

Mark 11:27-12:12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Mark chapter 11 verse 27 to chapter 12 verse 12. And they discussed it with one another, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say, Why then did you not believe him?

But shall we say from man? They were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know. And Jesus said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

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. And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and they struck him on the head, and treated him shamefully.

And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others, some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, They will respect my son.

[1 : 32] 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. 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 marvellous in our eyes.

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. The end of Mark chapter 11 sees Jesus back in the temple again.

And there is a movement back and forth between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount in this chapter that is worth paying attention to. And we see it continuing throughout the Gospel. Jesus has entered the city like a king.

He declared judgment upon the temple. He'd healed within it. And there are people gathering around and behind him. He's the head of a movement. And now the leaders, the chief priests, the scribes, and other elders try to trap him.

[2 : 39] If his authority is from man, it can be dismissed. If his claim is that it is from God, they have grounds to move against him. So Jesus answers their question with a question.

Once again, he's challenging the authority on which they are asking the question and putting them in a position where they are trapped. The answer to the question that Jesus asks is the answer to the question that the chief priests and the elders ask.

Because John the Baptist was sent by God and his prophetic ministry was one through which God authorized and bore witness to his son. So Jesus traps those seeking to trap him, as he does on many other occasions.

The parable of the tenants that follows is important to read in the light of Israel's identity as the vineyard. Jesus introduces the parable in a way that highlights the background of Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80.

Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 to 7 reads, Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines.

[3 : 41] He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. And he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,

judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured. I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed and briars and thorns shall grow up.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed.

For righteousness, but behold an outcry. The prophecies of Isaiah have often been in the background of the book of Mark and here is no exception. We also see references in Psalm 80 verses 8 to 16.

[4 : 44] You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade. The mighty cedars with its branches.

It sent out its branches to the sea and it shoots to the river. Why then have you broken down its walls so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it and all that move in the field feed on it.

Turn again, O God of hosts. Look down from heaven and see. Have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted and for the sun whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire.

They have cut it down. May they perish at the rebuke of your face. Isaiah's parable focused upon the failure of the vineyard to produce good fruit. Jesus, however, focuses upon the wickedness of those working within it.

The fruit seems to be there but the workers are rebellious. The master is sending his servants, the prophets and finally his own son and all are being rejected. In speaking of the killing of the son within the parable, Jesus is presenting to the people who will orchestrate his death, their part in the fulfilment of this parable.

[5 : 55] Listening to the parable to this point, you can imagine that the chief priests and the scribes and the elders would have thought in terms of the background of Psalm 80, the vineyard of God has been exposed to the enemies of the Lord, to the enemies of the people who are ravaging it and they're going to pray for God to deliver them.

The real problem are the Romans or some other force that's oppressing the land from outside but even though a passage like Psalm 80 is playing in the background, the enemies of the land are not actually the Romans in this parable.

It's the elders and the chief priests and the scribes themselves and a further biblical allusion can help us to see what's taking place here. In Genesis chapter 37 18 to 20 we read of Joseph approaching his brothers.

They saw him from afar and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another here comes this dreamer come now let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.

The wicked tenants in this parable speak in a manner similar to the brothers of Joseph. They are members of the people they are the tribes of the land and they are rejecting the one that has been set apart by the father to receive the firstborn portion.

[7 : 10] By using this particular parallel maybe we could see Jesus inviting us to read his story in the light of the story of Joseph. He's the one who's going to be placed into the pit. He's the one who's going to go down into the far country.

He's the one who's going to deliver his people and he's going to be raised up seated at the right hand of power. He's going to have criminals on either side of him. He's going to provide bread and wine and the raising up of his body from the far country is going to be at the heart of God's great act of deliverance of his people.

The wicked tenants will be deprived of their position. This isn't a claim about Israel itself being dispossessed but about the wicked tenants of the chief priests and the scribes.

Their places will be taken by the twelve and others who are the true tenants of the vineyard of Israel. It also looks forward to fruit from Israel. The vineyard isn't abandoned it's given into different hands.

And Jesus quotes Psalm 118 verses 22 to 23 here a verse that is used in reference to resurrection in Acts 4 verse 11 and 1 Peter 2 verses 4 and 7.

[8 : 18] The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. The quotation interprets the parable. The chief priests and the leaders of the people might have identified the wicked tenants with the Romans or some other party.

Although it's not found in Mark's Greek there seems to be a word play behind the use of this verse with sun Ben and stone Eben being played off against each other.

The rejected sun is the rejected stone and this brings temple themes to the foreground. Jesus is the rejected stone and he becomes the cornerstone of a new temple.

In Isaiah chapter 8 verses 14 to 15 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of a fence and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and many shall stumble on it.

They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken. And Daniel chapter 2 verses 44 to 45 Later in the story Jesus will be buried in a tomb cut out of the rock.

[9 : 46] He is the stone quarried from the rock prepared as the cornerstone of a new temple of the Lord. The wicked tenants get their comeuppance but the focus of the parable ultimately rests upon the vindication of the rejected son.

Once again the response of the chief priests the scribes and the elders is determined by their fear of the people. They could not respond to Jesus question about authority concerning John the Baptist because they feared the people and once again they cannot respond properly because they fear the people.

A question to consider how might Jesus' quotation from the Psalms that opens up his parable remind us of the setting and also connect with Jesus' actions in the previous chapter?