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“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, A-men; and have the keys of hell and of death,” Revelation 1:18.

Exalt the Son

Lesson Aim: To celebrate the victory of the risen Christ.

L265. Date: March 1978. **Text:** Mark 12:1-11. **Topic:** Christ: Parables of.

Suppose Jesus were to ask you believers the question, **“Whom say ye that I am?”** You could answer with confidence, **“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”** (Mathew 16:15, 16). The reply would come so readily to your mind. The words would fall so easily from your lips.

It was not always so. In the days of His flesh, many who knew Jesus' claim of special relationship with God found it difficult to agree with Him. There was much open opposition to Him. That opposition is the subject of today's study.

What should men think of Jesus Christ? The reply of Jesus was, **“All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him”** (John 5:23).

Many of the Jews who heard Jesus express those words considered them blasphemy. Only a few, who had been enlightened by the heavenly Father, recognized that Jesus was God's Son, the Messiah of Israel, and the Savior of the world. The parable of the wicked husbandmen was given to help men see the seriousness of not accepting God's testimony concerning His Son.

1. CONTEXT OF THE PARABLE

The parable of the wicked husbandmen was given on Tuesday of the Passion Week. That Tuesday is commonly called “The Day of Controversy.”

Jesus was challenged by the Jewish leaders on that day. He was the hero of the people since His triumphal entry on Sunday and His exhibition of authority on Monday. His popularity and authority had to be checked, so the leaders of the opposition to His teaching joined forces to challenge Him on Tuesday.

A. The Sanhedrin challenged Jesus.

“By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?” (Mark 11:28). Those leaders considered themselves to be the authority in Judaism and resented Jesus' intrusion into their area.

He replied by asking them what was the authority behind the preaching and baptizing of John the Baptist. Was it from heaven or from men? If they answered, “From heaven,” He would inquire why they did not submit to it. If they answered, “From men,” they feared they would lose favor with the people. They replied, “We cannot tell.” Jesus countered, **“Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things”** (Mark 11:33).

Then Jesus exposed them by three parables. (1) The first parable was concerning two sons who were asked of their father to work in the vineyard. One agreed but did not go; the other refused but repented and went. He concluded, **“The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”** (Matthew 21:28-32).

(2) The second parable was concerning the wicked husbandmen the text of today's study (Mark 12:1-12; Matthew 21:33-46).

(3) The third parable was concerning the wicked rejection of an invitation from a king to attend the wedding feast of his son, and the judgment which followed. He concluded that parable with the statement, **“For many are called, but few are chosen,”** Matthew 22:14.

B. The Pharisees and Herodians (who were natural enemies) joined against Jesus.

They proposed the question whether it was right to give tribute to Caesar. Jesus left them speechless with the reply, **“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”** (Mark 12:17).

C. The Sadducees challenged Him.

They came with the proposition of a woman who had married each of seven brothers after the death of each brother with no child being born to their union. They asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Jesus replied that in the resurrection people neither marry nor are they given in marriage (Mark 12:18-27).

D. Jesus counter-attacked His opponents.

He challenged the Pharisees with the question of how the Messiah could be the Son of David and the Lord of David (Mark 12:35-37). Then He solemnly denounced the hypocrisy of both the scribes and the Pharisees (Mark 12:38; Matthew 23:1-39; Luke 20:45-47).

It was in the midst of such controversy and opposition that Jesus gave the parable of the wicked husbandmen. At the end of that day, Jesus returned to Bethany where He enjoyed a dinner in the home of Simon, a leper whom He had healed. He was anointed by the expensive ointment of Mary.

Judas Iscariot went forth in anger from that setting to agree with the enemies for the betrayal of the Lord. Jesus knew Himself to be the Son who would be slain by the wicked husbandmen; He knew it at the time He gave the parable.

II. CONTENT OF THE PARABLE

A. Consider the vineyard of which the parable speaks (Mark 12:1; Matthew 21:33; Luke 20:9).

The owner had much invested in the vineyard. He had bought the ground, prepared the soil, set out the vines, built a fence for protection and a watchtower against thieves, and put a winepress in it. He entrusted it to certain renters who seemed to be honorable men. There was every prospect that the vineyard would be productive to the profit of the renters and the owner.

B. Consider the servants who were sent to collect the rent at the harvest time (Mark 12:2-5; Matthew 21:34,36; Luke 20:10-12).

They were obedient to their master's orders. They did not come representing their own interests, but that of their master. They were justified in their requirements. They sought only the due portion of the harvest which had been agreed upon as rent. Yet, they were shamefully treated.

Many servants were sent. At least three servants were sent, at three different times (Luke 20:10). It is possible that more than three went to represent their master's interest (Mark 12:2-5). The time span between the appearance of the servants gave the renters time to consider their ways and pay the due rent, but they did not.

C. Consider the son whom the owner of the vineyard sent (Mark 12:6-8; Matthew 21:37-39; Luke 20:13-15). He was highly esteemed by his father, a "beloved son." He was respected by honorable men, so the father thought of the renters, "**They will reverence my son**" (Mark 12:6). The son received no more recognition or respect than did the servants who were treated shamefully and even murdered. Disrespect of the son indicated the

renter's disrespect for the father of the son.

D. Consider the renters (Mark 12:1-9). They had been honored with the owner's trust. He had let out his vineyard to them and went into another country **“for a long time”** (Luke 20:9). They were greedy for the owner's property, so they refused to pay the rent and plotted to kill the heir. They made a tragic and fatal mistake. They supposed that the owner, then absent at a great distance, would never return to the land to claim his own property. Though given repeated opportunities to pay the rent (at least four, for three servants and the son went to them), they not only withheld the rent, but they even murdered certain of the servants and the son.

E. Consider the judgment (Mark 12:9; Matthew 21:42, 44). It was severe. He resolved to “destroy” those wicked men. It was just. The renters were wicked beyond description. They were guilty of unnumbered assaults and at least two murders — a servant and the son. They deserved the judgment they received. By killing those innocent men who came representing the rightful claims of the owner of the vineyard, they forfeited their own right to live (Genesis 9:6).

The parable is not pretty. Sin is never pretty, and the parable was intended to represent the seriousness and the ultimate judgment upon sinners.

III. APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE

A. The parable can be applied to Israel as a nation (Mark 12:12). The vineyard entrusted to their care would represent the revelation of the true God given to Israel. The servants who were sent to represent their master's interest were the prophets of God whom He rose up early to send to Israel (II Chronicles 36:15, 16). They rejected the prophets and even killed some of them (Acts 7:51, 53).

The son who was sent by the owner of the vineyard represents Jesus, the Christ, whom God sent in **“the fulness of the time”** (Galatians 4:4) and **“in the likeness of sinful flesh”** (Romans 8:3) and of whom He testified, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”** (Matthew 3:17). They rejected the Son and killed him (Luke 23).

The judgment which came upon the wicked husbandmen comes upon Israel in a two-fold way. (1) She has been set apart from God's primary work during the church age. (2) She will answer in eternal judgment for her general rejection of God's Son.

B. The parable can be applied to Christians today.

Believers are the “renters” in that God has entrusted them with the good

news of redemption and regeneration in Jesus Christ. The rent which they are to pay is to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:21).

Just as the growing season is limited in nature, so the time for God's people to produce fruit to the glory of God is limited. Abuse of their opportunity will result in loss of their opportunity. Many of God's servants (preachers, evangelists, missionaries, Bible teachers, and other faithful saints of God) are trying to stir up Christians to produce more fruit today. Believers must not reject them as did the wicked husbandmen in the parable.

The Bible teaches a doctrine of divine election. It is important to realize that election includes much more than just to be saved. God chose believers that they might each bear the image of His only Son (Romans 8:29). He foreordained that they should live a life of good works (Ephesians 2:10). He made that possible by making them acceptable in His beloved Son (Ephesians 1:6). If God is not glorified in your life, you have missed the purpose of your election.

God chose Israel that He might bless all the nations of the earth through the revelation He would give through her (Genesis 12:3). Her interest gradually turned inward upon herself, just as the husbandmen forgot the interests of the owner of the vineyard and sought to keep all profit to themselves.

God judged her for that and turned to the church for His great purpose. Christians must not make the same great mistake that ancient Israel made. God said to her, **“The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”** (Matthew 21:43).

Christians are the keepers of God's vineyard today. Let them take care how they return to the Owner of the vineyard all that is due Him. Believers can do that by exalting the once-crucified Jesus of Nazareth as the living Lord of Glory through the faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel for the salvation of men. Will you join in producing that kind of harvest for God?

Questions for discussion

1. How does John 5:23 relate to today's lesson?
2. What happened on Sunday and Monday of Passion Week?
3. Why is Tuesday called “The Day of Controversy”?
4. How did the Sanhedrin challenge Jesus?
5. How did the Pharisees challenge Jesus?
6. How did the Sadducees challenge Jesus?

7. How is the parable of the wicked husbandmen an answer to them?
8. What is the content of the parable?
9. How did the parable apply to the nation of Israel?
10. How does the parable apply to Christians today?