

# Mark

## Chapter Eleven

### Introduction

The parable of the vineyard is not at all difficult to understand. Even the hardhearted Jewish religious leaders understood it, "for they knew He had spoken the parable against them."<sup>1</sup>

God is the vineyard owner, and the nation of Israel is His vineyard. The vinedressers are the Jews - especially the religious leaders - from whom God has every right to expect fruit. At various times in her history God came seeking a fruitful relationship with His people but was denied what was rightfully His. He sent out His servants, the prophets, to call upon Israel to bring forth the fruits of repentance and to return to their relationship with Him. The Jews instead often shamefully treated the prophets - beating some, killing others. At last God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The Jews sought to kill Him, too, and finally did kill Him. They "killed Him and cast Him out of the vineyard"<sup>2</sup> when they delivered Him over to the Gentiles to be crucified outside of the city of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman government.

What did God do to Israel? As owner of the vineyard He came and destroyed those vinedressers. In 70A.D. the Roman General Titus came, laid siege to Jerusalem, and destroyed its Temple. After that destruction, from that time until today God has been disciplining the Jews at the hands of the Gentiles - whose hands they put Jesus in to be crucified.

God also said He would "give the vineyard to others." As you read the Book of Acts you see what this means. While Israel as a nation is being disciplined, God is calling disciples from *all* nations into His Church! You are the "others" who were called upon to bring forth the fruits of repentance, and who now enjoy a fruitful relationship to God.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 12:12

<sup>2</sup>Mark 12:8

We want to look at the Jews, and look at you, from the perspective of the parable of the vineyard: #1 At Vintage-time The Owner's Son Came And Exposed The Jews As Vinedressers Who Labored Only For Themselves In The Lord's Vineyard, and #2 At Vintage-time The Owner's Son Will Come And Extol You As Vinedressers Who Labored Only For Him In The Lord's Vineyard.

#1 At Vintage-time The Owner's Son Came And Exposed The Jews As Vinedressers Who Labored Only For Themselves In The Lord's Vineyard  
(12:1-34)

The coming of Jesus to Jerusalem was a vintage-time in the history of Israel. Through John the Baptist God had called upon them to bring forth the fruits of repentance and return to their relationship to Him.<sup>3</sup> God was seeking to restore them to a fruitful relationship.

The Jewish religious leaders refused to heed John's call to repentance, and they rejected Jesus. Jesus used another familiar figure to emphasize their rejection of Him:

Mark 12:10 "Have you not read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.

Mark 12:11 This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

The "Stone" was a well-known symbol in Israel for the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> Jesus was not only the *Son* of the vineyard owner, He was also the *Stone* all Israel awaited. The religious leaders were the "builders" who were rejecting the very foundation that their faith was to be established upon. Regardless their rejection, Jesus was and would remain the Chief Cornerstone in Israel; it would be "the Lord's doing, and...marvelous.." He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven, only to one day return again to be received by all Israel in His glorious Second Coming!

At His Second Coming, when Jesus establishes the kingdom of God on earth, Israel will once again be His vineyard:

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<sup>3</sup>Matthew 3:8

<sup>4</sup>Exodus 17:6; Daniel 2:34; Zechariah 4:7

Isaiah 27:2 In that day sing to her, "A vineyard of red wine!  
Isaiah 27:3 I, the LORD, keep it, I water it every moment; Lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day."

What can we glean from God's dealings with His vinedressers? Immediately following the parable of the vineyard Jesus is confronted by representatives of several groups - the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Scribes. These groups were the religious leaders of Israel; they were Israel's vinedressers! Jesus exposed these religious leaders as vinedressers who labored only for themselves in the Lord's vineyard. He exposed the *leaven* of the Pharisees and the Herodians, the *liberalism* of the Sadducees, and the *legalism* of the Scribes. These are the labors that we must avoid as vinedressers in God's vineyard.

### The Leaven of the Pharisees and the Herodians...

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus, verse fifteen tells you that He knew "their hypocrisy." In the Gospel of Luke Jesus says that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy.<sup>5</sup> Earlier in Mark's gospel Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, or the Herodians.<sup>6</sup> *Leaven* is used in the Bible as a symbol for sin, corruption, and decay. It represents an internal sin, corruption, and decay that cannot be recognized on the surface. The Pharisees looked good on the surface; but inside they were corrupt. Jesus once compared them to white-washed tombs: Outside they were attractive, but inside they were full of rotting flesh. The Herodians were Jews who sympathized with the rule of Herod. They preferred Roman culture and the things of the world. They were widely held as hypocrites by their fellow Jews.

Notice the leaven of the Pharisees and the Herodians - their hypocrisy - as they confront the Lord:

Mark 12:13 Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words.

Mark 12:14 When they had come, they said to Him, "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. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

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<sup>5</sup>Luke 12:1

<sup>6</sup>Mark 8:15

The Pharisees and the Herodians hated each other, so it was hypocrisy for them to be together. They joined together only because of their mutual hatred for Jesus.

They hypocritically said, "you teach the way of God in truth," yet they refused to follow it.

Flattery is the language of their hypocrisy. They come to Jesus and say to Jesus, "you care about no one." This phrase, "care about no one," means that Jesus is impartial, not looking on the outward appearance. It means He never flattered others! Yet here they tried to flatter Him.

Flattery is the language of hypocrisy. Don't use it!

Their question about taxes seemed a masterful trap. If Jesus answered that it was proper to pay taxes to Caesar, then the common people who hailed Jesus as King would be offended. If, on the other hand, Jesus answered that it was improper to pay taxes, then they would have cause to have Him arrested by Rome.

Mark 12:15 "Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it."

Mark 12:16 So they brought it. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's."

Mark 12:17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him.

By using money, they already acknowledged Caesar's authority over them. God's authority was greater, but it didn't void Caesar's. Jesus Himself paid taxes to the government,<sup>7</sup> even though the government of the first century was at least as corrupt as our own.

Submission to government isn't an either/or question. You are to be submitted to God, Who in turn expects you to submit to government.<sup>8</sup> You are to be a responsible citizen, pay your taxes, and work within the government that God has sovereignly placed over you. Anything else is not biblical Christianity.

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<sup>7</sup>Matthew 17:27

<sup>8</sup>Romans 13; 1Timothy 2:1-6; 1Peter 2:13-17

The leaven of the Pharisees and the Herodians was religious hypocrisy. The Pharisees made a great outward effort at right living. Their outward works were a masquerade, hiding inward corruption, sin, and decay. The Herodians were hypocrites in just the opposite way. They thought themselves so spiritual by their birthright as Jews that they could enjoy all the things of the world without it soiling or spoiling their relationship with God.

The leaven of hypocrisy is a selfish labor, because it is an outward show for others of your supposed spirituality. Vinedressers who labor in this way do not bring forth fruit for the owner of the vineyard. They are useless to themselves, to God, and to others.

### The Liberalism of the Sadducees...

The Sadducees denied all things supernatural and miraculous, and did not believe in the existence of angels. They were the religious liberals among the Jews. They confronted Jesus with a seemingly unanswerable question about the future resurrection from the dead - a resurrection that they did not believe *could* or *would* ever happen!

Mark 12:18 Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying:

Mark 12:19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.

Mark 12:20 "Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring.

Mark 12:21 "And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise.

Mark 12:22 "So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also.

Mark 12:23 "Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

The Sadducees used the Scriptures to show the supposed absurdity of believing in heaven. Liberals use the Scriptures, but only to their own purposes. Many believe that the Bible contains the word of God, but is not inerrant throughout its pages. They like to point out seeming contradictions.

Mark 12:24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?"

Mark 12:25 "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

The resurrection will *not* be a restoration of relationships as we know them today! Jesus says plainly that there will be no marriage at all. The Sadducees were mistaken.

Mark 12:26 "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?"

Mark 12:27 "He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

Jesus uses the Book of Exodus. The Sadducees only recognized the first five books of the Bible as Scripture. At the burning bush, God didn't say, "I was the God of Abraham...of Isaac...and of Jacob." They were physically dead, yet spiritually alive, when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush! There is, therefore, life after death. There is, therefore, a resurrection from the dead.

Liberals labor hard to deny what the Scripture plainly teaches. A watered-down message from Scripture has no power to transform the lives of their listeners.

Liberalism is a selfish labor, because it makes you feel good about yourself when in reality you are inherently sinful and wicked. Vinedressers who labor in this way do not bring forth fruit for the owner of the vineyard. They are useless to themselves, to God, and to others.

The Legalism of the Scribes...

Jesus is next confronted by "one of the Scribes..."

Mark 12:28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

The Scribes had identified six hundred thirteen commands in God's Word. They saw two hundred forty-eight positive laws, and three hundred sixty-five negative laws. Their careful scrutiny led them into debates about which laws were most important, and which could be overlooked. This scribe was interested in Jesus' position on the greatest commandment.

Mark 12:29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Mark 12:30 'And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

Mark 12:31 "And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 4:4-5 and linked it up with Leviticus 19:18. In doing so He was also giving this Scribe a whole new way of looking at God's Laws. Jesus told him to live by *relationships*, not by *rules!* If you love God, you will find yourself keeping His laws. If you love God, you will find yourself loving others the way God loves them.

Mark 12:32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.

Mark 12:33 "And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

The Scribe was beginning to understand! Love "is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." He had put law before love, rules before relationships; now he saw that love was the basis for all God had written in His law. He was beginning to understand the spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law.

Mark 12:34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

Jesus saw the Scribe as able to grow in his spiritual understanding. Because he had responded to God's grace, he would be given more grace. He was on his way to the kingdom of God - on his way to expressing saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Legalism is hard to define, but easy to determine. When you are more interested in rules, and in the letter of the law, than you are in relationships, and the spirit of the law, you are in the realm of legalism. I like to use marriage to illustrate the difference between rules and relationship, and between the letter and the spirit of the law...

Legalism is a selfish labor, because *you* decide which rules, which laws, are most important - and they are always the ones you

are already able to keep! Vinedressers who labor in this way do not bring forth fruit for the owner of the vineyard. They are useless to themselves, to God, and to others.

The leaven of religious hypocrisy, of liberalism, and of legalism describe a great many people who profess and who possess Jesus Christ. When you are involved in any way with any of these, you are a vinedresser who is only laboring for yourself in the Lord's vineyard.

#2 At Vintage-time The Owner's Son Will Come And  
Extol You As Vinedressers Who Labored  
Only For Him In The Lord's Vineyard  
(12:35-44)

Jesus said that the owner of the vineyard would "give the vineyard to others." While God is disciplining the nation of Israel, He is discipling others. You are the others - you and all those who comprise the Church.

When Jesus returns for you it will be a vintage-time, a time for Him to receive fruit from your labors in His vineyard. Jesus speaks about His return to establish the kingdom in verses thirty-five through thirty-seven:

Mark 12:35 Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"

Mark 12:36 "For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

Mark 12:37 "Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?" And the common people heard Him gladly.

The Jews believed the Scribes when they said that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. But David himself said that the Messiah would be His Lord. How could David's Lord be David's son? Only if Jesus Christ were God come in the flesh could Jesus - a descendant of David - be the Christ - David's Lord.

The quote from Psalm 110 indicates that Jesus would be seated in heaven for a time before establishing the kingdom of God on earth. But, once God "makes [His] enemies [His] footstool," He would return to fulfill the Old Testament promise of a literal kingdom on earth.

Jesus is indeed risen and seated at God's right hand today. Great historical events are being set into motion by our sovereign God to prepare the world for the time during which He will make Christ's enemies His footstool.

In the meantime, you and I are His vinedressers. He said so Himself when He said He would "give the vineyard to others." We want to labor only for Him in His vineyard. We want to produce fruit that will be pleasing to Him when He comes to collect it.

Jesus wants to encourage you to be good vinedressers. To do so He shows you two people - a Scribe and a widow. Be unlike the Scribe; be like the widow.

#### Be unlike the Scribe:

Mark 12:38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces,

Mark 12:39 "the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,

Mark 12:40 "who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

The Scribe is characterized by his outward pretense of spirituality. He does everything to be noticed. If he were a vinedresser, you'd say he was enjoying the fruit of his labor, holding nothing back for the owner of the vineyard.

Beloved, be unlike the Scribe...

#### Be like the widow:

Mark 12:41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

Mark 12:42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

Mark 12:43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

Mark 12:44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

This is a great encouragement to your giving. God is not interested in the portion you give; He is interested in its proportion to what you keep! When you give out of your poverty, it counts far more in heaven than it does on earth.

The widow is characterized by her genuine spirituality, pursued in secret. If she were a vinedresser, you'd say she was investing the fruit of her labor, anticipating the return of the vineyard owner.

Jesus had earlier exposed Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and Scribes. He now extols the widow. He praises her highly in the presence of the other disciples. Think of it this way: One day you will appear in God's Temple, in heaven. You won't walk up with coins to put them in an offering box, but in a sense your whole life as a Christian will be an offering to the Lord. Don't you want more than anything to hear Jesus extol you, and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord."? Why take your praise now from men when the Lord wants to praise you?

Labor for Jesus Christ. He is coming back soon. When He does He'll receive the fruit you have been producing in His vineyard.

## Conclusion

Landlords are not generally noted for being longsuffering!

The owner of the vineyard in the parable of the vineyard, however, shows incredible longsuffering.

God is longsuffering, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." God is looking for the fruits of repentance out among unbelievers...

He is also coming to receive the fruit due Him from you, from believers. Labor well in His vineyard; labor only for Him. It is vintage-time.