

Mark 12:1-13
August 15, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

Jesus has been systematically revealed to the disciples and now to the leaders of Israel as the coming King, the Son of David, the Promised Messiah. He continues to assert His authority and has now dramatically done so by entering the Temple, casting over tables and pronouncing judgment upon them.

In this story, He again points to Himself as the Son of God and brings the wrath of the leaders of Israel down upon Himself.

So, He is setting Himself up for a major showdown with the leaders. He is the King and shall be enthroned.

Set in contrast to this is the various expectations as to what it means to be the Messiah. His disciples have embraced Jesus as the Messiah but things are not working out as they had hoped. Their desired seats of power are not coming to pass.

In all of this, the cross is looming. The cross is this seemingly tragic ending to the story. Promises, kingdoms, power, rule, authority, might, the salvation of Israel all depend on Jesus taking the throne and gaining victory in that throne. But as we read, we need to remember that the end result of all of the ministry and teaching of Jesus comes to fruition on the cross. And we should, like the disciples, see that tragedy in that event, having all of our hopes for the story dashed to the ground.

But the story turns out not to be a tragedy. Or it is a like the comedic play within a play. The story of Jesus dying on the cross is part of the ironic turn of events that wrest the kingdom from the powers that be. Without the cross and subsequent resurrection, we of all men are the most to be pitied. But we are emphatically NOT men to be pitied. We have a victorious and risen Savior. He defeated His foes on the cross and rose victorious from the grave to stand over them in triumph. How's that for an unexpected end to the story. Well, it is an expected end now, simply because Jesus told us how to end stories.

Jesus is piling on to the leaders of Israel. He is coming to bring judgment and the leaders of Israel help Him along in pronouncing their own need for God's judgment. Jesus tells this parable about them and they immediately begin to seek to fulfill it.

EXEGESIS

Mark 12:1-12 12 And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. 2 And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.

Of course, in this case, the certain man is the Lord, Himself. He planted a vineyard that was Israel. He put in a winevat, expecting there to be fruit. He wanted the vineyard to produce grapes for the making of wine. When the Lord came to the vineyard, He expected the vine growers to give Him choice wine.

Given the last scene when Jesus drove the people from the temple, we can understand what the Lord was looking for. He desired that His house be the place of prayer for all nations. That is the same thing as saying that Israel was responsible to bring the nations into the Temple. They did exactly the opposite. They essentially kept the nations from the Temple.

The Lord provided the means for them to bear fruit. He planted the vineyard. He provided the wine vat for them to bear fruit and to dispense to the nations. He built a watchtower so that His people would be warned of enemies.

In Ezekiel we see that it was the responsibility of the shepherds to keep watch from the watchtower. They were to warn the people of their sins. Only if they did their work well would they be held guiltless. However, the shepherds failed in this task, not warning the people of their sins. In fact, on the contrary they encouraged the people in their sins.

It is interesting that Jesus describes the landowner as going to a far country. No doubt, God is near but there is a sense in which He has provided us with all that we need to do His will. In the New Covenant this is even more clearly the case. The Holy Spirit has been poured out and the Church has been faithful to take the gospel to the ends of the Earth. The Lord is in this process by the directing working of His Holy Spirit but we are not without responsibility to carry out what the Lord has called us to do. If He held Old Covenant Israel accountable, how much more His people in the New Covenant.

It is interesting in this story as we think about what the Lord sent His servants to get from the vinegrowers. What fruit do you get at a vineyard? Wine. Jesus told this story and He did not have any sense of a problem with His people making and drinking wine.

They catch the Lord servant, beat him and send him away empty-handed. He gets no wine. If there is any fruit the wicked tenants keep it for themselves. This is strike one.

4 And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled.

God shows His patience. He does not simply have one rejection and then come in wrath. The Lord is ever patient and long suffering with His people. He does not overlook sin but He does delay judgment in order for there be time for repentance.

These landowners do not produce fruit nor do they honor the Lord's prophets. We need to realize that their behavior is not ignorance. It is not that they failed to recognize that these were indeed the prophets of the Lord. They DID recognize them as prophets. However, they beat them, wounded him and sent him away shamefully.

And yet the Lord still does not immediately come in judgment. He still waits. He sends more prophets. But His waiting proves vain. The wicked tenants, the rulers, scribes, Pharisees and elders of Israel prove fruitless. They do not repent.

5 And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some.

The Lord speaks again and again to His people. He is constantly looking for fruit. He does not just come looking. He also send prophets, teachers, and preachers. By the time the Lord gets around to judging His people, He has given them every opportunity and they are completely without excuse.

6 Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.

The vine owner did not get the results that He had hoped for by sending prophets and wise men. He decides to send His Son. This is odd. We should wonder why. In the parable it says that the Landowner believes that the caretakers will reverence His Son. However, we know that as this story relates to Jesus, the caretakers were not going to reverence Him.

It is as if the Lord was ramping up the requirement for judgment.

7 But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. 8 And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.

We would think that if God sent His Son and the tenant farmers realized that it was the Son, that they would reverence Him. But they do not. We try to give them the benefit of the doubt for not recognizing Jesus as Messiah but this parable teaches us that some did recognize Him as Messiah and killed Him anyway. How could the Lord keep from judging this behavior?

9 What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?

Let me ask you this question, If you knew of a wealthy landowner, who had great power at his disposal, military and police forces, who had been treated as this landowner was. If that landowner had his best workers beaten and murdered, his foreman mistreated shamefully and never had received the promised produce of his vineyard. If that landowner got so frustrated that He finally sent His Son thinking they would have to obey the Landowner Himself, represented by His son. But they killed the Son. Imagine such a man with great resources at his disposal. What would he do?

He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.

This is the judgment pronounced against Israel. It was fully carried out in 70 A.D. when the Romans defeated Israel and the temple was destroyed. This put an end to animal sacrifices and the entire Old Testament system of worship by animal sacrifice.

The Kingdom had already been given to others. It was given to the church and the Gentiles streamed in as they should have. The church became the house of prayer for all nations, something the destroyed temple was meant to be but never was.

10 And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:

Often, the ceremony involved the placing of [offerings](#) of [grain](#), [wine](#) and [oil](#) on or under the stone. These were symbolic of the produce and the people of the land and the means of their subsistence. This in turn derived from the practice in still more ancient times of making an animal or human^{[2][3][4]} [sacrifice](#) that was laid in the foundations.

11 This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

This quote is from Isaiah 5. Let me read some of it to you, Isa. 5:4-7, 18-26. The Pharisees knew this passage and understood that Jesus was saying that it applied to them. This is why they hated Jesus.

12 And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

Ah, this is the tenants fulfilling the very parable. He is the son in the story. Let us take Him and kill Him, then we will have nothing to fear further to fear from the landowner.

EXHORTATION

The reason for this parable is for the Lord to confront Israel for her sin. Israel's sin was national in nature. But you do not have national sins without individual sins. Israel was to be a light set on a hill, a beacon to the rest of the nations. However, she failed in that task. But she did not do so without her ministers, her shepherds failing to do their tasks. And when the shepherds fail, the people fall into various sins, as well.

This is an apt warning for us. God has established His Church in the Earth and this is His appointed means to take the gospel to the ends of the Earth. He has already done that but there is much more room for the growth of the kingdom. The kingdoms of the Earth have come to Christ but the knowledge of the Lord is not yet as the waters that cover the sea.

That said, there is room and time for great nations of people to rise and fall. We are seeing this occur in the West even as our Asian, African and Southern Hemisphere churches are exploding with dynamic growth. The long-term prognosis for Christ's Kingdom is right on track.

However, what is going on with our shepherds and the health of the church in our country? I think it is safe to say that it is on the decline. The shepherds are falling asleep and embracing worldliness. The homosexual lifestyle, which the Lord says is an abomination, is very publicly received by many in our nation, and has been embraced by many churches. In some quarters of the church, homosexuals are even ministers within the church. How can God not judge this? The practice of abortion continues to kill millions of babies in our country. Politicians and clergy continue to fight for this right for women to kill their unborn babies. How can God not judge this? Shepherds in the church refuse to speak of sin, confession and repentance and therefore the people continue in sins. Sins like drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, divorce and rebellion continue to run rampant and unchecked in the church. The shepherds will be held accountable by God as He visits them in judgment and such a church will never be the light to the world that God intends it to be. Perhaps our current economic distress and the rulers the Lord has given us is the beginning of His chastisement. I pray that we would repent of sins before He comes in wrath and that we would produce the fruit of Christ's kingdom.

These national sins cannot run rampant if the people submit themselves to Christ. Let us do this, first, in our own lives, in our marriages, in our homes, in our church, in our city. A people who faithfully serve the one and only living God will be a blessed people, indeed.