

"They *came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders *came to Him, and *began* saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?" And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and *then* I will tell you by what authority I do these things. "Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." They *began* reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' "But shall we say, 'From men?'"--they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. Answering Jesus, they *said, "We do not know." And Jesus *said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things." And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive *some* of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. "They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. "Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. "And he sent another, and that one they killed; and *so with* many others, beating some and killing others. "He had one more *to send*, a beloved son; he sent him last *of all* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' "They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. "Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?" And they were seeking to seize Him, and *yet* they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And *so* they left Him and went away." Mark 11:27-12:12, NAS95.

One of the distinctive things about Jesus was that He spoke with a calm but unshakable authority. This set him apart from the rabbinical teachers of that day who were always attempting to quote the opinion of some earlier rabbi or expert.

Jesus spoke from God. He was able to say, "Thus saith the Lord." And He even went further to say, "Thus saith ME."

He did not only speak with authority; He also acted with authority. He acted with authority when He commanded demons to leave those whom they had possessed. He acted with authority when He told a storm to be silent. He acted with authority when He told a lame man to walk, when He rebuked disease and it departed, and when He commanded a dead girl to get up. And He acted with authority when He came in and cleansed the Temple, driving out those who had come to make a profit instead of to listen to the Prophet.

Imagine what would be the reaction if an out-of-town carpenter showed up this Sunday in your church and began overturning pews and tossing around the offering plates. What would be your reaction? It would probably be the same as was seen by the Temple leaders.

"What gives you the right to do these things?"

"Just who do you think you are?"

That is the question asked by the leaders of the Temple in verses 27-33. They come to Him in an official delegation and ask Him point-blank concerning His authority by which He has done these acts.

But that is not all. The question does not go away. This will be the underlying question behind everything presented in chapter 12.

They came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, 28 and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?"(Mark 11:27-28).

The delegation who comes to Jesus is made up of the most important men in the nation of Israel. Three groups are mentioned:

The chief priests: There were 24 courses of priests who took turns serving in the Temple. At Passover, all of the priests were in attendance. Everyone who was anyone in the priesthood was here. And so, it was the upper echelon from among the priests who were apart of this delegation.

The scribes: These were the scholars and the experts in the Scriptures. It was their duty to correctly hand copy the Scriptures.

The elders: These were the representatives of the major tribes and families of Israel.

Together, these three groups comprised the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Israel. There were 70 members of that august body. Their president was the high priest himself.

Notice that they do not ask Jesus why He cleansed the Temple. They knew why He had done what He had done. They knew that they had turned the Temple into a den of robbers. They knew that they were guilty of fleecing the flock instead of feeding the flock. And so, the question is not, "Why?" but rather, "By what authority?"

Jesus has not been ordained by any reputable denomination. He has no seminary degrees hanging on His wall. He goes by not title such as "reverend" or "rabbi." So what gives Him the right to over turn money changer's tables or to drive out animals being bought and sold? What gives Him the right to stop the "business as usual" within the Temple?

And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. "Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." (Mark 11:29-30).

Jesus turns the question over to them. He does this by asking about the baptism of John. Notice that it is specifically the baptism of John about which He asks, not the ministry of John or even about the character of the man John. The question regards the source and the authority of the baptism of John. It came from one of two locations: (1) From heaven. (2) From men.

The baptism of John was something new and different in the religious life of Israel. They were used to ceremonial washings. At several of the main entrances of the Temple there were large pools dedicated to ceremonial washings. The priests were constantly having to wash themselves before serving in the Temple.

But John's baptism was different. It was in rivers and streams. And it was part of a call to repentance. And it was accompanied by the promise of One who was to come to establish a Kingdom.

They began reasoning among themselves saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, "Then why did you not believe him?"

"But shall we say, From men?" -- they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. (Mark11:31-32).

I enjoy playing chess. There sometimes comes a point in a chess game where, no matter what you do, you are going to lose a piece. That is what happened here. They pondered their possible range of answers and came to the conclusion that, no matter what they said, it would be wrong.

They are more interested in fighting Jesus and in holding onto their popularity than they are in learning the truth.

Answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Mark 11:33).

There is a lesson here. It is that when you refuse to believe the teachings of Jesus, then no further teachings are given beyond that which you have been given.

Jesus now proceeds to relate a parable. This parable must be seen in the context of this confrontation with the leaders of the Temple. It is still an issue of authority.

"And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive *some* of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. "They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. "Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. "And he sent another, and that one they killed; and *so with* many others, beating some and killing others. "He had one more *to send*, a beloved son; he sent him last *of all* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' "They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others." Mark 12:1-9, NAS95.

The man in the story was a landowner. As a landowner, he owned a vineyard. In the course of time, he leased the land to a group of vine-growers with the agreement that, at the time of the harvest, he would be given a share of the produce.

When the harvest came, the unfaithful vine-growers treated the landowner with disdain, even going so far as to beat and kill those of his servants which were sent to represent the master.

When the master sent his own son, the vine-growers murdered him, hoping to steal the son's inheritance for themselves. What you must understand is that Jesus is borrowing

“Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected *it* to produce *good* grapes, But it produced *only* worthless ones.” Isaiah 5:1, 2, NAS95.

Sound familiar? It sounds very much like the cursing of the fig tree which took place in the last chapter. That was a judgment against the nation of Israel. This is a similar judgment. Verse 7 indicates the identity of the vineyard.

“For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.” Isaiah 5:7, NAS95.

Jesus begins His parable in the same way. Again there is a vineyard. Again there is a wall and a wine-vat and a tower. But this time, the focus is not merely upon the nation, but upon the leaders of the nation.

It is not the vineyard that is being condemned, but the vine-growers who hold control over the vineyard. Remember the initial issue which gave rise to this parable? It was when the Jews asked Jesus what was His authority. This parable answers that question. His authority comes from the Father. He has authority because He is the Son - He is the heir to the vineyard. They are the sharecroppers who were charged with the job of raising fruit, a portion of which was to be returned to the Master. But they have been unfaithful in their duties. They have taken up the mantle of a false authority. And in their pseudo-authority, they are rebelling against God Himself.

The following lessons come to us from the story.

The Generosity of God: The Landowner provided not only the vineyard, but also a wall and a wine vat and a tower. He was not a slum landlord, but rather graciously provided for those into whose hands the vineyard was entrusted.

The Trust of God: The owner went away and left his prized vineyard in the hands of the keepers. He gave them the freedom to either follow or to rebel against him.

The Patience of God: The owner sends a number of servants, even after they are rejected and mistreated and even killed.

We tend to read this story out of long years of association and as a result, we do not feel the emotional impact. But to anyone reading the story for the first time, it seems incredible that the master could be so longsuffering in the matter of the cruel treatment of His servants.

When was the last time that you were startled by the love and the patience and the forgiveness of God?

There is the the Eventual Justice of God. Although the patience of God is longsuffering, there will come a time when the landowner will no longer hold his wrath in check.

Did you ever stop to wonder what happens if, at the end of it all, the rebellious farmers repent of their sinful actions and receive the landowner? He forgives them. And he welcomes them into his family to take the place of the Son who they murdered. And he gives them the vineyard as their inheritance.

This parable reveals some basic truths about Jesus.

(1) It reveals that Jesus is the Son of God.

He had described Himself to the populace as the "Son of Man." Mark has shown Him to be the Servant of God. He is both of those things. But He is also the beloved Son of God.

(2) It reveals that Jesus will be rejected by the Jews and killed by them.

Jesus knows that there is a cross awaiting Him.

(3) It reveals the ultimate triumph of Jesus.

There is coming a day when the Lord shall return to take His vineyard and to render judgment upon those unfaithful stewards. Forty years from the date that Jesus stands talking in the temple, the Roman general Titus will surround Jerusalem, capture the city, burn that same temple to the ground, and carry the surviving inhabitants away into

“Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?’” Mark 12:10, 11, NAS95.

The Scripture to which Jesus refers is Psalm 118:22-23.

“The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner *stone*. This is the LORD’S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.” Psalms 118:22, 23, NAS95.

This Psalm speaks in its context of the nation of Israel. As the nations of the world sought to build their empires, they regarded the nation of Israel as a rock that was merely in the way - a rock that was to be set aside from the important affairs of men. But this tiny nation was to play a key role in God’s economy.

Do you see what is happening? Jesus takes this passage which refers to the nation of Israel and He applies it to Himself.

There is a lesson here. It is that Jesus is the personification of the nation of Israel. He is everything that the nation of Israel was supposed to be.

What does that mean to us? It means that we have been called to be everything that Jesus is.

1. Spiritual descendants of Abraham.
2. A nation of priests coming boldly before the throne of grace
3. Salt and light as we take the gospel to a world in darkness
4. Living holy and righteous lives

Jesus gives the Psalm a new meaning. He points out that, in the same way Israel has been rejected in the past, so now the leaders of the nation are themselves going to pass a similar judgment upon the Messiah of Israel. They look at this little Galilean rabbi and they think that He is merely in the way. A stone to be rejected and cast aside. What they cannot realize is that this stone is to become the foundation stone for God’s New covenant people.

“And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.” Mark 12:12, NAS95.

I don't know if they understood all of the implications of the parable.

Even the truly regenerated Old Covenant believer still had veiled eyes to some degree, about the fullest revelation of Jesus. And some, like Simeon, at Jesus birth, knew who he truly was, although he probably did not live to see Jesus death, burial and glorious resurrection.

But these men understood enough to know that it was directed against themselves. They saw themselves as the unfaithful vine-growers. Whenever Jesus pointed out their shallowness and their true lack of understanding, it hit the heart like a piercing two edged sword, and their final attitude was murderous.