

Mark 12 - Parable of the Vineyard Owner; Pharisees & Herodian Plot Against Jesus; The Problem of the Resurrection; The Greatest Commandment; Son of David; Widow's Mites

V. Ultimate sacrifice of the servant (Mark 11:1—16:20)

(1) Presentation and rejection of the servant (Mark 11:1—12:44)

(F) Parable of the tenants (12:1-12)

(G) Reciprocal questions (12:13-37)

(a) Three hostile questions from the Jewish leaders (12:13-34)

(i) Taxes (12:13-17)

(ii) Resurrection (12:18-27)

(iii) Law (12:28-34)

(b) Christ's defense of his deity (12:35-37)

(H) Christ rejects the Pharisees (12:38-40)

(I) Widow's mite (12:41-44)

A Busy Tuesday

The debates recorded in the following verses all took place on one busy day—Tuesday of the Passion Week:

1. The source of our Lord's authority (11:27-33)
2. The parable of the vineyard & husbandmen (12:1-12)
3. A question about taxation (12:13-17)
4. The resurrection (12:18-27)
5. The greatest commandment (12:28-34)
6. The Messiah's relationship to David (12:35-40)
7. An account of the widow's gift of two mites (12:41-44)

Mark 12

(F) Parable of the tenants (12:1-12) (Cf. Matt 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19)

1 And He began to speak to them in parables: "A **man** planted a **vineyard** and put a fence around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and leased it to **vine-growers** and went on a journey.

1 And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.

1 Then Jesus began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went abroad.

1 And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.

- Jesus addressed this parable to all the people present (Luke 20:9), but in particular to the religious leaders

- "...man" - represents God

- "...vineyard" - the vineyard was a national symbol for Israel (Ps 80:8-19; Jer 2:21; Cf. Jotham's Parable, Judges 9:7-15)

- "...vine-growers" - tenants, husbandmen; vine growers; represents Israel's religious leadership

The Principle of Expositional Constancy

- The Olive
- The Fig
- The Vine
- The Bramble
- The soils, birds, mustard seed (Matt 13)
- The woman (Matt 13; Rev 2)
- The Rock that followed them (1 Cor 10:4)
- The Stone cut without hands (Dan 2:34)
- The Stone the builders rejected (Matt 21:42)
- The Chief Cornerstone (Ps 118:22; Is 28:16; Jer 51:26; Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-7)

The Vineyard

The very Temple in which Jesus was standing featured a richly carved grapevine 70 cubits high (>100 ft) sculpted around the door which led from the porch to the Holy Place. The branches, tendrils and leaves, were of gold; the bunches hanging upon them were costly jewels. (Herod had first placed it here, and rich and patriotic Jews had continued to add to

its embellishment.) The Maccabbean coins also bore the same symbols. Jesus is using phrases directly from the Song of the Vineyard (Is 5:1-7). Just as with Israel: How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out (Ps 44:2; Ex 15:17).

[We farm a far richer vineyard than that of ancient Israel. More than the prophets, we have the Word of God and the indwelling Spirit. And we also have the testimony of the saints over the past 2,000 years. Cf. Luke 12:48!]

The parable develops the scene presented in Is 5:1-2, which is part of a prophecy of God's judgment on Israel (Cf. Ps 80:8-16). God spared no expense or effort to make Israel a choice nation. He had left Israel on its own, so to speak, after He had established the nation.

2 And at the **harvest time** he sent a **slave** to the vine-growers, in order to receive *his share* of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers.

2 At the **harvest time** he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive *some* of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers.

2 At the right time, he sent a servant to the farmers to collect from them a share of the produce from the vineyard.

2 And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard.

- "...harvest time" - the time when God expected to receive some reward for His investment in Israel

- "...a slave" - represent the prophets, whom Israel's leaders typically rejected, persecuted, and even in some cases murdered (Cf. 1 Kings 18:13; 22:27; 2 Chr 24:20-22; 36:15; Neh 9:26; Jer 37:15)

— The main point of the parable is the wicked treatment Israel's leaders had given the servants whom God had sent to them

3 And they took him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed.

3 They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

3 But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him, and sent him back empty-handed.

3 And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.

4 And again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully.

4 Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully.

4 Again, the man sent another servant to them. They beat the servant over the head and treated him shamefully.

4 And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled.

5 And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so *with* many others, beating some and killing others.

5 And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so *with* many others, beating some and killing others.

5 Then the man sent another, and that one they killed. So it was with many other servants. Some of these they beat, and others they killed.

5 And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some.

- A farmer would not use the fruit until the fifth year (Lev 19:23-25)

— In order to retain his legal rights to the property, the owner had to receive produce from the tenants, even if it was only some of the vegetables that grew between the rows of the trees or vines

— This explains why the tenants refused to give him anything: they wanted to claim the vineyard for themselves. It also explains why the owner continued to send agents to them; it was a question of authority and ownership.

The analogy to Israel is no exaggeration: Elijah was driven into the wilderness by the monarchy (1 Kings 19:1-5); Isaiah was sawn in half (according to tradition and hinted at in Heb 11:37); Zechariah was stoned to death near the altar (2 Chr 24:21); John the Baptist was beheaded. Summary: Heb 11:37-38.

6 He had one more *man to send*, **a beloved son**; he sent him to them last *of all*, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

6 He had one more *to send*, a beloved son; he sent him last *of all* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

6 He still had one more person to send, a son whom he loved. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

6 Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.

- The sending of the owner's Son constituted the supreme test for the tenant farmers

- "...a beloved son" - these words are an obvious description of Christ himself. The plot to kill him was a description of the scheming at that very time to put Jesus to death.

7 But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!'

7 But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!'

7 But those farmers told one another, 'This is the heir. Come on, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!'

7 But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.

- The husbandmen in the parable may have believed that the owner of the vineyard had died, and that he had only one son who was his heir

- They rationalized that if they killed the Son, there would be no one else to inherit the vineyard and they could retain control of it

- If the tenants could do away with the heir, they would have a clear claim to the property; so they cast him out and killed him (Cf. Heb 13:12-13). They were willing to kill to accomplish their evil purpose (John 11:47-53).

8 And they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

8 They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

8 So they grabbed him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

8 And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.

- If v2-5 covers the three years when the fruit was not used, then it was in the fourth year that the beloved Son was sent

- This is the year when the fruit was devoted to the Lord (Lev 19:24)

9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and put the vine-growers to death, and **give the vineyard to others.**

9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others.

9 "Now what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come, execute the farmers, and give the vineyard to others.

9 What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.

- The husbandman's rejection of the owner's Son was a rejection of the "owner"

- In answering they condemned themselves (Matt 21:41)

- The prediction that the owner would destroy the husbandmen was fulfilled in 70 AD, when the Romans under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and put an end to any semblance of self-rule which the Jew had previously enjoyed

- "...give the vineyard to others" - the others unto whom the vineyard was to be given are further described in Matthew, where Jesus is quoted as saying, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt 21:43)
— This is an obvious reference to the Gentiles and the Church

10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'A **STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE**;

10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner *stone*;

10 Haven't you ever read this Scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

10 And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:

- Again, a quote from Psalm 118:22-23 (LXX); this is the same Psalm that the crowds chanted at the Triumphal Entry (Cf. 11:9)

- In its original use, the stone represented Israel. Here' Jesus made Himself the "Stone"; it was a well-known idiom for the Messiah (Ex 17:6; esp. Dan 2:34; Zech 4:7; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:32-33; 1 Cor 10:4; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

The Rejected Stone

- First appears in Ps 118:22, then recurs at Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7, making it one of the NT's most repeated phrases. Repetition like this can only refer to an emphasis that cannot be overlooked.
- It appears Israel's leaders rejected the Stone that was to be the capstone to complete Israel, God's temple, through which He would work to bring blessing to all mankind (Gen 12:3). The Stone rejected has become, not the capstone, but the most important Stone, the "chief corner stone" in the foundation of a new temple that God is now building, the Church (Matt 16:18; Eph 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-10)
- After the Church is removed by the Rapture, the Stone will return to the earth (Cf. Dan 2:34-35, 44-45; Rev 19:11-16) and Israel will accept Him (Zech 12:10). He will then complete Israel (Is 59:20) and Israel will, during the Millennium, function as the temple that God intended her to be (Dan 7:22). He will then bring blessing to the entire world through Israel.
- Jesus: the Rock in the Wilderness, the stone cut without hands, and the chief cornerstone!

11 **THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"**

11 This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

11 This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

11 This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

- Jesus was God's Ultimatum!

(G) Reciprocal questions (12:13-37)

(a) Three hostile questions from the Jewish leaders (12:13-34) (Cf. Matt 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26)

(i) Taxes (12:13-17)

12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He told the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

12 They were trying to arrest him but were afraid of the crowd. Realizing that he had spoken this parable against them, they left him alone and went away.

12 And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

- The meaning of the parable was clear to the religious leaders. Jesus had exposed their murderous plot to kill Him

- The favor of the multitude shielded Jesus from their wrath temporarily

13 Then they *sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement.

13 Then they *sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement.

13 Then they sent some Pharisees and some Herodians to him, intending to trap him in what he said.

13 And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.

- The common threat had forced two traditional enemies to unite: The Pharisees, the nationalistic legalists, and the Herodians, the sold-out liberals

— The former were unalterably opposed to any foreign overlordship, while the latter were supporters of the foreign government of the Herods

— The asked Jesus about a political issue that divided them (v15)

The Herodians supported the family of Herod as well as the Romans who gave them the power to rule. The Pharisees considered the Herod clan to be evil usurpers of the throne of David: Herod was an Edomite, not even a Jew. The Pharisees opposed the poll tax that the Romans had inflicted on Judea and they resented the very presence of Rome in their land.

14 They came and *said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and do not care what anyone thinks; for You are not partial to anyone, but You teach the way of God in truth. Is it permissible to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"

14 They *came and *said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"

14 They came and told him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere. You don't favor any individual, because you pay no attention to external appearance. Rather, you teach the way of God truthfully. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or shouldn't we?"

14 And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

- Their words dripped with insincere flattery, but were aimed at setting a subtle trap: He was ostensibly snared to offend either the Jewish population or the Roman leadership

15 Are we to pay, or not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, **"Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at."**

15 Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, **"Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at."**

15 Seeing through their hypocrisy, Jesus replied to them, **"Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it."**

15 Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, **Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.**

- Since Judea became a Roman province in 6 AD, the Romans had required the Jews to pay an annual "poll tax" to the emperor's treasury

— The Zealots refused to pay it, as it acknowledged Rome's right to rule over them; the Pharisees paid it but objected strongly; the Herodian paid it willingly, since they supported Roman rule.

— Jesus critics asked Him what was the right or lawful thing to do. In their eyes, the Messiah would never sanction foreign rule, but if Jesus opposed Rome He would be in a dangerous position

- "...Why are you testing Me?" - Jesus exposes their question for what it was, malicious entrapment (not honest inquiry)

- "...denarius" - a small silver coin of 3.8 grams; the only coin that Rome accepted in payment for taxes

— One side bore the head of Caesar and the abbreviated inscription: TI. CAESAR DIVI AVG. G. AVGVSTVS - "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, Augustus." The reverse was inscribed: PONTIFEX MAXIMUS - "Chief Priest"

16 And they brought one. And He *said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's."

16 They brought one. And He *said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's."

16 So they brought one. Then he asked them, "Whose face and name are on this?" They told him, "Caesar's."

16 And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's.

17 And Jesus said to them, "Pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were **utterly amazed** at Him.

17 And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him.

17 So Jesus told them, "Give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.

17 And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

- Jesus avoided the "either/or" problem with a "both/and" response

— God has authority over those who bear His image

— Some have regarded it as the single most influential political statement ever made in the history of the world

- "...render" - *apodidomito*, pay a debt; to pay back (Cf. Rom 13; 1 Tim 2:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-17)

— Coinage was regarded the property of the government that minted it. They were already accepting Caesar's authority or they would not be using his money.

— The state is a valid institution (even when it is controlled by a man who thinks he is god!) Being created in the image of God, we are under God's authority as well! He has total ownership of us all!

- "...utterly amazed" - *exethaumazon*, Jesus simple answer avoided the trap they set for Him

The obligation to pay Caesar some of his own coinage in return for the amenities his rule provided is affirmed, but the idolatrous claims expressed on the coins are rejected. Jesus is not distinguishing between two separate, independent spheres (that of Caesar and that

of God), but rather He is indicating that there are obligations to Caesar which do not infringe the rights of God, but instead were ordained by God.

(ii) Resurrection (12:18-27) (Cf. Matt 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40)

18 Some **Sadducees** (who say that there is no resurrection) *came to Jesus, and *began* questioning Him, saying,

18 Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) *came to Jesus, and *began* questioning Him, saying,

18 Then some Sadducees, who claim there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him,

18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying,

- "...Sadducees" - this is the only place in Mark where the Sadducees are mentioned.

Nowhere is it recorded that any of these "liberals" came to faith. Many of the Pharisees and priests did.

Sadducees

The Sadducees were mainly urban, wealthy, educated Jews. They were few in number compared to the Pharisees, but they occupied important positions, including many in the priesthood. They did not believe in the existence of the soul, life after death, resurrection, final judgment, angels or demons (Cf. Acts 23:8) because they couldn't find clear revelation on it in the OT. They did, however, accept the Torah, the books of Moses. Most of them were wealthy; the religious aristocrats.

The Sadducees...are, even among themselves, rather boorish in their behavior, and in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as aliens. [Josephus, Jewish War, II, 8.14]

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife and does not leave a child, his brother is to marry the wife and raise up children for his brother.

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother.

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no child, he should marry the widow and have children for his brother.

19 Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

- The Sadducees posed their hypothetical question to make any view of the resurrection but their own look absurd

— The question was based on the law of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10)

— From Latin *levir*, "husband's brother," the practice or requirement of marriage of a widow to the brother of her deceased husband

20 There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children.

20 There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children.

20 There were seven brothers. The first one married and died without having children.

20 Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed.

21 The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise;

21 The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise;

21 Then the second married her and died without having children, and so did the third.

21 And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise.

22 and so the seven *together* left no children. Last of all the woman also died.

22 and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also.

22 None of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died, too.

22 And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also.

23 In the resurrection, which one's wife will she be? For *each of* the seven had her as *his* wife."

23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

23 In the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since all seven had married her?"

23 In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God?

24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?

24 Jesus answered them, "Aren't you mistaken because you don't know the Scriptures or God's power?

24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?

- Jesus pointed out their ignorance of two things:

1. The truth of Scripture - they did not understand the Scriptural revelation about resurrection

2. The power of God – they did not realize that God’s power was sufficient to raise people, and to raise them to a different type of life

25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like **angels in heaven**.

25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

25 When people rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven.

25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

– Marriage as we know it will not exist when we have immortal bodies, and deathless existence will not require procreation

– “...angels in heaven” – much confusion has arisen from this verse: He doesn’t indicate that fallen angels could not meddle with women: Cf. Gen 6, confirmed by 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 5-6.

— Angels in heaven do not marry: there is no procreation necessary among immortal beings. That doesn’t limit the technologies available to fallen angels bent on mischief!

— *oiketerion*, appears only in 2 Cor 5:2, referring to the heavenly resurrection body the believers aspire to, and in Jude 6, the “habitation” the fallen angels disrobed from.

— The same God who created the angels is able to give us the new bodies we will need for the new life in heaven (1 Cor 15:38ff)

— Jesus did not say that when people die, they will become angels. He also didn’t say that we will be like angels *in every respect*, which we will not

— The Sadducees considered them viewed “enlightened,” but Jesus said they needed enlightenment

26 But regarding the fact that the dead rise, **have you not read** in the book of Moses, in *the passage about the burning bush*, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB’?

26 But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in *the passage about the burning bush*, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?

26 As for the dead being raised, haven’t you read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?

26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and

the God of Jacob?

- In concluding that the OT did not teach the resurrection, the Sadducees overlooked an important passage

- "...have you not read" - the question expects an affirmative answer, for Christ knew well that these Sadducees were thoroughly familiar with the Pentateuch

— He referred specifically to Ex 3:6, quoting the LXX

— The Sadducees accepted only the Torah, so Jesus nails this one from Ex 3:6!

— God didn't use past tense: "I am the God of Abraham, et al." He spoke in the present tense.

[Origen pointed out in the second century that it is ridiculous for God to say that he is the God of men who have no existence! Origen, Commentary on Matthew, Tom. XVII, 36.]

— Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were alive when those words were spoken: the Torah does, thus, teach that there is life after death! The covenant promises were eternal (Heb 11:10-13)

— Covenant promises are in effect as long as the covenant partners are alive, but if one of them dies, the covenant promises are no longer binding (Cf. Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39). For the covenant promises that God made to the patriarchs to still be in effect, they had to still be alive.

— Jesus does not appeal to Is 26:19; Dan 12:2; Ps 16:9-11; Job 19:26, which all support the doctrine of resurrection. Instead, He appeals to the character of God. If God's people are destined to perish and to remain dead, then in what sense is He the God of the living?

27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

- The Sadducees—the liberals of that day—did not know Scripture or the power of God. What about us? Resurrection is the signature of my soul. Even the Torah is replete with other examples:

- Adam, created *ex nihilo* is a proto-resurrection (Gen 2:7)

- Enoch was raptured; not subject to death

- Abraham's offering of Isaac is also imbued with the resurrection of Isaac (Gen 22:5; Heb 11:19)

- Israel's deliverances: Red Sea, manna, quail, water, etc: all lifegiving power...

(iii) Law (12:28-34) (Cf. Matt 22:34)

28 One of the scribes came up and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"

28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"

28 Then one of the scribes came near and heard the Sadducees arguing with one another. He saw how well Jesus answered them, so he asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of them all?"

28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

- This next challenge was a scribe who was a Pharisee (Matt 22:34-35)

— The scribes had determined that there were 365 negative precepts and 248 positive, for a total of 613 precepts in the Law: One of their common exercises was discussing which were the greatest.

29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, '**HEAR, ISRAEL! THE LORD IS OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE;**

29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord;

29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

- "...Hear, O Israel!" - the familiar words of the *Sh'ma* ("Hear") (Deut 6:4-5)

— This great confession of faith is quoted by the pious, morning and evening, and is inserted in the little *mizuzahs* that adorn virtually all Jewish doorposts

30 **AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'**

30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

- What is the "heart"? ...the "soul"? ...the "mind"? We use these terms without precision:

- "...heart" - *Lev'av*, the seat of craving, aspiration...the gut; where passion resides

— Also know as the seat of appetites, emotion, and courage

- "...soul" - *Nephesh*, the soul—essentially the whole of a person as in a being

— Your soul refers to the seat of your intellect; your self-conscious thought life

- "...mind" - our thought capacity

- "...strength" - *Ma'od*, physical resources; all of our bodily powers

All of these should be the sources out of which love for God should flow. We should love God with all of our decisions (heart), emotions (soul), thoughts (mind), and strength (actions).

God is to be loved completely and totally because He, and He alone, is God and because He has made a covenant of love with His people. In the covenant God gives Himself totally in love to His people; therefore, he expects His people to give themselves totally (heart, soul, mind, strength) in love to Him.

Order

- Matthew - heart, soul, mind
- Mark - heart, soul, mind, strength
- Luke - heart, soul, strength, mind
- Masoretic Text - heart, soul, strength
- LXX - mind, soul, strength
 - Mark and Luke added "mind"; Matthew substituted "mind" for "strength"

31 The second is this: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

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31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

- The scribe requested one commandment, but Jesus gave him two

- Love for man, in Lev 19:18, grows out of love for God, in Deut 6:4-5. They are inseparable philosophically, thus, "love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom 13:8-10)

— The Jews regarded only fellow Jews and full proselytes as their neighbors, but Jesus taught that a neighbor is anyone with whom we have any dealings whatsoever (Cf. Luke 10:25-27)

— We are to love all others as we love ourselves. The Law assumed that everyone has a fundamental love for themselves.

— "Loving our neighbors as ourselves" does not mean spending the same amount of time, energy or money to meet the needs of others that we do to meet our own needs, since that would be impossible. It means treating others as we treat ourselves.

— We do not live by rules, but by relationships

- These are the two greatest commandments in that they summarize the two basic responsibilities regarding the Law: our duties toward God and our duties toward others.

These are basic human responsibilities.

— The termination of the Mosaic Law does not invalidate these. They have been primary since creation and will continue as such forever.

32 And the scribe said to Him, "Well *said*, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO OTHER BESIDES HIM;

32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him;

32 Then the scribe told him, "Well said, Teacher! You have told the truth that 'God is one, and there is no other besides him.'

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

- The scribe dared to commend the reply. The Word had spoken to his heart.

— This Pharisee believed Jesus' answer, that love is more important than the observance of religious ritual (Cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Hosea 6:6)

— This was not typical of the Pharisees, who regarded ritual observance as more important than attitude, and ceremony as more important than morality.

33 and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."

33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."

33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

- Even the OT taught that there were some things more important than offering sacrifices and keeping laws (1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:16-17; 141:1-2; Jer 7:22-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8).

This "friendly scribe" identifies the fundamental difference separating Jesus and the religious leaders in terms of what it is to do the will of God: Whereas the essential matter for Jesus is loving God and neighbor, for the authorities it is strict adherence to law and tradition as they define it.

The Jews and Their Laws

- The Jews have 613 commandments from the OT Law
 - There are 365 negative and 248 positive ones
 - One negative for every day of the solar year
 - 248 positive which is ascribed to the number of bones and significant organs in the human body

[Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot* 23b-24a]

In Ps 15, David reduces the 613 down to 11:

Ps 15:2-5:

2 He that **walketh uprightly**, and **worketh righteousness**, and **speaketh the truth in his heart**.

3 He that **backbiteth not with his tongue**, nor **doeth evil to his neighbor**, nor taketh up a **reproach against his neighbour**.

4 In whose **eyes a vile person is contemned**; but he **honoureth them that fear the Lord**. He that **swareth to his own hurt**, and changeth not.

5 He that **putteth not out his money to usury**, nor **taketh reward against the innocent**. He that doeth these things shall never be moved

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**" And *then*, no one dared any longer to question Him.

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**" After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

34 When Jesus saw how wisely the man answered, he told him, "**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**" After that, no one dared to ask him another question.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, **Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.** And no man after that durst ask him any question.

- Jesus meant that the scribe was "not far from" *entering* the kingdom

— His openness to Scriptural revelation and his positive orientation to Jesus would bring him to faith in Jesus and ultimately entrance into His kingdom

It was clear that Jesus derived His authority from God's Word (Cf. 11:28). All the answers He gave were from the OT. Since this is the authority all the Jewish leaders claimed to follow, although they didn't, they failed to discredit Jesus.

"Thou art not far from the kingdom of God": What a tantalizing statement! You can be close, but that only counts with hand grenades and the game of horseshoes! And this is eternity we're talking about! ...within an inch of heaven, yet on the way to hell. He was informed, honest, he was not a coward, but still not in the kingdom. — John Wesley

John Wesley

John Wesley's coming to faith was one of the most important events in the Western world. Born in 1703, the 15th child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, John had a sound upbringing under an unusually talented mother. He went on to a brilliant career at Charterhouse and Oxford; was elected fellow of Lincoln College in 1726; served as a double professor of Greek and logic; ordained as a priest in the Church of England in 1728.

He met regularly for prayer, study of Greek NT and devotional exercises... fasted twice a week, visited prisons, assisted the poor and sick...In 1735 he accepted an invitation to become a missionary to the American Indians in Georgia. It was a fiasco—conflicts—he almost died from disease. (He still was unsaved.)

Aboard the ship on his return he met some German Moravian Christians, which had a profound effect on him and upon his return to London, he sought out one of their leaders. Through a series of conversations, Wesley (in his own words) was "clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved." On the morning of May 24, 1738, he opened his Bible haphazardly and his eyes fell on Mark 12:34: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." It would become his life verse.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. [q.v., James McGraw, Great Evangelical Preachers of Yesterday, Abington, NY, 1961, p.57]

From then on, Wesley became a dynamo: he preached in churches, in mines, in fields, on horseback. He preached 42,000 sermons, averaged 4,500 miles a year, 60–70 miles/day, 3 sermons a day...the Church has never been the same.

The Lord conversing with a lost clergyman of the house of Israel bore parallels to Wesley's own lostness! Both were clergymen. Both were highly educated. Both were scholars who knew their Scriptures inside and out. Both were "not far from the kingdom" when confronted with Christ.

It is possible to have studied theology and have never become a true Christian. You can hear of the grace of Christ preached all your life and still be resting on you own goodness...

(b) Christ's defense of his deity (12:35–37) (Cf. Matt 22:41–46; Luke 20:41–44)

35 And Jesus responded and *began* saying, as He taught in the temple area, "*How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?*"

35 And Jesus *began* to say, as He taught in the temple, "*How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?*"

35 While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he asked, "*How can the scribes say that the Messiah is David's son?*"

35 And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, *How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David?*

- Until now, the religious leaders questioned Jesus about His teaching. Now, He asked them about theirs (Matt 22:41)

- "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matt 22:42)

— This was the key question at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:15)...And it is the most important question in our life!

— If we're wrong on this one, nothing else matters (John 3:16-21; 8:24; 1 John 2:18-23)

— The OT taught that the Messiah had to be a physical descendant of David (2 Sam 7:7-16; Is 9:7; Jer 23:5ff; et al)

— The Jewish leaders believed this, but their understanding of Messiah's relationship to David was only that of another victorious Jewish king from David's dynasty.

36 David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'THE LORD SAID TO **MY LORD**, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES UNDER YOUR FEET."'

36 David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet."'

36 David himself said by the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord told my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet."'

36 For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

- "...my Lord" - quoting Ps 110:1: "YHWH said unto Adonai..."

— Ps 110:1 showed that the Messiah was not only David's junior in age, but also his senior in rank

— It is only through the virgin birth that Jesus possesses the dual nature that allows Him to be both David's Son and David's Lord



Matt 5:17-18:

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

37 David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

37 David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

37 David himself calls him 'Lord,' so how can he be his son?" And the large crowd kept listening to him with delight.

37 David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.

- "...in what sense is He his son" - the question was how could Messiah be both less than David (his son) and greater than David (his lord) at the same time? A father does not refer to his son as his "lord"; it is more natural for a son to refer to his father as "lord"

— Jesus' argument hangs on a yot! (Cf. Matt 22:41-46; 5:18)

— Matthew records: "And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions" (Matt 22:46)

- "...the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him" - the crowd's positive response to Jesus' teaching further stressed its authority. Israel's religious leaders challenged it, but the

multitudes acknowledged it.

[Rom 1:3-4]

The Jews believed that the Messiah would be David's son (John 7:41-42), but the only way David's son could also be David's Lord would be if the Messiah were God come in human flesh! The answer, of course, is the miraculous virgin birth (Is 7:14; Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). And before the week was over, the Son of David would die (in fulfillment of Ps 22, Is 53, et al.) ...and would be resurrected!

In the next section, Jesus condemned His accusers who had condemned Him. They condemned Him because He did not fit their ideas of the Messiah. He had shown that the OT presented a different Messiah than the one they wanted. Now, He condemned them for failing to measure up to what the OT required of them.

(H) Christ rejects the Pharisees (12:38-40) (Cf. Matt 23:1-12; Luke 20:45-46)

38 And in His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and *like* personal greetings in the marketplaces,

38 In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and *like* respectful greetings in the market places,

38 As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes! They like to walk around in long robes, to be greeted in the marketplaces,

38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,

39 and **seats of honor in the synagogues**, and places of honor at banquets,

39 and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets,

39 and to have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.

39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts:

- "...seats of honor in the synagogues" - the bench before the ark which contained the scrolls; the bench faced the people, so sitting there would make one highly visible

Jesus' Indictment of the Scribes and Pharisees (Cf. Matt 23:13-36; Luke 20:47)

40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer **long prayers**. These will receive all the more condemnation."

40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."

40 They devour widows' houses and say long prayers to cover it up. They will receive greater condemnation!"

40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

- This verse moves from their ostentatious manner to their corrupt morals
- Jesus condemned the religious leaders for having the attitude of lords instead of servants
- He spoke of the religious leaders as a group, although there were exceptional individuals
- Since they were not paid by the state, but rather received voluntary contributions, they preyed on ("devoured") the public, often widows, who needed all their income simply to survive
- This reference sets the stage for the next incident (v41-44)
- "...long prayers" - presented the impression of piety that masked their greed
- They pretended to love God greatly, but their aim was to get people to love them greatly
- The result of their greed would be "greater damnation" when they stood under God's judgment
- This is another indication that there are degrees of punishment (Cf. Matt 11:20-24; James 3:1; et al)
- It is character that counts, not credentials or other appurtenances
- These words signal Jesus' final break with Israel's religious leaders

(I) Widow's mite (12:41-44) (Cf. Luke 21:1-4)

41 And *Jesus* sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* watching how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large amounts.

41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

41 As *Jesus* sat facing the offering box, he watched how the crowd was dropping their money into it. Many rich people were dropping in large amounts.

41 And *Jesus* sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

- This incident contrasts the spiritual poverty and physical prosperity of the scribes, with the physical poverty and spiritual prosperity of the widow
- There were 13 trumpet-shaped chests (Heb. *shofar*) around the Court of Women where people deposited their offerings
- The Court of Women was within the Court of Gentiles, the outermost court of the temple. The Court of Women was farther from the temple building than the Court of Israel, which only Jewish men could enter, or the Court of Priests, which only the priests could enter.
- *Jesus* had given His preceding teaching in the Court of Gentiles; now He evidently moved into the Court of Women

42 And a **poor widow** came and put in two **lepta coins**, which amount to a **quadrans**.

42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.

42 Then a destitute widow came and dropped in two small copper coins, worth about a cent.

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

- "...poor widow" - not only a widow, but a "poor" widow

- Evidently it was obvious to onlookers that she was poor and a widow, probably from her clothes. She contrasted with the many wealthy people there.

- "...lepta coins" - so small they were called a *lepton*, or *lepta* (literally, "peeled" or "fine"; a really tiny thin coin); 1/400th of a shekel; 1/8 of a cent; less than 1/100th of a day's wage for a working man in Palestine

- Two *lepta* were her day's earnings, a considerable sum to her

- "...quadrans" - the smallest Roman coin or the smallest Greek imperial coin

- Representing two Greek words: *kodrantes* (Latin: *quadrans*, Cf. Matt 5:26; Mark 12:42) and *assarion* (Latin: *as*, Cf. Matt 10:29; Luke 12:6). The two *assaria* constituted probably one coin).

43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury;

43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury;

43 He called his disciples and told them, "I tell all of you with certainty, this destitute widow has dropped in more than everyone who is contributing to the offering box,

43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

- Jesus specifically called the disciples to Himself for an object lesson on giving

- The poor widow's offering was worth more than the others because it cost her more to give it, and most of all because she gave it willingly

- Her sacrifice expressed her love for God and her trust in God to sustain her (Cf. 1 Kings 17:8-16)

- It was proportion, not portion

The test of liberality is not what is given, but what is left.

44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

44 because all of them contributed out of their surplus, but out of her poverty she has given everything she had to live on."

44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

- There were two! She could have retained one of them. She gave everything.

Cirrhosis* of the Giver

[*Cirrhosis: a progressive disease of the liver characterized by an excessive formation of connective tissue followed by hardening and contraction that results from unknown toxemia, deficiencies, or parasites. From Greek *kirrhos*, orange-colored; the yellowish appearance a diseased liver presents when cut.]

It was actually discovered about 34 AD, and ran a terminal course in a couple named Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). It is an acute condition which renders the patient's hand immobile when it attempts to move from the billfold to the offering plate. The remedy is to remove the afflicted from the House of God, since it is clinically observable that this condition disappears in alternate environments such as golf courses or clubs or restaurants. — R. Kent Hughes

The disease is really not a motor problem, but a heart problem. The best remedy is to fall in love with God with all your heart, for where your heart is, there will your treasure be (Matt 6:21, reversed).