him. In Luke 23:2, they accused Jesus of *forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar* - when He actually said just the opposite!
36. Sometimes it doesn't matter how good an answer you give; some people will still twist your good words. They did this to Jesus, yet God's truth prevailed. In the answer of Jesus, God is *glorified*, Caesar is *satisfied*, the people are *edified*, and His critics are *stupefied*.

#### **APPLICATION**

**WHAT SPECIFICALLY WAS THE LORD SAYING TO ME?**

**WHAT WILL I CHANGE ABOUT MY LIFE AS A RESULT OF GOD'S WORD TO ME?**