

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 12:1-12

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we'll be reading Mark chapter 12, and today we'll read from verse 1 to verse 12.

In Mark's account, Jesus' earthly ministry's final week began with Him entering the temple on the first day to inspect its contents. On the second day, He entered again and cleansed it. Then, on the third day, He entered once more and engaged in seven dialogues within the temple.

The first dialogue was about the authority of Jesus Christ, recorded in Mark 11:27-33. In this conversation, Jesus wisely responded to their questions about His authority by posing questions to them. Knowing they were in a dilemma and unwilling to answer directly, they evaded Jesus' questions by saying they didn't know. However, Jesus was willing to remind them once again, hoping they would truly understand their situation and perhaps repent for salvation.

So, Jesus continued by telling them a parable, implying the dangerous situation they were in, hoping for their repentance. This warning to the religious leaders of that time is also a reminder for church leaders today. Hopefully, we can all approach today's passage with humility. Let's read verse one.

Verse 1: "Then He began to speak to them by parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.'"

In this parable, Jesus starts by saying "a man," who is actually God Himself, planted a vineyard. According to Isaiah 5:7, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant." This vineyard refers to the Israelite nation, which God planted as His chosen people in the Old Covenant. Then, a hedge was placed around it to protect it from wild animals and thieves. God not

only planted the vineyard but also surrounded it with a hedge for protection. He also dug a winepress, where the grapes would be pressed to make wine. Since this vineyard belonged to God, its produce was naturally for Him. Therefore, the wine was for God's enjoyment. Additionally, a tower was built, serving as a watchtower for the vineyard's protection. People could ascend the tower to see into the distance, making it easy to guard. At the same time, the tower also provided living and resting quarters.

After God prepared all this, He leased it to vinedressers. It's important to note the use of the word "lease", indicating that ownership still belonged to God. These vinedressers were merely managers for God. These vinedressers represent the chief priests, scribes, and elders who questioned His authority. After leasing the vineyard to the vinedressers, the owner went away, giving the vinedressers significant freedom. God respected the vinedressers, giving them plenty of space to decide how to manage the vineyard.

With just one simple verse, Jesus clearly outlines the relationship between God, the Israelites, and their leaders. God nurtured the Israelite nation, setting up a hedge to protect them. If the Israelites accepted God's cultivation, they would bear fruit, satisfying God. God also built a watchtower for the vineyard's protection. Then, God entrusted the entire Israelite nation to its leaders, the chief priests, scribes, and elders of that time, before temporarily departing.

God treated the Jewish people in the Old Testament this way, and He treats the church in the New Testament similarly. In the New Testament, this vineyard is the church, and the vinedressers are the elders, deacons, and coworkers within the church. Church leaders must recognize that the church belongs to God, and its ownership has never been human. God only leases the vineyard to the vinedressers, so we cannot exalt humans within the church.

Paul strongly condemned the practice of elevating individuals within the church in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13. Because there were disputes in the Corinthian church, with some saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Paul questioned them, asking "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Indeed, the church is purchased with

the precious blood of Jesus Christ, paid with His life as a ransom. The church inherently belongs to the Lord. Church leaders are merely servants of God, temporarily entrusted to serve the church.

We must have a clear understanding of the relationship between the church, its leaders, and its members, without ambiguity. Sometimes, in our habitual conversations, we might refer to a certain person's church, as if the church belongs to them. This offends God because the church always belongs to Christ. If believers pay attention to my sharing, you'll notice I most often say "the church we belong to." The church isn't ours; it belongs to God, who has placed us in it under His sovereignty. This is the correct concept we should have regarding the church.

Verses 2-3: "And at vintage-time He sent a servant to the vinedressers, that He might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed."

At harvest time, the owner of the vineyard sent a servant to the vinedressers to collect some of the vineyard's fruit. These servants represent the prophets of the Old Testament era. And the vinedressers? They're the same, the leaders among the Israelites, members of their council, including the priests, scribes, and elders. They beat the owner's servants and sent them away empty-handed.

Verse 4: "Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated."

God sent another prophet, but the outcome was even worse. This prophet was stoned, wounded in the head, and shamefully treated.

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

The owner of the vineyard persisted in sending servants, but the vinedressers were truly wicked. Among the servants sent by the owner, some were beaten, and some were killed. God couldn't obtain the fruit produced by the vineyard. Jesus provided a summary of the history of Israel in the Old Testament with a few verses. After Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, they were supposed to establish a kingdom of priests and be a holy nation according to the laws given by God. This was what God originally commanded Moses at Mount Sinai, recorded in Exodus 19:3-6, where God said to Moses, "Say this to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" This was God's original intention for the Israelites.

However, after the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they deviated from God. They worshiped idols of foreign nations and engaged in deceitful and wicked practices. The kings followed the customs of foreign nations and forgot God's commandments. Even the system of priests became corrupt, pursuing piety for profit, resulting in the entire Israelite nation bearing no witness. God sent prophets multiple times to speak to the Israelites, calling them to repentance. While a few responded, most of the prophets were beaten, insulted, and even killed. With just five simple verses, Jesus depicted the history of the Israelites after their entry into the Promised Land over 1500 years.

Verse 6: "Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"

At the end of the day, or at the fulfillment of time, God sent His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to earth. God's intention was that the Jewish people would respect His Son. Here, Jesus implies that He is indeed the Son of God, and indicates that this is the final opportunity for repentance for these chief priests, scribes, and elders.

Verse 7: "But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'"

According to Jewish law, it is the son who inherits the estate, and if a man dies without an heir, his property becomes ownerless, and others may claim it. These vinedressers, upon seeing the heir, plotted to kill him in order to seize his inheritance. Jesus directly points out the intent of the chief priests, scribes, and elders. If they were not as stubborn as their ancestors were toward the prophets, they still had a chance to repent. If they did not repent, Jesus directly indicated what they would do.

Verse 8: "So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard."

Jesus was actually prophesying that on this very day, they would seize Him, bring Him to trial before the Sanhedrin, then to the Roman court, and a few days later, He would be killed on the hills outside Jerusalem known as Golgotha. This seemingly prophetic discourse was actually Jesus pre-informing these Jewish leaders of what they were about to do. All the dark schemes of the heart are known to God. Jesus particularly understood and informed these leaders in such detail because if their hearts were willing to turn, they might wonder why Jesus didn't escape. Why could He calmly narrate these things as if they had nothing to do with Him, even though He was the central figure in the entire event?

Jesus did not flee because this was the purpose of His coming to earth, to fulfill His ministry, to complete the redemption for the sins of mankind. He clearly informed these Jewish leaders, hoping that among them, or perhaps a few, would be willing to repent. Their repentance would not change the ultimate outcome of Jesus being crucified, but it would change their own destiny, not heading towards destruction. Here we see Jesus facing persecution from Jewish leaders, yet He was full of compassion and willing to give them a chance to repent.

Verse 9: "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others."

Here, Jesus seems to be asking these Jewish leaders a question: what will the owner of the vineyard do? Then Jesus directly gives them the answer. The owner of the vineyard will do two things: first, destroy these vinedressers; second, give the vineyard to others.

Let's first look at what the owner will do in terms of destroying these vinedressers. Jesus said God will destroy these vinedressers, and indeed this happened in AD 70. Just 40 years later, Titus, the Roman prince, led the Roman army to destroy the entire city of Jerusalem, and the Jews were scattered among the nations. This was just a short-term fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, and a more comprehensive long-term fulfillment will occur at the end of the age, as described in Revelation 11:1-3, where the Gentiles will tread the holy city for forty-two months. The short-term fulfillment has already occurred, and the long-term fulfillment will occur at the end of the generations, which is also a reminder to the New Testament church given by God.

Next, let's look at the second thing, which is to give the vineyard to others. This vineyard in the Old Testament is a type of the Israelites, and in the New Testament, it becomes a type of the church. Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit." With the coming of Jesus Christ, time is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Israelites are God's vineyard, and in the New Testament, it becomes the church. The vinedressers of the New Testament are the elders, deacons, and co-workers of the church today. The warning Jesus gave to the Jewish leaders back then must be remembered by the leaders of the New Testament church.

The most important thing is threefold: first, the church belongs to God, and its leaders are only servants of God to serve the church. They cannot rule as masters, as this would violate God's sovereignty. They must be examples to lead the saints in the church. The second thing is that the church must bear fruit. Leaders of churches that are lazy and do not bear fruit cannot give an account to the Lord. What is the fruit of the church? It is found in Galatians 5:22-23, which is the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, self-control". And the third thing is that one cannot persecute or harm God's servants. Every leader of the church can fulfill their duties and responsibilities according to the revelations and visions given to them by God. But they cannot attack or slander leaders from other churches, nor can they attack or slander the practices of other churches. Because judgment is God's, we cannot consider ourselves orthodox and easily judge others as heretics. If you do so, you are no different from the Pharisees of Jesus' time. We must respect God's leadership in others. Of course, we must be faithful to what God has entrusted us. We must adopt a tolerant attitude towards the different practices of other churches.

Verse 10: "Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.'"

Here, Mark quotes from Psalm 118:22-23: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes." When Jesus mentions the builders, he is referring to the chief priests, scribes, and elders, and the stone refers to himself, Jesus. Although Jesus was rejected, persecuted, and killed by them, God raised Jesus from the dead, making him the chief cornerstone of building the New Covenant Church.

The cornerstone is the foundational stone of the church, the first stone laid in constructing a building, and it connects different walls. Christ is the chief cornerstone, indicating that our building must be centered on Christ, with Christ as the head and connection. Any building outside of Christ is not a true building; it is unauthorized construction, subject to demolition by God one day. All of this is the work of the Lord, marvelous in our eyes.

Paul understood this mystery well. In Ephesians 2:20, he says, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." Christ can properly unite various parts of the building, making the church grow into the temple of the Lord.

Peter's understanding of this matter was even richer. In 1 Peter 2:4-7, he states, "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.'" Jesus quoted the Scriptures here to help the apostles Paul and Peter better understand the nature of building the church.

Verse 11: "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Have you not even read this Scripture?"

After Jesus finished this parable, he directly asked the chief priests, scribes, and elders, "Have you never read this Scripture?" His question was actually quite polite because in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is depicted from the perspective of a servant. Thus, although mistreated, he still politely questions those who persecuted him.

In the parallel passage in Luke 20:18, Luke adds a statement, "Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." Luke portrays Jesus as a complete human, standing in the position of a person, simply pointing out the facts and foretelling the consequences they would face.

In Matthew's parallel passage in Matthew 21:43, Matthew goes even further, directly telling these Jewish leaders, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." Because Matthew depicts Christ as a king, with authority to judge, he directly declares that the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to the new covenant church.

By comparing the same event in three different Gospels, we hope to better appreciate each Gospel, which depicts Jesus' identity and work from different perspectives.

Verse 12: "And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away."

They did indeed recognize that Jesus' parable was directed at them. Unfortunately, their hearts remained hardened, and they didn't listen to Jesus' words spoken in mercy. They didn't dare to take action at that moment because the people enjoyed listening to Jesus' teaching. So, they had to leave first. Dear brothers and sisters, through Jesus' warning to these Jewish leaders, it is also the best reminder for today's leaders in the New Covenant Church.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for helping us understand through this parable that the church belongs to You. We cannot violate Your sovereignty; we are just servants serving in the church. The church must bear fruit; if the church does not bear fruit, we cannot give an account to the Lord. Give us a heart of tolerance, not persecuting Your servants. Although different churches may receive different revelations and practices, grant us a broad heart to accommodate them. Because God is greater, richer, and more transcendent than what we know. Bless the church where I am, especially the leaders in the church, that they may shepherd and manage God's vineyard according to God's will. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.