

1. **Introduction:** Returning to Mark’s story of Jesus, it is Tuesday of Passion Week. Jesus is in the Temple where He has been confronted by religious rulers who wanted to know “by what authority” Jesus acted.
  - Jesus responded with His own question. *“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”* The religious rulers were unwilling to answer that question, seeing it as a trap they could not overcome.
  - So, the rulers simply said, *“We do not know.”* Jesus responded with, *“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”*
  - The religious rulers refused to accept the truth about Jesus that was right before them. Refusing to accept a truth does not shield a person from the consequences and impact of that truth.
  - Is God’s grace unlimited or does it depend on events?
  - Jesus tells a condemning parable illustrating that God’s patience and grace are not without limits.
  - The parable is about a vineyard leased by the owner to tenants. Payment is to be a portion of the grapes each harvest.
  - The vineyard is Israel, its owner is God. The tenants are religious rulers.
  - Drawing on strong cultural imagery, Jesus tells the vineyard parable.
2. **Mark 12:1-3:** *“And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. <sup>2</sup> When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.*
  - For centuries, the prophets had used the image of the vinedresser and his vineyard as a metaphor to describe the God’s special relationship with His covenant nation. Israel (Ps 80:8; Isa 5:1-7).
  - In this parable, the vineyard owner “contracts” (covenants) with tenants to manage the vineyard. The owner is to receive a portion of the harvest.
  - When the time came, the vineyard owner sent a servant to receive the payment of produce from the vine. The “servant” came with the full authority of the owner. He was beaten and sent away empty handed.
3. **Mark 12:4-5:** *“Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. <sup>5</sup> And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.”*

- The vineyard owner is amazingly patient and willing to persevere in the face of offense. Clearly, he could justly take legal punitive action. But instead, he sends servants again and again.
  - By this point in the parable, Jesus' listeners could clearly recognize the parallel with the God's prophets who had warned Israel's political and religious leaders repeatedly but received no thanks.
  - They were brutally persecuted and often mercilessly martyred.
  - But the vineyard owner would make one last effort to resolve the issue.
  - His final effort is to send his beloved son to confront the tenants and bring them to their senses.
4. **Mark 12:6-8**: *“He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’<sup>7</sup> But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’<sup>8</sup> And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.”*
- Identifying the son as “Beloved” points to Jesus’ transfiguration and baptism as well as to the John 3:16 description of His mission.
  - The tenants were evil through and through. Recognizing the son and heir, they together decided to kill the son and take the vineyard that should have been his inheritance. It was premeditated murder and theft.
  - They killed the son and threw him out of the vineyard. The tenants were convinced that they would never be punished.
  - The long-suffering attitude of the owner convinced them he was weak and could be bullied any way they chose. They were mistaken.
5. **Mark 12:9-11**: *“What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.<sup>10</sup> Have you not read this Scripture: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;<sup>11</sup> this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”*
- Jesus says the owner will come and destroy the wicked tenants and give the vineyard to others. God's patience with wickedness has limits. When He chooses to act, He will destroy evil.
  - His eternal vineyard producing bountiful good fruit will be given to others who choose to follow Him and His righteous ways.
  - Jesus asks a question about Psalm 118. Are you unaware that the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone? This is astounding.
  - And it is God's doing. He made it happen. The chief priests, scribes, elders and their followers were rejecting Jesus. The completion of that rejection would be realized on the cross.

- But God chose Him as the cornerstone and Jesus would rise from the dead after 3 days. As it then existed, Israel would be destroyed (AD 70).
  - There would be a “new covenant” and the universal church, arising from the new covenant, would be given Israel’s spiritual mission to complete.
  - The parable reminds that it is wrong to exclusively emphasize God’s love. We must recognize that His holiness, righteousness, and avenging wrath are equally real.
  - The principal points of the parable are factually true.
  - God did repeatedly send “servants” (prophets) to His vineyard, Israel, where they were they were all rejected and scorned, some wounded and killed, including the recent beheading of John the Baptist.
  - The religious rulers had no doubt about which role represented them.
  - Their reaction was like that of the tenants. They wanted to eliminate Jesus but believed they must seize Him privately. Then eliminate Him.
  - How were they going to make that happen?
6. **Mark 12:12**: *“And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.”*
- The fear of losing the people’s support stopped them from seizing Jesus immediately, killing Him, and throwing His body out of the Temple.
  - Like the criminally insane vineyard tenants, the religious rulers believed that if they killed Jesus, they would retain as an inheritance that which God had appointed them over as His stewards. They were mistaken.
7. **Mark 12:13-17**: *And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. <sup>14</sup> And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?”*
- They think they have Jesus in a trap He can’t escape. They are wrong.
  - The Herodians & Pharisees opposed one another. Pharisees strictly observed the Law of Moses. They thought it wrong to have to pay Roman taxes.
  - The Herodians were secular, supported Rome, and wanted Herod to have a larger kingdom than just Galilee and Perea. Herodians and Pharisee’s coming together was to treat Jesus as their common enemy.
  - “Lawful” refers to acts that are morally permissible within Jewish Law.
8. **Mark 12:15-17**: *But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” <sup>16</sup> And they brought one. And he said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to him,*

***“Caesar’s.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus 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.***

- Jesus objected to the way the questioner framed the issue. The tax in question was something like a poll-tax applied to all adult males.
- This question was aimed at revealing either loyalty to Rome or loyalty to the kingdom of God. Either a “yes” or a “no” would be trouble.
- Earthly governments exist within the sovereign plan of God. Believers are expected to submit to their authority unless doing so requires us to violate God’s moral standard.
- Jesus has been asked an “abstract” question. He answers it with a “concrete” example. Excellent!
- Asking for and taking into His hand a denarius which bore an image of the Emperor and an inscription.
- Jesus shrewdly said, ***“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”***
- Jesus’ answer startled the questioners. It was a marvelous answer that held to the truth and placed the burden on individuals to decide what things belong to God and which belong to Caesar.
- The Herodians and Pharisees have not given up on their quest to eliminate Jesus, but for the moment they are stymied.
- They will keep trying to put Jesus in the wrong.