

Text: Mark 12:1-27

Theme: Give to God What Belongs to Him

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Holy Communion Service on 11/02/2018 at 10.30am

Introduction

Everything we have read in Mark 11-12 happened in the last week of Jesus' life. At the end of the week, they will kill Jesus. However, Mark 12 shows that Jesus, is in control. They can only kill Jesus when he gives himself up to them!

The parable of the wicked tenants in Mark 12 pictures a God dealing with humans who resent the fact that they are only humans. They want to be God. A man plants a vineyard, digs a pit for a winepress, rents it out to tenants and leaves. When harvest time arrives, this owner sends a servant to get some fruit from the tenants. They beat him up and run him off. Twice more the owner sends servants. They beat one of them up and kill the other one. All the owner has left is a beloved son. So he sends him, saying, "They will respect my son." But the renters have become profiteers. They want to steal the property.

Under Jewish law, three years undisputed possession of a piece of land enabled a person to claim ownership of that land over the holder of a deed. The tenants were elated when the son came. They got their hands on the heir. So they killed the owner's son.

Jesus reported, "What will the owner do? He will come and destroy the tenants. "When the scribes and priests heard this, they exclaimed, "God forbid!"

Immediately following this parable, Jesus was asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus simply responded, "Give Caesar the things that Caesar owns and give God the things God owns." Obviously, the meaning is clear - woe, be unto us if we try to give ourselves the things that God owns.

It is poignant that the central image of this parable is a vineyard. Vines and vineyards were repeated images for Israel in the Old Testament, and Isaiah 5 represents God's condemnation of His people for failing to be a fruitful vine. The God who had given Israel His law, a temple to worship in, and who had made Israel a numerous nation, expected some yield from His investment. Likewise, the God who has given us His Son, His Holy Spirit, and a worldwide, international church, expects some fruit from His kingdom.

God sent prophets to Israel to gather in the fruit, but they were mistreated. What a thankless task it was for everyone from Elijah, who faced up to Ahab and Jezebel, to Isaiah, who was sawn in two, to Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. The criticism that Paul and his ministry colleagues often faced when bringing God's word to wayward New Testament churches reminds us that God's spokesmen must still be prepared to suffer in order to fulfil their calling.

'But surely they will listen to my son: thought the landowner. Surely, even if they felt a certain antagonism against him, they would be too fearful to abuse the owner's own flesh and blood. The parable highlights what a dreadful thing it would be for Israel to put God's own Son to death. While God would accomplish redemption through His Son's pain, those leaders whose jealousy and treachery led to His death should tremble with fear. 'What ... will the owner of the vineyard do [to the tenants]?'

It reminds us just how personally God takes our response to the gospel. The gospel is not a set of propositions to believe, but a glorious person to be embraced. All of God's passions are stirred by His Son, and how we treat Him. It is God's will that 'The stone the builders rejected' should become the 'cornerstone' (1 Pet. 2:6,7). All of God's plans for

the future of our world revolve around Christ, the 'cornerstone'. **The success or failure of our lives boils down to how precious or otherwise Jesus is to us.**

Jesus certainly wasn't scared of confrontation! A parable like this was bound to sign His death warrant - they 'looked for a way to arrest him' (v. 12) after hearing it - but, like John the Baptist before Him, Christ was not going to hold back from declaring the truth, even if it cost Him his life. I wonder, do we hold back when some awkward moral issue comes up at work, or in discussion with a neighbour?

Give to God what belongs to God. (Mark 12:13-17)

Some of the Pharisees and Herodians were sent to Jesus to catch him in his words. Mark 12:13. The 'Pharisees' are Jews who love their religion at times at the expense of what God is saying. The 'Herod' group do not care about God or religion but they both have a common enemy - Jesus. They are pooling their resources together in order to find a way to kill Jesus.

So they asked: "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach ... Should we pay poll tax to Caesar or not? (verses 14-15)

Mark 12:14-15. They pretend to say nice things about Jesus. They want Jesus to think that they respect him but Jesus knows what they really want. They want to get him in trouble. They want to use Jesus' answer against him.

Mark 12:15 is a clever question. If Jesus says yes, the ordinary Jews will turn against him. If Jesus says 'no', he will be in trouble with Herod, the Roman ruler.

Mark 12:16. 'Show me a Roman coin! Jesus drew their attention to every coin of Roman money ('denarius') It had a picture of Caesar's face on it. Caesar ('the emperor') was head over a large part of the world, the 'Roman empire', of which Israel was a province and the Jews hated being ruled by foreigners. The Jews thought that God's people should not have to pay taxes to Caesar! However, they all used Roman coins.

Jesus asks them to show him one. And on every Roman coin was the face of Caesar. The coin belonged to him. So if Caesar wants them to pay taxes, they must pay! Their question is clever. But Jesus' answer was better! Both groups know that what Jesus says is true. They must give taxes to Caesar because it belongs to him. And they must give to God what belongs to God!

We are like coins. We all show the image of God. He made us. We belong to him. Therefore, we must give him whatever he asks for! Many Christians do not understand that they belong completely to God. They give God a little money, a little time. And they please themselves with the rest.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

What does God ask from us? (Mark 12:29-31)

Jesus' answer is a continuation of the lesson on the parable he has just spoken: God sends his own Son to say 'Give to God what belongs to God'. However, these people will not listen. They do not really love God. They do not want to give up their lives to God. So they try to kill God's Son.

Jesus says to us: 'Give to God what belongs to God'. Are you glad to do that? Do you say: 'My money is God's money, my time is God's time, my life is all for God'?

But we have all robbed God because we have lived for ourselves. Remember, Jesus came to pay all our debts on the cross. He came to forgive us. And he came to claim our lives, to have us back. What do you need to give back to God?

V.18-27 Do not make a grievous mistake! Believe what the Bible says!

Next in line of those to ask Jesus hard questions are the Sadducees. They all think that Jesus will not be able to answer them. They want to trap Jesus. They want to make Jesus look silly. In the end, they want to kill him.

The Sadducees were different from the Pharisees. They only believed in the first five books of the Old Testament, which Moses wrote. They did not believe that people will rise from death. They do not believe in a resurrection day (when our dead bodies will be given new life). They think that their story makes resurrection look silly: A woman marries seven times to brothers who die, one after another. This is what the Old Testament says should be done, which was to ensure adequate provision for the widow. So, when they all rise from death, who will she be married to? They think that this is too hard for Jesus to answer!

It is easy to make the same grievous mistake as the Sadducees. We can hold on too strongly to what others say, or to what our traditions say. Or we can listen too quickly to new teaching. The teaching may attract us. It may promise good things. Then we may not look carefully at what God says in the Bible. We may not want to believe what the Bible says. We become blind.

So what does the bible say about resurrection?

Mark 12:26-27. (Exodus 3:6). **God made great promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They never received what God promised while they were alive on earth. But God keeps his promises! God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are not dead and finished. Their spirits are alive. They wait for resurrection day.** Their bodies will rise from the dead. Then they will receive the promises which they believed.

Mark 12:25. In heaven, we will have real bodies. But they will not be the same as our bodies on earth. In heaven, we will have real friends. However, it will not be the same as on earth. We will not marry, or have children!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-44

It is very important to believe that one day our bodies will rise from death. We will have real bodies, better bodies. If we believe in Jesus, we will live with him forever. We may have many questions about it. What will it be like? Do not worry. Believe what God tells us in 'the Bible.

Jesus shows the Sadducees what the Old Testament teaches. It says that we will rise from death. The Sadducees only believed the parts of the Bible that Moses wrote and Jesus teaches them from a book that Moses wrote - Exodus. He shows that God is a God for living people, not for dead people! God is still our God after we die in this life. This is because we are not finished. Our bodies will rise to life.

A Question About Us ~ Mark 12:24, 27

Have we made a terrible mistake like the Sadducees? Did they find the Bible hard to understand? Or did they not want to believe the Bible?

God loves to help us when we find it hard to understand the Bible. Ask God to help you. Ask your teachers to help you. However, the Sadducees were wrong because they did not want to believe. They did not accept the Bible's teaching. They did not like what the Bible says. That is why they did 'not know the Scriptures or the power of God.' Jesus says: 'This is a terrible mistake. How wrong you are!'

Are you willing to believe everything God says in the Bible? If you do not like something, what do you do? Do you ask God to help you?