

Controversies, Part II

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: 23 March 2014

Preacher: Malcolm Foley

- [0 : 0 0] Good evening, church. Let's turn in our Bibles to Mark 11, 27, which is page 848 in your pew Bibles.
- We're going to read through to chapter 12, verse 12, as we'll be focusing most of our time on that parable of the wicked farmers. Page 848, Mark 11, verse 27.
- Verse 27, and 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 they said to him, by what authority are you doing these things?
- Or who gave you this authority to do them? Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question. Answer me. And I will tell you by what authority I do these things.
- Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me. And they discussed it with one another, saying, if we say from heaven, he will say, why then did you not believe him?
- [1 : 2 0] But shall we say from man? They were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, we do not know.
- And Jesus said to them, neither 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 fence around it and dug a pit for the wine press and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country.
- When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty handed. Again, he sent to them another servant.
- And they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another and him they killed. And so with many others, some they beat and some they killed.
- He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them saying, they will respect my son. But those tenants said to one another, this is the heir.
- [2 : 3 2] 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. What will the owner of the vineyard do?
- He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.
- This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. 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 word of the Lord. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity we have this evening to gather and worship.
- Father, we praise you this evening for your lordship, your sovereignty, and your authority. As we marinate in your word this evening, continue to soften hearts and turn us to you in love, humility, and obedience.
- [3 : 4 7] Let us know and praise you truly as you reveal yourself in the scriptures. Amen. Amen. In the name of your son and by the power of your Holy Spirit, I pray. Amen.

Mom, I don't want to clean my room. Dad, I don't want to mow the lawn. That's a really annoying sound.

And any parent here probably recognizes it, though. It is universally known as whining. My parents tell me that for the first few years of my life, I was the perfect fat little baby.

Who just laid around and didn't want to move or make any noise. But when I got older, I began to whine. Whenever I was given orders that seemed unreasonable, unpleasant, or inconvenient, I did the thing that we as sinful human beings do.

Whine. And do we understand what creates this impulse? Do we understand the heart that produces such an annoying high-pitched sound? It is a heart of rebellion.

[5 : 05] It is a heart that wants authority for itself. It is a heart that is confined to a body that is too weak to fight. So it feebly struggles through whining. But as we get older and feel like we have got a little more power, that whining blossoms into full-fledged rebellion.

Rejection of authority. It is this rejection that Christ is warning us against in this passage. In the end of Mark 11, he faces a question from the religious authorities.

Verse 28. By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them? Jesus has just been cleansing the temple and healing on the Sabbath and people are really thrown off by that.

And so Jesus doesn't directly answer this question. Because he knows the heart behind it. This is why he deflects to the question about John. If the Pharisees are waffling on the identity of John the Baptist, how will they deal with the Son of God?

If middle ground doesn't make sense with John, it sure doesn't make sense with Jesus. Jesus' response, as foreshadowing of Jack Nicholson in A Few Good Men, you can't handle the truth.

[6 : 18] But, of course, Jesus actually does give them the truth, though indirectly. He does it through the parable of the tenants. So we're going to see a few things.

What authority Christ has, how we and the corrupt Jewish leaders approach that authority, and how we should approach that authority. Let's take a look at verse 1 of chapter 12.

Christ begins with the story of a man who plants a vineyard and puts a fence around it and digs a pit for the wine press and builds a tower and leases it to tenants and goes to another country.

What Jesus is doing here is he's quoting Isaiah 5, which begins almost exactly like this. But in this case, the tenants are the corrupt Jewish authorities that he's speaking to.

And so the parable continues. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. This is verse 2. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

[7 : 18] Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others, some they beat and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son.

Finally he sent him to them, saying, They will respect my son. 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.

This is, at first glance, the story of the Old Testament. The Pharisees would have suspected that from the beginning, since Jesus is starting with a quote of Isaiah.

This is beginning with God's creation and claim of his people. It is God who plants the vineyard, which we are told in Isaiah is the people of Israel. It is God who protects them with the fence and the watchtower in the parable.

And through numerous historical events in Scripture, whether it's the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea, or the Lord's many military victories. But the bad news comes in the tenants' response to the Lord's provision.

[8 : 24] They methodically, consistently, and violently reject the Lord himself. He sends servants, specifically the prophets, and they treat them horribly.

They chased Elijah. They beat Jeremiah. They sawed Isaiah in two. They had John the Baptist beheaded. Yet another recurring theme that we see in Scripture.

God provides, and yet we continually, faithlessly reject him. But then the sending of the Son. The heir.

While the tenants should have seen this as an extension of grace from the owner, who could have given up at any time along the way. Instead, they seize this as an opportunity.

They think, Oh, it's the Son. We can take this guy out, and the vineyard is ours. So they kill him and throw him out. Friends, Jesus is on the offensive.

[9 : 23] With this parable, he utters his indictment. In the last week of his life, which is where we are in the Gospel of Mark right now, he faces those who will soon have him killed, looks them in the face, tells them what they're about to do to him, and he tells them what the result of their action will be.

What will the owner do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. The result of rejection of the Son, both for the corrupt Jewish leadership and for us, is destruction.

In fact, to make it even more explicit, it is conscious eternal suffering. The verdict ends with an assertion of Christ's identity as he quotes Psalm 118, a well-known psalm about the Messiah, verses 10 and 11 of chapter 12.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Wait. Marvelous in our eyes.

We've just been talking about destruction. How is this marvelous? Well, for the Pharisees, it surely isn't. But for us, it's the greatest news of all.

[10 : 41] Why? Well, let's back this up to the beginning. Let's say the very beginning. The first verse of this parable is not just about God's calling of Israel.

It's about God's creation of you and his provision for you. The continuing stories of the tenant's rejection of God's authority and righteous desires are the story of you and I and our consistent rejection of his authority.

It's the story of the time when we're tempted by lust, when the desire boils up and the word comes in telling us that everyone who lusts after a woman or man has already committed adultery with them in their heart, but we ignore it and push it out and continue to dwell in our sin.

When we in pride exalt ourselves over others and the word comes in reminding us that God says, I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

But we push it out and continue to dwell in our sin. When we are consumed with a desire for wealth, for power, for position, for status and the word comes in reminding us all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of possessions is not from the Father but is from the world and the world is passing away along with its desires, we ignore it.

[12 : 10] Pushing it away, thinking that we know best. You see, we are not innocent creatures. We are rebels against the sovereign authority of the almighty God.

We want that authority for ourselves. We want to be gods in our own lives. And as a result of that, we deserve the destruction that the Pharisees are promised.

But this fate hinges on how we treat the authority of the Son, the last hope. The tenants thought, this is our chance.

We take this guy out, the vineyard's ours, no more pesky owner getting in the way of my plans for my life. Are we going to respond the same way? Or will we agree with the psalm?

Will we see the authority of Christ as marvelous? Will we see the authority of Christ as the authority of God, who disciplines us not to break us down, but so that we can bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness?

[13 : 16] Instead of seeking to exalt ourselves, will we yield to the authority of our creator as revealed in Christ? This is the command that Christ gives in the beginning of the Gospel of Mark in chapter 1, verse 15.

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel. Repent. Recognize that you are a rebel.

Not just that you rebel, but that you are a rebel. And that we are in need of a full overhaul of being. A new birth.

And believe in the good news of the authority of Christ. That he deserves that authority as heir and that he wields it with wisdom, strength, and perfect love.

That instead of attempting to take that authority for ourselves, a task that is guaranteed to fail, we seize the opportunity to be co-heirs with Christ as fellow children of God.

[14 : 22] Believe that in his sacrifice of his life, he took the righteous wrath of God upon himself for you. And that by faith in him and his substitutionary death and glorious resurrection, you can be brought back to life.

To live a life that's pleasing to him and worthy of him. We're not just people who occasionally rebel, who just need to stop rebelling and then everything will be fine. Our identity apart from Christ is marked by our foolish rebellion.

The Greek word for sin means to miss the mark. But it's not that we're firing an arrow at a bullseye and we just miss by a few inches. If the bullseye is over there, I'm firing my arrow over here.

That's the foolishness of our rebellion. Through faith in Christ, he turns us around, gives us a new heart, and a new desire for and closeness with himself.

But a huge part of that is submission to his authority. So let's boil this authority thing down. We've got three loci of authority that this text is telling us to submit to.

[15 : 36] The entire Gospel of Mark is all about Jesus. Who he is and what that requires of us. Such a task revolves around how we view his authority.

Now the Pharisees came to Jesus with that question, however insincere it was. And Jesus' answer was, well, if you're not willing to take a stand when it comes to John the Baptist's authority, you sure can't handle me.

So, I won't tell you plainly. But I will tell you in this parable. So the first and greatest authority that we are to submit to is the authority of Christ. Which is, as he notes in verse 11, the authority of the Lord.

Instead of seeking to save ourselves, he tells us to put ourselves under his lordship. He is our Lord and our Savior. In our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions.

And this isn't just a lofty, God's out there and I've just got to do what he says, I can ignore the people around me. It is our submission to his authority that informs and necessitates our submission to earthly authorities.

[16 : 43] It's because Christ is our Lord that we submit to our parents. It's because Christ is our Lord that we submit to our bosses. It's because Christ is our Lord that we submit to the police officer who pulls us over for driving 20, 15, 10, 5, or 1 mile past the speed limit.

Christ is to have authority over every aspect of our life. And he wields that authority completely, lovingly, and wondrously.

Now the second tier of authority is the word. We view the scripture as fully authoritative and fully true because of Christ.

This whole parable is soaked in scripture. Isaiah 5, Psalm 118, callbacks to 2 Chronicles 36, 15 to 16, which says this, The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people until there was no remedy.

[17 : 53] Christ is showing us that God is truly revealed in the scriptures and we are to submit to its view of the world, to its view of us, and to its view of God.

Lastly, however, and this may be surprising to some of you, this authority is applied to the elders of the church. Let's take another look at verses 9 and 10.

What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Who are these others that the owner is giving the vineyard to? Immediately, it's a reference to the gospel going out to Gentiles. Ultimately, it's the gospel going out from the church.

In redemptive history, Christ is signaling that the call that was initially confined to Israel was always meant to extend beyond them as well. What does it mean for Christ to be the cornerstone?

[18 : 58] Not only is he the Jewish Messiah, but Paul, in Ephesians, understands this to be a reference to the church. When he says, speaking to the Ephesians, you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The church draws from all nations. And there are men who have been called to authority in the church, namely the elders. Hebrews 13, 17. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Let us also submit with joy and not with groaning.

First, to the all-encompassing authority of the Son. also, to the all-penetrating authority of his word, and then to the loving, wise leadership of the elders in the church of which he is the cornerstone.

Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we are sobered by your word.

[20 : 35] The plight of these tenants who, like us, Lord, have rejected your word. Lord, I pray that you continue to soften our hearts, that you continue to draw us toward yourself, that we seek you in your word and through prayer.

And Lord, that when we fall, that when we fall into sin, that we heed, that we heed your warnings, that we heed your instruction, that we submit to your authority. Lord, I pray that we, I pray that we trust you, knowing that you, because you created us and you gave us our purpose, Lord, that you will, that you will fulfill that purpose.

Lord, anyone here, Lord, who has not taken you by faith, I pray that you soften their hearts and draw them towards yourself.

And for those of us, Lord, who have, I pray that you kindle our love for you and our love for one another. I pray these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Amen.