



## **Mark 12:1–12**

12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent

him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. 6 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 7 “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: “The

stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” 12 Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

## **Reflection**

You could cut the tension with a knife. The scene is the Temple courts, more specifically the Court of the Gentiles, a huge courtyard that engulfs the Temple in Jerusalem, approximately 13.5 hectares in size. Imagine an area the size of twenty football fields crawling with religious pilgrims from

all over the Mediterranean world. They've come on an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Holy City, to celebrate the ancient Passover festival. All the great preachers and teachers of Judaism have come out for the occasion. They're teaching in the temple courts, standing in the shade of its magnificent colonnades that surrounded three of its four sides. Only, the star attraction this year is Jesus of Nazareth. His crowds are by far and away the largest, and even more so since an authoritative looking delegation of chief priests, teachers of the law and elders have made their way over to him. Expectations are running high. People are leaning in, pressing up against one another, in anticipation of the encounter. There's going to be high drama – the prophet from Galilee who entered Jerusalem like a king riding on a donkey

only to head straight to the Temple and clear out the Royal Stoa (the Temple marketplace), referring to the Temple as his house, and the administration of the chief priests as a 'den of robbers' – up against the powers that be in Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world.

The chief priests, teachers of the law, and members of the leading Jewish ruling families are no fools. They can read the crowds and sense their mood; the sense of expectation around the one from David's line who entered Jerusalem like a conquering king, who performed miracles right throughout Galilee and even in the Temple courts themselves, and who looks and speaks like the long-promised Messiah. No, they are no fools; this matter will need to be handled very careful-

ly indeed if they are to keep their power-base and political influence in Jerusalem. And so in yesterday's passage the high stakes game of chess began – their opening gambit, a question as to the origin of Jesus' authority. But the grandmaster sitting opposite them had an opening of his own; a counter-question that leaves them speechless and looking very foolish before the delighted onlookers now squarely in Jesus' camp. Jesus asked them,

“I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?

Check mate. In a single move. Jesus' authority came from heaven. John the Bap-

tist, the one sent by God to prepare a way for the Messiah, the one loved by faithful Jews throughout Galilee and Judea including the crowds here on this day, baptised Jesus as the Messiah. And at that very moment the heaven's were torn open, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and God himself thundered from heaven, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' Jesus' authority is as the Messiah and Son of God, and they dare not say otherwise, for fear of the crowds. And so tails between their legs and embarrassment, shame and barely concealed anger written across their faces all they can manage in reply is "We don't know."

In today's passage it is Jesus' turn to go on the offensive. Having made a mockery

of their attempt of a trap, Jesus tells this parable to continue the theme of what he thinks of their leadership of the Temple and the people of God. Mark 12:1–12,

12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He



sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. 6 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 7 “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” 12 Then the chief priests,

the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Some of Jesus' parables are hard to interpret; this one is not. In the Old Testament Scriptures the vineyard was a familiar image of God's heavy investment of time, work, care and patience in his people, an investment made in anticipation of a fruitful return (e.g. Isa 5:1–7, Ezek 15:1–6; 19:10–14). The vineyard is Israel, the servants sent to her, the prophets, the vineyard owner, God himself, the son and heir, Jesus and the tenant farmers, the delegation presently confronting Jesus all the while plotting his murder in their hearts.

It's a testament to Jesus' story telling abilities that in Luke's version of this account, after telling the sordid tale of the tenant farmers beating the owners servants and then finally murdering his son in an attempt to have the vineyard for themselves, the whole crowd cries out as one, 'God forbid!' (Luke 20:16).

God forbid the crimes of the Jewish religious establishment down throughout the centuries in abusing and rejecting the prophets and God forbid the behaviour of this delegation of chief priests, teachers of the law and elders plotting right now in their hearts to do away with the Son of God.

But Scripture must be fulfilled. And Jesus

reminds them that it is written,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

The Son of Man must be handed over to the chief priests and teachers of the law in order for him to die for the sins of the world, but woe to those who are involved in his death.

## **Think & Pray**

What is unfolding before our eyes is a tragedy of the greatest proportions. The Son of God riding triumphantly into Jerusalem as the long-promised Messiah and Saviour of the World, only to be brutally

murdered by the leaders of God's people. How could this possibly come about? That the ones entrusted with leadership of God's people, who should have been most longing for the arrival of his Son, instead become his murderer?

The answer is greed and power; the undoing of so many in positions of authority. Perhaps God has placed you in a position of authority in our society or in the church. He's placed you there as a servant of all, to do good in our world and to put the needs of others above yourself. That's the type of leadership Jesus modelled to us in his life and death. I wonder, is this how you hold your authority? Little by little the trappings of their positions had begun to change the characters of the chief priests and teachers of the law. They'd become

puffed up with pride and had compromised their principles in order to curry favour with the Romans. They'd succumbed to the love of money and the lust for power. Their religion and social conduct had become a front for their self-seeking hearts. For those of us that God has placed in positions of authority – in our families, our workplaces and our churches – we all need to be on the lookout for this slippery slope; otherwise we might one day be found to be murdering the Son of God in front of the eyes of our children, work colleagues and neighbours. If we're overbearing with our family members, or power-hungry at work, or abuse the authority God has given us in any way, Jesus might as well be dead to those that we are trying to witness to.

Spend some time praying this morning that you and I would handle our authority just like Jesus. Pray also for the conduct of your church leaders that they would be like him as well. Pray against hypocrisy, greed and power-trips that can so easily undermine the gospel. Instead pray that both our leaders and ourselves might aspire to the kind of greatness that sees us lay our lives down as servants of all.