

A PARABLE OF REJECTED AUTHORITY

Mark 12:1-12

Intro: In our most recent studies in the Gospel of Mark, we have seen that the Lord knew that His time had come to do primarily what He had come to earth to do, and that was to offer Himself as a sacrifice to God for the salvation of sinners. And so He moved from northern Galilee down to southern Galilee, and primarily to Jerusalem. Having arrived there, He spent His days in Jerusalem and His nights in Bethany. Though we are not told where in Bethany, it was probably in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

He made a spectacular entrance into the city, usually called His Triumphant Entry, after which He went into the Temple for a brief time, looked around to see what was going on, and then returned to Bethany. On His return to Jerusalem the next morning He cursed the fig tree which had nothing on it but leaves, and we learned the significance of that. As He went on into the city of Jerusalem and into the Temple, He drove out those who were selling animals for sacrifices, turned over the tables of the money changers, and put a stop to the people who were coming and going for commercial purposes. He told them that His house, the temple, was to be “called of all nations the house of prayer,” but they had “made it a den of thieves.” The scribes and chief priests heard what He had done, and they wanted to kill Him because of it. However, they feared what the people might do if they did anything to the Lord, because they had been greatly impressed with the Lord’s teaching. And so the Lord and His disciples went out of the temple, and, presumably, back to Bethany.

The next day the Lord and His disciples returned to Jerusalem, and it was there that He gave them the lesson on prayer that we find in chapter 11, beginning with verse 22.

Then they went on to the temple again, and the religious leaders of the Jews were waiting for Him. We are told that the group consisted of “the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders.” They immediately confronted Him and asked Him by what authority He had done what He had done in the temple. The Lord told them that He would answer their question if they would answer a question for Him. And without waiting for a response from them He asked them the question which is recorded for us in verse 30 of Mark 11: “The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?” And the Lord demanded an immediate answer. They didn’t

realize it, but the Lord was exercising His authority over them when He said, “Answer Me.”

These Jewish leaders immediately recognized that they were, as we sometimes say, *on the horns of a dilemma*. This means that the Jews were in trouble which ever way they answered the Lord. If they said that John’s ministry was “from heaven,” meaning, *from God*, then the Lord would say, “Why then did ye not believe him?” They would have been in the position of rejecting a man and his message who had come from God. On the other hand, if they said, “Of men,” they were afraid of what the people might do. And so they took the coward’s way out, and refused to answer the Lord’s question. And so the Lord refused to answer their question. This all was done before many people, and so it must have been very humiliating to those Jewish leaders.

At this point the Lord began to speak directly to them in the presence of the people and the His own disciples, telling them one of His many famous parables. Now I want to read this parable to you.

I. THE PARABLE (Mark 12:1-11).

I want to read the parable to you. Try to picture yourself with the disciples, these Jewish leaders, and perhaps several hundred Jewish people as the Lord spoke this parable.

(Read Mark 12:1-12.)

You will find this parable in both Matthew and Luke. But it is not separated in them by a chapter division like it is here in Mark. So it is easier to see that it followed immediately the Jews attempt to find out by what authority the Lord had done what He had done in the Temple. Verse 12 here in Mark 12 contains the clue that the parable was the Lord’s response to the Jewish leaders. In fact, Matthew tells us that the Lord gave two parables (see Matt. 21:28-32), but, since we are studying Mark’s Gospel, we will confine ourselves to the one parable that Mark has recorded for us. Luke’s account is given in Luke 20:9-19, but he also indicates that immediately the Jews renewed their efforts to find some way they would be able to arrest the Lord, and turn Him over to the Roman authorities.

What is a parable? The word comes to us from the Greek. The Greek word for parable is παραβολή. The παρά is a preposition which can have

several meanings according to the way it is used, but here it means *beside*. The last part of the word *parable*, the b-l-e, is from the verb βάλλω, which means to throw, or to put or place. So a parable is a story, or some kind of an account, which is told with the idea of conveying some important truth. The dictionary actually defines a parable as “a comparison, specifically a short fictitious narrative from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn” (*Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 718).

So what the Lord told in this story did not actually happen, but he made it up for the purpose of getting a particular truth across to all of the people. The Jews, who really had no interest in our Lord’s teaching, nor were they concerned about the truth, yet they understood that the Lord was talking about them.

And so when you take the whole context into consideration, you can see why I have called my message this morning, dealing with this parable, **A PARABLE OF REJECTED AUTHORITY**. The issue between the Lord and the Jewish leaders was, *authority*. *That is where the ministry of the Lord Jesus clashed with the scribes and Pharisees. The Jews strongly believed that theirs was the highest authority among the Jews. But their authority was self-made and self-imposed upon the people. The authority of our Lord Jesus Christ was the authority by which He had been vested (to use a technical word), by God the Father. Cf. Matthew 28:18. And so there is no higher authority than the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 5:25-27 we read these words spoken by our Lord while He was here on earth. Listen to what He had to say:*

25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

Therefore, as the Son of God and the Son of man, the Lord in doing what He did in the Temple, was actually executing the authority given to Him in His humanity to denounce what the scribes and Pharisees had agreed that they would do in the Temple of the Lord, making the house of prayer into a den of thieves. And this was only the beginning of the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will act as the Judge of all men and nations! Men may despise and ignore Him now, but the day is coming when it will be impossible for anyone to escape the judgment of God.

I think it is possible that fathers and mothers from the beginning of time up to the present day, have made up stories to tell their children. Perhaps you remember that from your childhood. Children know that the stories are not true, but they beg their parents to tell them a story. So the Lord was doing this to get eternal truth into the hearts of adults who were really just children in their understanding of the truth of God.

Now let us seek to understand the parable.

II. THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE.

The Lord told this story which probably, as far as the setting was concerned, had been duplicated thousands of times. That is, a man with money, who had property, planted a vineyard, and set up all of the equipment for producing wine, and then, instead of operating it all himself, he leased it out to others. That is the idea in verse 1 where we read that the Lord said that this man “let it out to husbandmen.” He leased it to them.

When I went off to school in Texas, like many of my fellow students, I preached in small country churches. Most of the men in these churches were farmers, cotton farmers. But usually they were poor men who did not have the money to buy property of their own, and so they leased property from those who did have it, and usually paid the lease when they picked and sold their cotton. That is the kind of situation that we have here in this parable.

Evidently the men in the story that the Lord was telling had said that as a part of their lease they would return some of the fruit, a percentage of their harvest, to the owner. When that time came, the owner sent for his fruit, but the husbandmen had decided in the meantime that they were not going to give any fruit to the owner of the land.

So when the first servant of the landowner came to get the fruit, verse 3 tells us that the husbandmen “caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.

So the landowner sent another servant, and verse 4 tells us what the husbandmen did to him.

Verse 5 tells us that the landowner sent a third servant, and this time the husbandmen became more violent. They killed this third one. And this

rejection of the landowners continued many times, some were beaten, others were killed. We can't help but be impressed with the patience of the landowner, almost where he could be criticized for sacrificing so many of his servants in order to get the fruit.

But then the landowner came up with the idea that the men to whom he had leased his property would give the fruit they had agreed to give him if he would send them his son, his only son, whom he loved very much. He said, "They will reverence my son" (v. 6b). But what did they do when the son came to them? Read verses 7 and 8 and you will see what they did, and why they did it.

That was all that the landowner would take. And anyone hearing this story would be inclined to say that the landowner waited too long and sacrificed too many of his servants. We would feel that what the landowner finally did, he was fully justified in doing, killing the landowners, and leasing out the land to others.

Probably most of the children in our church, at least would a little help, would be able to tell who the people in this story represented. Well, let me help you with this.

III. THE APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE.

The landowner represents God. God owns everything. He owns the whole world. It all belongs to Him. He made it, and he has let it out to the people who live in the different nations around the world. Most of us may own the property on which we live, but we only have it as long as we live. When we die, we can't take anything with us. So it is not really ours. It actually belongs to God.

Now if the landowner represents God, what about the landowner's son. How does he fit into the picture? Well, that's an easy question to answer from the description that we have of him in verse 6. The landowner had just one son, and the landowner loved his son very, very much. This description fits the Lord Jesus perfectly, doesn't it? God has only one Son. And God even spoke from heaven while Christ was here on earth, saying more than once, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am wellpleased." And the Bible also tells that "the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

What did the Jews and the Roman soldiers do to Him when He came into the world? They killed Him, didn't they? They treated Him just like they treated the prophets of the Old Testament. That is the history of the world. That is what the scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests, and the elders wanted to do to the Lord Jesus. *And they finally succeeded in doing just that a few days after the Lord told this story, this parable.*

But who did those servants represent who were sent by the landowner to get fruit from the husbandmen. They were the prophets whom the Lord sent to turn the people to the Lord. This is the story of the OT. And while the Lord was here on earth He reminded the Jews of that day what God had done, and what the nation had done in response. Listen to these words of the Lord Jesus:

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Matt. 23:37-38).

But the tragic reaction of the Jews toward the Lord Jesus is magnified when we stop to realize that if the Lord had come to the United States, or to England, or to France, or to any other nation on the face of the earth, He would have been treated exactly as He was treated in Jerusalem.

But how did all of this turn out? Does the Lord's teaching stop at verse 8? Let's think for just a moment about:

IV. THE OUTCOME.

Here I want to call your attention to verses 9, 10, 11, and 12.

I want to point out to you several things in the last four verses of our text that will sober you, I hope, and also encourage you.

First, did the landowner give up on his project? Absolutely not. He took the vineyard away from those to whom it was given, and he gave it to others. This is not to say that God is through with the Jewish people, but it certainly is an indication of what we see taking place in the book of Acts when *beginning at Jerusalem, the Gospel went throughout Judea, then to Samaria, and ultimately as it has today to the whole Gentile world.* That which seemed to mean the defeat of the plan and purpose of God regarding salvation when Jesus Christ was crucified on the Cross,

was the very act which secured its success. We see in this parable that the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ which was opposed and supposedly threatened by the Jews, has now been extended to the whole world. We have this at least suggested in verse 9.

Second, that which happened to the Lord Jesus Christ supports the authority and the complete reliability of the Word of God. Jesus Christ, despised and rejected of men, has become “the head of the corner,” “the chief cornerstone,” of the work of God among men.

Third, note that glory is not due to men. If it has been dependent upon man, the work of salvation would never have been finished and God’s purposes would have been forever set aside. But “this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes” for that very reason. This is what salvation is; it is “the Lord’s doing.” I look at you and say, “This is the Lord’s doing.” And I hope that when you look at me, I hope you are saying the same thing. If you knew my heart, you know that I wouldn’t be standing before you if the Lord had not change me. And oh, as the parable itself is a testimony to the patience of God, and the persistence of God, so His dealing with each one of us is also a testimony to the fact that God is still patient and still persists in the accomplishment of His purposes. He never gives up on those of us whom He has chosen to save and to make us like our Savior.

But there is a sobering note in verse 12, which I sincerely hope is not to be seen in any person here today. Think of all that the Jews saw the Lord do, and all of the wonderful truth they heard Him teach, and the loving and gracious manner He always displayed, and yet they left His presence that day knowing that they had failed to do up to that point what they were intent on doing, would nevertheless continue on until they saw the Lord nailed to the Cross.

There are a lot of religious people in the world today, and some who are in our church, who really don’t want to have anything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope you are not one of them. If you have been like that up until the time you came today, maybe forced by your parents to come, I trust that the Lord will be gracious to you, and that He will do a work in your heart right where you set so that you and everyone who knows you will say about you, “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” May God grant that it will be so.