

Mark 12:1-12
Rose Hill PC

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Intro: Great to be with you this morning in my role as your summer Sabbatical support pastor. While Brian is away I, along w your terrific leadership teams, will not just be "holding things together," but will be working with you to further/advance the mission of Jesus in this place.

Preaching-wise, this week and next we'll finish up the Parables series from Mark's Gospel. Then for the remainder of the summer we'll be looking at a dozen or so Psalms. As you may know, the Psalms are the most quoted OT book in the NT. The NT writers loved the Psalms. And I trust we'll be blessed as we consider them together.

But back to Mark's Gospel and the parables of Jesus, looking today at Mark 12:1-12...

And Jesus began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. 2 When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. 6 He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 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?" 12 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.

As you know, when it comes to interpreting scripture, context is important. Like our lives, WHERE something is said or done makes a difference. Behavior that's perfectly fine at a Mariner's game is totally inappropriate at a memorial service. What's happening around us shapes/determines the meaning of our behavior.

So the key to understanding our parable in Mark 12 is actually found in the context of events of Mark 11. And we see in Mk 11 **1) Jesus' Triumphal Entry, 2) Jesus' Cleansing of the Temple Money Changers**, and then at the end of Mk 11 we read **"And as Jesus 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."**

His opponents won't answer Jesus' question, so Jesus refuses to answer theirs.

But all ch 11 provides the context, the lead-in, the setting to our parable.

The giant question on the table - reflected in the Triumphal Entry story, the cleansing of the temple story, and this encounter between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes of the elders - is this: **what is the nature and extent of Jesus' authority?**

Just who is this guy? And the parable's answer is this: **Jesus authority is ownership authority.** It's the Father's vineyard, and the fruit of the vineyard is rightfully his.

When we hear 'vineyard' we think Napa, CA or increasingly over the years Eastern WA. When Jews of Jesus' day heard 'vineyard' in a religious context, they would think "Israel"...God's people. The parable of the Wicked Tenants (as it's usually called) is a parable about rightful authority; the rightful authority of God over his people, his vineyard. And it's an authority that Jesus carried/embraced fully. Ownership authority. Jesus is the Beloved Son who has rightful ownership authority over the people of God. That who he was/is. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were rejecting the rightful ownership authority of Jesus. That was the rub.

There are at least two key implications of this God-given "ownership authority" of Jesus. And these implications were at play in Jesus' day and in the early church (NT), and they are very much at play in our lives today.

The first is this: Jesus had/has the authority to say "This is who God is." The theological term for this is "revelation." We read in John 1:14-18...

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Key: No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

The unambiguous witness of the NT is that the only authorized version of who God is - his nature, his character - is given to us in/thru Jesus.

In Hebrews we read: **"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many & various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." (Heb. 1:1-2)**

This Christocentric understanding of who God is is SO needed by/for us today. As you know if you read the OT the great temptation/problem Israel constantly faced was idolatry. And an "idol" is basically anything that claims to represent God other than God himself. Israel was surrounded by idol-worshipping nations, and was in constant danger of compromising the Lord's self-revelation.

We today aren't faced with literal idols like Israel was, but there are all kinds of views of who God is - of what life is, of what "to be spiritual is", etc, etc - that need to be cross-checked with Jesus' authorized view. John Calvin, the great Reformation theologian, called the human heart an "idol making factory."

In John 17:3, Jesus affirmed, **“this is eternal life, that they may know... the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [He] has sent.”**

We Christians come in all different types, styles, traditions. We're global, polyglot, urban, rural, rich, poor, capitalist, socialist...all refracted thru the Protestant, RC, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and free/independent church traditions. And where two or three are gathered, there's usually a disagreement about something.

But here's something that all Christians everywhere throughout history agree on: when we say "This is what God's like...", we base our affirmation on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. He's the Word of God made flesh. He's the invisible God made visible. If we want the authorized version of who God is, we look to Jesus.

The second key implication of this God-given "ownership authority" of Jesus is this: who the Son sets free is free indeed. Or to put it another way: who the Son saves is truly saved, who the Son forgives is truly forgiven, who the Son heals is truly healed.

Our first implication of the ownership authority of Jesus focused on revelation. The second focuses on salvation, or reconciliation, or redemption. Jesus gives us an accurate picture of who God is, AND bring us - by his Cross - into relationship with God.

***If I had a big white board...pic of Jesus...big arrow pointing down (revelation), and a big arrow point up (reconciliation.) Jesus brings God to us and us to God.

***TE testimony...college, atheist, use to laugh at Xns and their faith. Thought it was stupid. But slowly my curiosity grew. Met Xns I had tremendous respect for. Read books written by obviously intelligent Xns. Slowly turned...remember the night...put my weight down on the Gospel.

What I was doing - tho I wouldn't have known to use this language at the time - was trusting that Jesus a) gave me a accurate picture of who God was/is, and b) restored my relationship with that God. That's what Jesus does for people, bec all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him by his Father and he loves us.

That's how my Xns journey started. But the truth is, that's the heartbeat of our discipleship everyday, year in and year out: learning from Jesus about who God is - his nature, character, and will, and being reconciled with that God thru the life, death, and resurrection of his Beloved Son, our Lord JC.

This morning, as we start our summer together, how are things with you and the Lord? Are you growing in your knowledge of him based on Jesus? Are you going deeper in your relationship with him based on Jesus?

