

Give to God what belongs to God

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 12. Mark chapter 12. And we're going to be beginning at verse 1.

And we'll read through to verse 17. So Mark 1 through to verse 17. So this is Mark chapter 12. Beginning at verse 1. Reading through to verse 17. Now hear God's word. 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.

[1 : 07] And they took him. And beat him. And sent him away empty handed. Again he sent them to another servant. And they struck him on the head.

And treated him shamefully. And he sent another. And they killed. And him they killed. And so with many others. Some they beat.

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. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants. And give the vineyard to others.

[2 : 01] 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 speaking. And they were seeking to arrest him. But feared the people. For they perceived. That he told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

And they sent to him. Some of the Pharisees. And some of the Herodians. To trap him in his talk. 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? But knowing their hypocrisy.

[2 : 59] He said to them. Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius. And let me look at it. And they brought one. And he said to them. Whose likeness and inscription is this?

They said to him. Caesar's. 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.

Well if you have your Bibles with you. Please turn again to Mark chapter 12. As you're doing that. Remember we're making our way through the Gospels.

Or through the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. One Gospel seen from four different perspectives. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And we are seeing the sort of foundations as you were of the Gospel.

The very things that a person needs to turn to. And in order to belong to God. And tonight is no different.

[4 : 05] The issue here however is perhaps a little bit more complicated than normal. Because Jesus speaks in a parable. And the purpose of a parable is to seek out your level of perception.

It's a story that tells a truth. Especially this one. But it's whether or not you can pick up on that truth. That's the important thing. On many occasions.

Or at least some occasions. The disciples don't get the parables. Jesus tells the parable. You're a member of the sower. And the disciples are like. We don't understand what you're saying. The reason why that was so devastating.

Is because Jesus had just said. Let him who have ears to hear, hear. In other words. If I have to tell you the punchline to a joke. Which here I often do.

Because they're either not very funny. Or you don't get them. If you have to tell the punchline to a joke. It means that you haven't got the joke. You're having to explain it.

[5 : 06] So when Jesus is having to explain the parable to his disciples. It's actually a sign of judgment in many ways. Because they ought to be able to perceive these things.

And they can't. In other words. They don't have ears to hear. Now why is that troubling? Well it's troubling for this very simple reason.

That God designed us to be sensitive spiritually. With spiritual senses. Hearing the word of God. Is a spiritual sense.

Seeing things from God's point of view. Is a spiritual sense. Very important. Now the trouble is. Is when we take our eyes off God. And we begin to trust in other things.

The first thing that happens to us. Is that it destroys our spiritual senses. We no longer have eyes to see the things of God. That God wants us to see. And we no longer have ears to hear the things of God.

[6 : 03] We become like what we worship. Psalm 115. Jeremiah 2. Isaiah 6. 2 Corinthians 3 verse 18. We become like what we worship.

In other words. When these people of the Old Testament. Used to chop down a tree. And make firewood out of one half. To cook their tea on it. And out of the other half. They would make an idol. And bow down and worship that idol. The reason they would bow down. And worship that idol. Was because that was the thing. That they trusted in. The trouble was. That that idol had ears. But could not hear.

It had eyes. But could not see. And they become like the very thing. That they worshiped. Well when Jesus is telling these parables. He's telling people. And testing their level of perception. Now if they are worshiping God. Truly. Their level of perception. Is going to get the parable immediately. But if they're not worshiping God. This is why many of them.

[6 : 58] Don't understand the parables. Because they have become. Death. And dumb. Spiritually. To the things of God. Because they are worshiping. Other things. Worship here. Is the absolute.

Central issue. To parables. In many ways. Because Jesus. Is even testing. Our level of perception. To see whether or not. We understand. What he is saying.

In this parable. And he is speaking it here. To his people. Israel. God's people. But he's also speaking here. About. Worship. The fruit of the vineyard.

Now in Mark. This is pretty important. For this reason. Because Jesus has already. Had a run in. With the religious leaders. Where he comes to a fig tree. Expecting to find fruit on it.

Because it's in leaf. And he doesn't. And he curses the fig tree. And he says. May you never bear fruit again. Seems a little harsh. But he's making a point. And the point is. Is that he walks from the fig tree.

[7 : 55] Into the temple. What. What is he expecting to find? Fruit. Spiritual. Fruit. What does he find? People buying and selling.

Robbing God. And what are they robbing God of? They're robbing God. Of prayer. And not only are they robbing God. Therefore they're robbing people. Because people are not able to do the things. That they ought to be doing. In the temple of God. Jesus is so angry at this. That he overturns the tables. He throws the money changers out. My house should be called a house of prayer.

But you have made it a den of robbers. You are robbing God. From God receiving worship. Now Romans 15 says this. That the reason why we evangelize.

The reason why we want people saved. Is not to keep them out of hell. Though that's a pretty good motivator. More importantly. It's actually because God deserves to be worshipped. Now the reason why that's a far more important motivator.

[8 : 55] And more biblical. Is for this one reason. Because there may just be some people in this world. That you don't want to keep out of hell. Let's be honest.

But God does deserve to be worshipped. All the time. By all people. You know. We don't always think about other people.

As well as God thinks about other people. In fact. It's very unlikely that we think about other people. As lovingly. As God thinks about other people. So the center of the gospel must be God. If we're to love other people like God. That God wants us to love other people. The center of the gospel must be God. If we are to see other people as God sees them. If we are to hear what God is saying. At the end of the day. All this comes down to whether or not we are focused on God. Or we are focused on something else. Keeping what we have. Whatever it may be.

[9 : 50] To ourselves. Not sharing it with anyone. We just want to be left alone. We want to live life our own way. It's devastating for this one reason. It blinds you to the things of God.

It deafens you to the things of God. Rather understand that the vineyard. Everything belongs to him. And we must give to God.

What belongs to God. We must not rob him. We must give to God. What belongs to God. The vineyard owner here. Has the right to share in the fruit.

Of his own vineyard. That's the point. The fruit here. Though it seems like real fruit in a vineyard. Spiritually speaking. It's the fruit of worship.

The prayer. The honor. The devotion to God. Particularly the devotion to God. In all of these things. We must give to God. What belongs to God.

[10 : 47] We must give to the vineyard owner. The fruit of his own vineyard. Now the vineyard here is a common metaphor for Israel. That is the people of God.

The vineyard owner is of course God. Now. The tenants. Are the religious leaders. And here they're not painted in a very favorable picture.

They're the religious leaders. That on appearances. They look as if they're. They're obeying God. Jesus says. Not even close. The servants that the vineyard owner sends.

Remember this is set within biblical times. We're still in the Old Testament at this point. We say we're in Mark. No. Mark is still in the Old Testament for this very simple reason.

Jesus is not yet died. And the new covenant is a new covenant in his blood. The new covenant starts after Jesus dies and rises from the dead.

[11 : 46] So Jesus is telling this parable. Which has Old Testament context. Remember still in the Old Testament. Though it's in our part of the Bible.

Which says it's the New Testament. Jesus has not yet died. He's about to. But he hasn't. Yet. And so the servants that are sent in this parable.

Are the prophets that were sent to God's people. Telling them to turn back to God. So all the way through the Old Testament. You have these prophets. You know Jeremiah.

Amos. Isaiah. Going out to God's people. Telling God's people to turn back to him. And they don't. They stone the prophets. They kill the prophets. They just get rid. They don't want the prophets in the vineyard.

Disrupting things. This is ours. Leave us alone. Amos in particular. Is loved by Israel for the first part of his message. Because he says God is going to judge here.

[12 : 40] Here. Here. Here. And here. And all of a sudden Amos turns around and looks at them. And says. And you also. Well they were not expecting that. They were not expecting that. They thought we're fine.

Everybody else has the problem. So the issue here is that the prophets are sent by God to turn God's people back to God. But they do not want to turn. They do not want to worship God. They do not want to give to God what belongs to God. And it's no different for us. You're sat here. And God looks at you this evening.

Wondering. Not wondering. Knowing. Whether or not you are giving to God what belongs to him. So here's a very short summary. God plants the vineyard.

Therefore he owns it and everything in it. He appoints tenants. The religious leaders. He sends in servants to collect the fruit. When it's due. No servants return.

[13 : 38] Because they're either beaten or what have you. So he sends his son. Not only are the prophets rejected and some are killed. But now the son is beaten and killed.

Now the vineyard owner in sending his son is obviously taking the issue very seriously. But the tenants of the vineyard owner don't want to give to the vineyard owner what belongs to him.

They don't want to give to God what belongs to God. And so God sends his son. Jesus. And so Jesus is sent into the world by God because he understands that the world does not want to turn to

him.

The world, those in the world, do not want to give to God what actually belongs to God. And it's going to take Jesus in order for that to happen.

They kill Jesus. And this is why Jesus quotes Psalm 118. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord's doing.

[14:44] And it is marvelous in our eyes. What's the motivation here? Well, the motivation, if you remember, is the same as the rich young ruler last week. How can I avoid losing what I have?

How can I avoid losing what I have? Think how many decisions you make on a daily or a weekly basis that fall into the category of loss aversion. Not greed as in I want more.

But rather, how can I not lose what I have? And what if it really is the case that the one thing that you are not willing to lose is the one thing that's stopping you from coming to Christ like the rich young ruler?

These vineyard owners here are in the same, not owners, the tenants are in the same issue, same problem. They don't want to give to God what belongs to God, and therefore they suffer themselves by not belonging to God.

Well, they depart. They want to arrest Jesus, but they can't because they have enough perception to figure out that Jesus has told this parable against them. They understand. Jesus has made it quite pointed at these people.

[15:56] So they send some of their buddies. Verse 13. Some Pharisees are sent, and some Herodians are sent, and they go to Jesus with this question. The question is, can we or should we pay taxes to Caesar?

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? But remember the motivation for the question. The motivation for the question is, I want to trap Jesus. I want to trip Jesus up.

Jesus has managed to get us into a tight spot. Let's see if we can do it the same to Jesus. And the reason they ask this question is this, and this is why it's full of hypocrisy.

If we pay taxes to Jesus, Caesar, won't that compromise their devotion to God? Remember the parable. Devotion to God is giving to God what belongs to God.

And here they are pretending to be devoted to God by asking this question, saying, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? In other words, won't it make us a hypocrite if we give to Caesar?

[16:58] Won't that compromise our devotion to God? Jesus knows that the question is full of hypocrisy because he's just told a parable in which they are not giving to God what belongs to God, let alone giving anything to anybody else.

The issue is whether or not they are willing to give to God what belongs to God. So Jesus brilliantly, wonderfully, lovingly gives exactly the same answer that he does in the parable.

Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar. And give to God the things that belong to God.

Now before we go any further, I'm going to quote you a quote that I've actually brought to you before from someone you will meet, I'm sure, by the name of Irenaeus.

He lived a very, very long time ago. But Irenaeus had this to say, that God is in need of nothing.

And that is something that you really need to understand. God doesn't need me.

He doesn't need you. He doesn't need a church. He doesn't need people. He doesn't need the world. And therefore, if God doesn't need any of it, there has to be another reason for why we exist.

[18:20] There has to be another reason for all of this. And the reason is that he doesn't need you, but he wants you. That every act of God's will is an act of love towards you.

He doesn't need you in order that you must give him something in return. That you must be his slaves or servants because he is lacking something. No, no, no. God doesn't need anything.

Rather, you need God. And the reason why God created you is so that you could share in that goodness.

The reason why God wants you to worship him is because worship belongs to God.

And by worshiping God in spirit and in truth, you are spiritually whole. You are everything that God wants you to be. You're everything that God has intended you to be.

So the reason why worship is so central is because we gain our spiritual faculties. We become spiritually alert. We become spiritually topped up. But the moment we become void of our worship of God, we then suffer spiritually.

[19:24] We no longer have ears to hear the word of God. We no longer have eyes to see things as God sees them. We no longer really have voices that want to praise God. Or if we do, our hearts have been detached from our tongue for such long time that Jesus has to say things like, You honor

me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me.

In other words, if we don't have God first, it's not that God misses out on anything. Rather, we do. We sort of shrivel up and become dehumanized.

Less of a person. When we keep ourselves from giving to God what belongs to God. Irenaeus said this, That God himself is indeed having need of nothing, But granting communion with himself to those who stood in need of it, And sketching out like an architect a plan of salvation to those who pleased him.

In other words, God created you not because he needed you, But God created you because he wanted you to share in him. God created you not because he needed you to give him something, But God created you because you need him to give you something.

God created you so that you could share in his goodness. God created you so that you could share in the very love that he has for us. In fact, every act of his will is an act of love concerning us.

[20 : 56] God created you so that you could share in the very good news. I mean, that's tremendously good news. That God doesn't actually need me, but he wants me.

That God doesn't actually need you, but he wants you. I'd rather be wanted than needed. I'd always rather be wanted than needed.

And that's the type of God you belong to. That's God who wants you to know that he is like that. God wants you. And he wants you for this reason.

The parable here seems on one surface to be about a vineyard, tenants, landowners, all of this thing. The real issue is the fruit. The vineyard owner sends servants to get the fruit that belongs to him.

The vineyard, the rest of the tenants, get to share in the fruit of the vineyard that belongs to the vineyard owner. But the vineyard owner wants his portion. He wants what belongs to him.

[21 : 59] And, of course, they don't want to give it up. So Jesus then answers it in this issue over paying taxes, answers the question of whether or not it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.

And the answer is this. Give to God what belongs to God. Let me put it simply. The reason they say, is it lawful, is because they want to know whether or not they're going to compromise themselves by paying taxes.

Jesus knows that it's full of hypocrisy because they are not giving to God what belongs to God. So forget about what they're giving to other people. They're not actually giving to God what belongs to God in the first place.

So listen to the response of Jesus carefully. Jesus asked for a denarius, the coin, and then he says to them, whose likeness and inscription is on the coin?

They say, in response to Jesus, Caesar's, says Jesus, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar and give to God the things that are God's.

[23 : 08] Now, I think there's something we can infer from here, and it's this, that if they already have the coin to give to Jesus, then they are already carrying around the currency to pay Caesar. Caesar. They're already engaged in that type of thing.

That's pretty important when you bring it down in today's context, the things that we hold on to, the things that we have. When Jesus says, bring me a denarius, that's a test in itself to see whether or not anyone actually has a denarius, to see whether or not anyone is actually carrying around the currency of Caesar.

So this whole idea of, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? Well, you're carrying his currency. But Jesus' point is this, that if Caesar has managed to get his image on the coin, that if Caesar has managed to get his likeness on the coin, then give to Caesar the things that belongs to Caesar.

But this is his point. Make sure you give to God that which he has got his image on. You.

You. You are made in the image of God. You have God's likeness on you. And so, sure, give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar.

[24 : 28] But you who are created in the image of God, you make sure that you give to God, you, who belong to God. That's his point.

That's the whole point here. If Caesar's managed to get his image on a coin, then give it to him. And if God has managed to get his image on you, which he has, then you give yourself to him.

But that's the very thing they're not doing. That's how they're robbing God. But not only are they robbing God, they're robbing themselves.

Because by keeping themselves from God, they are keeping themselves from someone who doesn't need anything from them, but who wants to share his goodness with them. Just like those in the temple, not only are they robbing God, but they are robbing themselves.

So you, as you sit here this evening, made in the image of God, you belong to him. Because God has managed to get his image on you. Also remember the parable of how it ends.

[25 : 44] And it ends with Jesus saying the words from Psalm 118, that the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and this was the Lord's doing. And it is marvelous in our sight.

Elsewhere, Jesus says this, that I have come to seek and to save the lost. I have come to seek and to save those who are made in the image of God. I've come to get those type of people to bring them back to God, just like the servants did, just like the prophets did, came to God's people to get them to turn back to him.

I have come for exactly the same reason. The only difference is you can't get rid of me. For the stone that the builders rejected becomes the cornerstone. You can't get rid of Jesus.

And it's that very truth that makes this whole thing so marvelous. That Jesus doesn't go away. That yes, you reject him, but in rejecting Jesus, Jesus is still chasing you.

Jesus is still seeking and saving you, ultimately, on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus does not give up on his mission because his mission is not thinking about what you want or what is best for you, but rather that God deserves to be worshipped.

[27 : 03] He is rendering to God through his life, death, and resurrection, you. He is giving back to God the things that belong to God, you.

And that's the foundation of our faith. That's the very foundation of our salvation, that in Jesus, in his life, in his death, and in his resurrection, he gives us back to God because we belong to him. That's why it's marvelous. Because we, we reject him. We kill him. We, if we come face to face with God, turn our face from him.

But Jesus continues. And in continuing, he brings us to God. Why? Because the whole point is that everything belongs to God.

The vineyard is his. The people in the vineyard belong to God. The fruit of the vineyard belong to him. But God is in need of nothing. And so the reason why God goes after you in his son, Jesus Christ, is not because God needs anything, but rather because he wants you to share in his goodness.

[28 : 22] And God deserves to be worshipped. And in you, worshipping God, you become the person, the very person that God has created you to be. Jesus is restoring you back to the very person, the very image, the very likeness of God.

That's salvation. That's the purpose of Jesus' coming. Here's a few considerations then as we sort of close this up.

Parables are given to see whether or not you can perceive. So do you perceive? Do you this evening have ears to hear the things that you are hearing?

Do you have a heart that is open to receive the words that are spoken here by Jesus himself that I'm just speaking on behalf of him? Are you able to see that because you are made in the image of God, therefore you belong to God?

Are you able to perceive that if it's right to give to others what belongs to them, that it is equally right to give to God what belongs to him? You belong to him because you have his likeness on you.

[29 : 31] Now Jesus is not affirming here that people should be allowed to take more than what they do, like Caesar. Caesar's taxes were very, very heavy.

He's not for a moment saying that it's right to give to Caesar more than is due to him. What he's affirming is that if Caesar's got his image on it, then give it to him. And if God has got his image on you, then you give yourself to him.

Zacchaeus understood this, didn't he? Zacchaeus understood that all the taxes he took was not right and so upon conversion when Jesus says, I've come to seek and to save the lost, he repays those taxes four times for the amount that he has taken illegally, wrongly, immorally from the people.

Jesus is reordering priorities when it comes to God. Secondly then, as we conclude, that this means that not only does your life belong to God, but everything that comes from your life equally belongs to God.

thoughts and words and deeds, they belong to God because you're made after his likeness. You're made in his image.

[30 : 45] And remember, all of this is the case not because God needs it. God is in need of nothing. But rather because God wants you to share in him.

God wants you to share in his goodness. God wants you to share in everything that he has. That's the purpose.

And that's the issue here. If God doesn't need you, then you really have to think about why you have a relationship with him. And if God doesn't need you, you have to think about why you should have a relationship with him.

And it's very simple because he's not on the take. God isn't engaging in a relationship with you because he's trying to take something from you. Rather, it's because he's trying to give something to you.

God doesn't need you. And therefore, your relationship with him can only be explained because he wants to share what he has with you.

[31 : 50] Don't be like the rich young ruler who made the decision to not lose what he had but then to lose Jesus. And don't be like the tenants here who want to hold on to everything they have and at the same time miss out on and reject Jesus.

Rather, come to God. Rather, do as Jesus says and give to God what belongs to God. You belong to God. Amen.

Amen.