

Mark 12:1-27

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 February 2023

Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. So great to see you all. Will you open your Bibles again with me to Mark chapter 12, verses 1 to 27?

And as you do so, if you are considering introducing Jesus to a friend who doesn't know him, or if you yourself are just here this morning or watching online and you're curious about Jesus, but you're not sure what to make of him, I can't think of a better passage than Mark chapter 12 to introduce someone to Jesus.

Because this man is absolutely captivating, isn't he? If you bring him a political riddle, if you bring him a theological riddle, it seems like he knows exactly what to say.

And our theme today is authority, Jesus' authority. Where does it come from, and what's it for? So let me remind you where we are in this gospel. Last week, Jesus entered Jerusalem in this dramatic fashion.

People waving palm branches and saying, Hosanna in the highest, blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. So that Jesus' identity as the Messiah, as the king, was now out in the open, on full display, after being concealed for so many chapters.

[1 : 18] And then Jesus made a very public display in the temple, driving out corruption and false teaching, with strong words and actions.

Do you remember this from Mark chapter 11? All of this led to the religious authorities, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, demanding at the end of chapter 11, By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority?

And Jesus counter-questioned to them, made it clear that his authority comes from heaven, from God himself. He is the king, the son of David. He is the Lord, the son of God.

But what we find in chapter 12, is these religious leaders refusing to acknowledge Jesus' authority. In fact, not just refusing, rebelling against his authority.

Opposing him, looking for opportunities to arrest him, verse 12 in our passage. Seeking to entrap Jesus with a series of tough questions and riddles. Now, of course, authority can be a dirty word.

[2 : 27] So, authority means to have power or control over or govern someone. It's often abused, though, isn't it? So, authoritative governments become dictatorships.

Authoritative bosses become bullies in the workplace. Even Jesus himself refused his disciples, James and John's, undue authority request. And instead, he taught his followers not to lord it over others, but instead, whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

So, we chafe against authority. We rebel against it, even. But it's impossible for me to live without someone in charge.

So, rejecting one person's authority means either accepting another person's authority or setting myself up as the ultimate authority, which is usually my preferred way of living.

So, years ago, I was driving, and I saw a shortcut, but it involved I needed to turn left onto a one-way street going the wrong direction. So, I did it.

[3 : 36] And suddenly, a fellow in a car started waving at me and motioning me to turn around and go back, and I ignored him. And then he turned on his red and blue flashing lights. And he motioned for me to pull to the side of the road.

And I didn't ignore him anymore. That story had a happy ending, actually. If we have time, I'll tell it to you. But in some way, Jesus' authority, which has been hidden for so many chapters, is now on full display.

He's no longer an undercover cop. He's in full uniform. So, how will you respond? Because the root word of authority in English is author, which is really helpful.

The author, Christians believe, that all authority is owed to God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit because God is the author and the sustainer of life.

And as Jesus confronts these three powerful groups here, standing in opposition to him, he points us to the source and the purpose of his authority.

[4 : 39] So, we're going to look at this chapter under three simple headings. First of all, authority belongs to the author. We'll look at verses 13 to 17. Authority belongs to the author.

Secondly, authority belongs to the living God, verses 18 to 27. And then we'll go back to the beginning, and we'll look at verses 1 to 12. Jesus' authority judges and saves.

So, let's begin. Firstly, then, authority belongs to the author. If you look at verses 13 to 17 with me, the first group to test Jesus is the Pharisees and the Herodians.

And we last saw this unholy alliance back in chapter 3, verse 6. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Jesus how to destroy him. Mark warns us they're here to trap Jesus in his talk, verse 13.

So, their question is, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? And this is why it's a trap. Because if Jesus says yes, then the Jewish popular support will turn against him, because people bitterly hated the Roman occupation.

[5 : 46] But if Jesus says no, well, then they can report Jesus to the Roman authorities. It's an act of rebellion to encourage people not to pay their taxes. So, how does Jesus respond?

Well, he asks for a coin, right? Someone reaches in their pocket and they pull out a denarius, a Roman coin used to pay the tax. And Jesus says, whose likeness and inscription is on that coin?

So, one side of the coin, similar to ours today, one side of the coin bore the image of Caesar. And this is what it said. It said, Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus. And the other side bore the inscription, Pontifex Maximus, meaning chief priest.

So, Jesus says, okay, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Render means to give or to pay back. And since Caesar's image is on the coin, it belongs to him.

And it could be given back to him. No one could accuse Jesus of sedition with that kind of response. But then he continues. He says, and render to God the things that are God's.

[7 : 02] So, what things are God's? Well, let me ask the question in a different way. Where else do we see God's image and likeness in creation?

If you look at Genesis 1, verse 27, it says, so God created man in his image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. So that we are like coins in God's mint.

And we are entirely his. We bear his image and his likeness. He is our author. Therefore, he has authority over us. In fact, Jesus also subtly undermines Caesar's authority as well.

Because to give back to God what is his means giving him everything. So as followers of Jesus, we do our best to submit to and respect those who are put in authority over us.

Our government, our employer, our teachers, for example. However, this authority cannot allow us to act immorally, to disobey God's commandments, or to go against our Christian conscience.

[8 : 19] In other words, we render to God what is God's first and foremost. I think you all know that we've had opportunities to put that into application in the last few years, haven't we?

In doing so, we declare, I'm not my own authority. Jesus is Lord. Jude 1, verse 25. To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, now and forever.

So firstly, authority belongs to the author. And secondly, authority belongs to the living God. If you look at verses 18 to 27, right at the beginning in verse 18, we see a new group, a religious group we haven't seen before called the Sadducees, challenging Jesus' authority.

So who are these guys? Well, they're Jews. They're from upper-class families. They're wealthy and they're worldly. They're what we would call theologically liberal. They rejected the supernatural.

They denied the existence of angels. And as Mark tells us, they denied the resurrection of the dead. So they bring a riddle to Jesus designed to make him look foolish.

[9 : 28] One woman ends up marrying seven brothers during her life. So whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus. That's kind of their tone, right? And look at verse 24, how Jesus responds.

Jesus said to them, Is it not the reason, is this not the reason you are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? That takes boldness, doesn't it? It's damning, too.

You're wrong, he says. And he demonstrates his authority using two pieces of evidence. You heard it there in the verse. God's word and God's power prove that they're wrong. So first he reminds them from Exodus 3, verse 6.

God's words to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Present tense. I am. Now these three men were patriarchs of Israel, but they're long dead.

If they're nothing more than dust in the ground, then God can't now, at this moment, be their God. But no, he's not the God of the living, not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.

[10 : 34] You are quite wrong, Jesus says. So that these patriarchs are with their author and creator as we speak, just as Moses appeared with Jesus at his transfiguration.

Authority belongs to the living God. So that when we rebel against God's authority, we rebel against both God's words and his power.

And Jesus elaborates on this resurrection power in verse 25. Have a look. For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. I have so many questions about this verse.

Please say more, Jesus. But he doesn't, does he? So certainly, certainly Jesus is, at least one thing he's doing is he's undercutting any sort of crude materialistic ideas we have about resurrection.

And he chooses to compare the resurrection or the risen to angels in the sense that they will be immortal and no longer bearing children.

[11 : 40] There's at least those two connections to angels. Immortality, no longer bearing children. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul adds also that our resurrection bodies will be of a different kind than the ones we endured in this fallen world.

They'll be perfect. But why is there no marriage in heaven? Does that seem strange to you? Are you surprised by that? Why is there no marriage? Very simply, there's no longer need for marriage because love will be fulfilled.

There will be an increase, not a reduction in love. We won't miss intimacy or love with any individual, a child, a spouse, a parent.

We won't miss that kind of intimacy that we experienced here because we will be more lovable and capable of more love than we have ever been before. If anything, you could say that as hard as it is to believe that you don't need to be married in heaven because you will love everybody just as much as you love your spouse now.

But incidentally, this also means that if you're single or if you have endured a loveless marriage, or a difficult marriage, there is no loss or diminishment for you in heaven.

[13 : 01] That's very important because, you see, God's authority grants eternal life and eternal love to those who are in Christ Jesus. Authority belongs to the living God and nothing can prevent him from his salvation plan, which brings us to our third heading.

Jesus' authority judges and saves. We turn to the parable at the beginning of the chapter, verses 1 to 12. Jesus' authority judges and saves.

So, in response to the religious leader's hard-heartedness and rebellion against his authority, what does Jesus do first? He tells a story, a parable, about a vineyard and farmers who rent it.

And many of the elements in this parable would have been immediately recognizable to his Jewish audience, but maybe not so much to us. So, let me just give you a little bit of a clearer sense of what each character or place in the story represents.

So, the man who planted the vineyard, he represents God the Father. The vineyard represents Israel. It says that he leased the vineyard to tenants.

[14 : 11] These tenants represent the Jewish religious leaders. Verse 2 reads, When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. So, what's the fruit of the vineyard?

Well, this represents fruitful good works and the blessing to the nations that Israel was meant to be. And then the servants are sent by the owners.

So, what do they represent? Well, they represent the Old Testament prophets who are either roughed up or killed. Let's pause there for a moment. I want you to imagine you own a property.

Maybe an apartment you're renting out. Maybe that's hard for you to even imagine. I want you to imagine you own property. Kind of like Will's story. Your tenants refuse to pay you rent.

And then you send your property manager to talk to them. But they rough them up. They beat them up and kick them out. What would you do? What would you do next? You'd call the police, right?

[15 : 12] You'd send in strong reinforcements and you'd evict those lousy tenants. Now, picture God as the landlord of that vineyard. What is he going to do with Israel?

Martin Luther knew what he would do if he was God. If I were God and the whole world treated me as it treated him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces. Thank goodness that Martin Luther isn't God.

The first shock in Jesus' parable comes to us in verse 6. If you look at verse 6, what does the landowner do? He had still one other, a beloved son.

And finally, he sent him to them, saying, they will respect my son. This beloved son represents Jesus. Coming from his father in heaven, without an army, without a sword, to offer forgiveness of all things to this rebellious tenant, Israel.

Jesus, laying down his authority in the incarnation. And the word respect here, they will respect my son. It could be literally translated, they will feel shame.

- [16 : 23] God's desire in sending his son, Jesus, was to lead his chosen people, Israel, to repentance and submission to his loving authority. And yet, Jesus knew the cost that he would pay for his incarnation.

As we've already seen three times in Mark's gospel when he predicts his suffering, his rejection, and his death, the beloved son knows the cost that he's going to pay. And so he's not surprised by their tragic response in verse 7.

But those tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. The tenants see the heir and they assume that the master, the owner of the vineyard, must be dead.

So if they kill the son, the vineyard will be theirs. How foolishly we think that if we turn our backs on God, killing him with our callousness and dismissal, that we can step into his shoes and assume authority over our lives.

And now we come to the next surprise in our parable. So Jesus' audience is expecting a swift and brutal response from the vineyard owner. You see, for that audience, they would have been thinking right away of Isaiah chapter 5 in the Old Testament.

- [17 : 42] It's an Old Testament parable of a vineyard very similar to Jesus' story, except it ends like this. The Lord God tramples and lays waste the rebellious vineyard which represented Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel.

Isaiah 5 was fulfilled when Judah was destroyed and taken into exile by Babylon. And when we read verse 9, yes, we do see judgment. But it's judgment with a twist, isn't it?

Jesus says, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and then he'll give the vineyard to others? What's that about? The rebellious tenants, the rebellious religious leaders who rejected Jesus' authority will be judged.

But who are these new tenants? Who are the new tenants? Who is God giving the vineyard to now? Well, it's the church. It's us. This is the final surprise of the parable.

Vindication for Jesus and his new tenants. So we read in verse 10 and 11, have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And this was marvelous.

- [18 : 53] This was the Lord's doing. It's marvelous in our eyes. The seeming tragedy that awaits Jesus in Jerusalem is not an accident of history or beyond the power of the living God because Jesus is given authority back by the Father in his resurrection to judge and to save.

The apostle Peter takes the same words describing Jesus as the cornerstone of the church, which are taken from Psalm 118, by the way, and he applies them to Jesus this way in Acts chapter 4.

This is Peter speaking. Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved.

This is vindication. The one with complete and authority he willingly laid down his life for our sake. Mark chapter 10, verse 45, even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[20 : 11] And yet he was destined to rise again because the Lord God is the God of the living, not of the dead. And in his resurrection, the Father has handed Jesus all authority now to judge and to save.

So how will you respond to this parable? How will you respond to Jesus' words? Verse 12 tells us that the religious leaders, well, they perceived that he had told the parable against them, and so they plotted to assert their own authority by getting rid of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, don't make the same mistake. Jesus' words are inviting us to respond in at least two very simple ways. First of all, remember that we are renters and not owners.

And I know that for many of us living in Vancouver, that's quite easy, isn't it? We are renters and not owners. What a lot of gifts we have received from our author who holds all authority.

It's all gift. Life and breath and beauty and curiosity and adoption, regeneration, union with Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, it's all gift.

[21 : 22] All of these and more are available in the name of Jesus. So approach the King of Kings with humility, knowing that he is slow to judge and quick to forgive and save. And secondly, respond by bearing fruit in the vineyard.

This is the vineyard. Vancouver is the vineyard. The world is the vineyard. The church is in the vineyard. We are commissioned with the privilege of joining the beloved Son in his mission to bring many sons and daughters to glory.

So we bear fruit. How? By prayer? By making St. John's a house of prayer for all nations? By rendering to God the things that are God's? By sharing the hope of the resurrection with those who long for hope?

And by trusting Jesus' authority to judge, yeah, and to save. Amen.