



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

Chapter 12

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

Chapter Outline

- The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12
- The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17
- The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27
- The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34
- Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord? 12:35-37
- Beware of the Scribes 12:38-40
- The Widow's Two Mites 12:41-44

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- Christ having showed the rulers, chief priests, and scribes, the complete evil of their sin, in rejecting John the Baptist, Mark 11:30, He found it proper, likewise, publicly to represent the crime of the nation in rejecting all the messengers of God from first to last, and among the rest His only-begotten Son
- The situation in the parable would have been familiar to Jews at that time
- Landholders often rented out their property to tenant farmers who had to share a percentage of the profits from the harvest with the owner of the land

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- Jesus uses the parable as a metaphor predicting His death at the hands of the Jewish religious authorities, their eventual loss of authority as God's representatives to His people, and the destruction of the "vineyard" that is Old Covenant Israel
- St. Jerome says, "By this *man* we are to understand God the Father, whose vineyard was the house of Israel, which He guarded by angels; the place dug for the wine-vat is the law; the tower, the temple; and Moses, the prophets and the priests, whom the Jews afflicted and persecuted are the husbandmen or servants."

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- This same parable was employed by Isaiah 5:1, where speaking of Christ
- *went into a far country*, Not by change of place, for He is every where, but by leaving the workmen the power of free-will, either to work or not to work; in the same manner as a man in a far country cannot oversee his farm at home, but leaves them to themselves

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- St. Matthew 21:34 says he sent "his servants"
- In his account of this parable St. Mark is very detailed and mentions them one by one
- These servants were the prophets whom the Jews persecuted and slew in different ways, as the reprovers of their vices
- They were sent to call upon them to bring forth fruits of righteousness
- The first servant that was sent received no fruit to carry with him, or give an account of to the owner of the vineyard
- He was beaten

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- Another prophet was sent to instruct, advice, and counsel them, and exhort them to their duty
- The second received much worse treatment and was almost killed
- The third messenger they killed instantly
- From the parable we learn that these people were determined to hear no reason, to do no justice, and to keep the possession and the produce by violence

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- Note here the description of this last of the ambassadors of the householder
- Not only was his son, but his only one, his well-beloved
- There is something very touching in this form of expression
- Many messages had been sent; many means had been tried
- But one other resource remained, *still having one son, his beloved*
- The owner thinks, “I will send him; they will, surely reverence him”

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- He thought, “They will reflect, and reflection will bring shame and submission and reverence”
- This was the last effort of Divine mercy - the sending of the Incarnate God, whom the Jews put to death
- Jesus Christ was speaking about the present time and what will happen to Him
- From this it appears, that the chief priests and Pharisees were not ignorant that Christ was the Messiah promised in the law and the prophets, but their knowledge was afterwards blinded by their envy

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- In St. Matthew's narrative the scribes answer the question in verse 9
- St. Luke, as St. Mark here, assigns the answer to our Lord
- It would seem probable that the scribes first answered Him, and that then He Himself repeated their answer, and confirmed it by His looks and gesture
- So that from that fact, as well as from what followed, they might sufficiently understand that He spoke these things of them

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- *give the vineyard to others*, This is a distinct prediction of the rejection of the Jews and the call of the Gentiles
- By this question, Christ shows that they were about to fulfill this prophecy, by casting Him off, planning His death
- He became the corner-stone, joining the two people of the Jews and Gentiles together, and forming out of them the one city and one temple of the faithful

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- This quotation is from Psalm 118:22, where David prophesies of Christ
- These were the words of Christ directed to them
- Many of them were teachers of the people, and therefore ought to have read the scriptures, and have known that this was a prophecy about the Messiah
- Jesus is identifying the rejection of the owner's son in the parable (verse 14-15) and Himself as the "Stone" rejected by the "builders," who are the religious authorities

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- *the builders rejected*, The verb in the Greek implies that the stone was first examined and then deliberately refused
- The prophet Isaiah also spoke of a judgment on the people and of God's plan for one who will be both a "cornerstone" and a "stumbling stone" to test the covenant people and especially the people of Jerusalem
- *This was the LORD's doing*, The exaltation of the Messiah, after He had been so ill treated, and at last put to death by the Jews
- These words are a continuation of the passage cited out of Psalm 118:22

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 12:1-12



- The chief priests Scribes, and elders, thus show, that what our Savior had just said was true, by thus seeking to lay their hands on Him
- They were greatly irritated, and provoked, and had a good will to have seized Him, and carried Him away, and have had Him before their court, and condemn Him
- Thus, however, by His rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, He prepared the way for that death which, within three days, they brought upon Him
- And the counsel of God was fulfilled for the redemption of men by the blood of Christ



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- Once again we see the unlikely cooperation between the Pharisees, the rigid adherers and interpreters of the Law, and the Herodians, a sect of the Jews who supported the house of Herod and who were for full subjection to the Roman emperor, Mark 3:6
- The Herodians were in favor of giving tribute to the Roman Caesar
- They were so called at first from Herod the Great, who was a great supporter of Caesar
- Though opposed to each other, they joined against Christ



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- What they said of Christ was right; whether they knew it or not
- Jesus Christ was a faithful Teacher, and a bold reprover
- *You are true ... but teach the way of God in truth.* “Because, You are so truthful and impartial, give us Your unprejudiced opinion about the following much-disputed question”
- These people assume to be simple-minded inquirers, who came to Jesus to have a perplexity resolved
- By asking concerning the lawfulness of the payment, they do not inquire whether it was advisable to make it, but whether it was morally and religiously right



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- They took counsel how they might ensnare Him in His talk namely, by proposing to Him entrapping questions, which, in whatever way He might answer them, might expose Him to danger
- If He said that tribute ought to be given to Caesar, He would expose Himself to the malice of the Jewish people, who prided themselves upon their freedom
- If, on the other hand, He said that tribute ought not to be given to Caesar, He would incur the wrath of Caesar and of the Roman power



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- The Pharisees did not dare to use open violence, but they now endeavored by insidious questions to make Him compromise Himself either with the Romans, their political masters, or with the national and patriotic party
- St. Luke, 20:23 says, "their craftiness"; St. Matthew, 22:18 uses a more general word "wickedness" and St. Mark says, "knowing their hypocrisy"; for there was, a mixture of malice, hypocrisy, and artfulness, in the scheme they had formed
- But Christ being the omniscient God, saw the wickedness of their hearts, knew their hypocritical designs, and was well acquainted with all their artifice
- *a denarius* , This was the coin in which the tribute money was to be paid



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- The Roman denarius had the emperor's image with a proper legend stamped on one side of it
- It was not therefore the sacred shekel which was to be paid for the repairs of the temple which was now demanded, but the regular tribute required by the Roman government
- *Whose image is this?* He knew well enough whose they were; but He showed the Excellency of His wisdom in making them answer to their own confusion
- They came to ensnare our Lord in His discourse, and now they are ensnared in their own



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- Our Lord, in His infinite wisdom, avoids the question altogether whether the Jews were rightly in subjection to the Romans
- This was a doubtful question
- But there could be no doubt as to the fact that they were tributary
- This was made plain by the evidence of the current coin
- Now, this being so, it was manifestly the duty of the Jewish people to give to Caesar the tribute money which he demanded of them for the expenses of government, and especially of supporting an army to defend them from their enemies



The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 12:13-17

- And it was no less their duty to give their tribute to God, which He in His own right demanded of them as His creatures and faithful subjects
- The rights of Caesar are one thing, and those of God are another
- Tertullian says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's;" that is, give to Caesar his image stamped upon his coin, and give to God His own image stamped upon you; so that while you render to Caesar the coin which is his due, you may render your own self to God."
- "The first virtue," says St. Jerome, "of the respondent is to know the mind of the questioner, and to adapt his answer accordingly."

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- *the Sadducees*, Josephus states that they did not believe in a physical resurrection of the dead like the Pharisees, Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8
- The Sadducees only observed the precepts of the written Law in the Torah/Pentateuch (five books of Moses), unlike the Pharisees who also followed the oral Law
- The Sadducees were the religious/political party that was for the most part composed of the chief priests, and they counted among their supporters the wealthy and the aristocracy
- To press their belief in the absurdity of a physical resurrection, the Sadducees allude to a passage in Deuteronomy 25:1-5

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- According to the Law, a man was forbidden to marry his brother's wife if she had borne children to his brother, but an exception was made if the brother died without an heir
- In that case, it was his closest kinsman's obligation to marry the widow and give his deceased kinsman an heir, Ruth 4:5
- They heard Christ preach the resurrection, and by means of it persuade men to repentance and a holy life
- They therefore proposed to Him a question which appeared to them to be fatal to the doctrine of a future state and a resurrection

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- The case supposed is that of seven brethren, who, in compliance with the Law of Moses, one after another, as each died in succession, took the same woman to wife
- It is probable that such a case may actually have occurred; at any rate, it was a possible case
- The fact of there being no seed left, even by the seventh, increases the appearance of the question to be true
- And the question founded upon it by the Sadducees was this - *whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?*

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- Here, then, they hoped to entangle Him, and to show that the doctrine of the resurrection was absurd
- For if our Lord should say that in the resurrection she would be the wife of one only, the other brethren would have been excited to envy and continual strife
- Nor could He have said that she would be common to the seven brothers
- Such were the absurdities which would flow out of His doctrine of the resurrection, if it could be proved

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- Jesus gives the Sadducees a shockingly strong rebuke, accusing His questioners of not knowing the Scripture
- Remember these are chief priests of the ministerial priesthood, Matthew 22:29
- They did not know or remember the Scriptures, such as that in Job 21:25, *"I know that my Redeemer lives,"* etc., or in Isaiah 26:19, *"Your dead shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise;"* or in Daniel 12:2, *"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,"* etc.

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- Had they known the power of God they could not have imagined that it was limited by death, or that the life of “the children of the resurrection” was a mere repetition of man’s present mortal existence
- So in these words our Lord struck at the double root of the error of the Sadducees
- The Sadducees denied not only the Resurrection, but the existence also of angels and spirits, Acts 23:8
- In His reply, therefore, our Lord embraces the whole area of their unbelief

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- He refers to the angels in heaven and their existence as a fact
- Moreover in these words we have one of the few revelations which He was pleased to make as to the state after death
- The blessed, after the resurrection, will be like angels as to purity, as to a spiritual life, as to immortality, as to happiness and glory
- There will be no necessity for marriages in heaven
- In heaven there is no death, but every one will live and be blessed for ever; and therefore it is that St. Luke 20:36 adds here, *Nor can they die any more*

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- They had brought forward the name of Moses to perplex Him, He now appeals to the same great name in order to rebuke them
- These patriarchs had long been dead when this revelation was made to Moses; had they been destroyed, the Lord could not have called Himself still their God
- If He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, these are not dead, but alive; alive with God, though they had ceased, for some hundreds of years, to exist among mortals

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 12:18-27



- We may see, from this, that our Lord combats and confutes another opinion of the Sadducees, namely that there is neither angel nor spirit; by showing that the soul is not only immortal, but lives with God, even while the body is detained in the dust of the earth
- *You are badly mistaken!*” Signifying, that it was not a slight mistake, an error of small importance, but a very great one
- It was contrary to the Scriptures, and diminished the power of God, and destroyed that covenant interest, which God has in His people, and particularly in the principal men of their nation, who were the fathers and founders of them

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- If the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, have come to the Lord, in an evil attempt to catch Him, as a revolutionary against the Roman authority, or a breaker of the Mosaic Law, their conversations with the Lord attracted many, to enjoy new concepts, something that moved that scribe to pose a crucial question often debated especially by scribes; and probably also, he intended, by his question to test the Lord, Matthew 22:34-35; Luke 10:25
- It appears here from St. Mark that this scribe had been present at the discussion with the Sadducees, and he was impressed with the wisdom and power of our Lord's answer

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- Christ replied at once, without taking any time to consider of it, that the chief and principal of all the commands of the law, and what is of the greatest importance is *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*
- Jesus replies by citing Deuteronomy 6:5, which instills supreme, devoted love to God, and pronouncing this the great and greatest, first commandment
- The clauses referring to heart, soul, and mind are to be taken cumulatively, as meaning love to the uttermost degree; with “*all that is within*” us Psalm 103:1

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- One must give God one's undivided love and loyalty which encompasses one's entire being
- One's heart which is the true essence of a person and the seat of moral integrity; one's entire spiritual and physical being; and one's entire intellectual faculties
- God is to be loved with all our powers and faculties, and that nothing is to be preferred to Him
- After God our neighbor is above all to be loved
- And we are to extend to our neighbor that kind of love with which we love ourselves

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- Our love of ourselves is not a cold love, but a sincere and passionate love
- In like manner we should love our neighbor, and desire for him all those good things that we desire for ourselves
- This is what our Lord Himself teaches us
- There is no commandment greater than these, because all the precepts of the Divine Law are included in them
- The two quotes summarize the Ten Commandments: the first three commands address man's relationship to God and other seven commandments address man's relationship with his fellow man

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- The words seem to be uttered not with the covert sneer of the hypocrite, but in the sincerity of admiration
- Note also the real reverence shown in the form of address, “Teacher”, he recognizes the speaker as one of his own order
- The Scribe was charmed with His answer, and could not refrain speaking in commendation of it, and even before the multitude, and those of his own sect
- This was a rare and uncommon instance

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- It was not usual with the Scribes and Pharisees, whatever convictions they were laid under, either by the miracles or discourses of Christ, to own any thing, or make any concessions in His favor, or speak in His praise
- But this man not only commends Him, but gives reasons for it, and confirms the doctrine He taught in his own words
- *is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*, This scribe was evidently emerging out of the bondage of ceremonial things, and perceiving the supremacy of the moral law

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- It would appear from this answer that our Lord regarded him as one who approached Him with the sincere desire to know the truth, and so He encouraged him
- This shows how powerful an influence our Lord's teaching had already exercised amongst all classes of the Jews
- This scribe had learned that the true way to the kingdom was by the love of God and of our neighbor
- He was *not far from the kingdom of God*

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 12:28-34



- He was not far from the kingdom, but still he wanted that which in the true pathway to the kingdom - faith in Christ as the Savior of the world
- Jesus has defeated all attempts to discredit Him with the people
- Finding they could get no advantage, or occasion against Him that way; He having silenced the Herodians, Sadducees, Scribes, and Pharisees
- They no longer intended to interrogate Him, but deliver Him up to the Roman power

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord? 12:35-37



- Jesus continues to address the crowd of people in the Temple, teaching in the outer courts
- Jesus has successfully dealt with the questions of His adversaries
- Their failure to discredit Jesus implies that they can no longer teach with authority on the Law
- Now He will turn the table on them and will ask them a question on the interpretation of Scripture
- According to St. Matthew it was principally to the Pharisees that Christ proposed this question

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord? 12:35-37



- He would try now to raise them to a higher theology
- He would place before them a truth concerning the nature of the Messiah, which, if they received it, would lead them to accept Him
- He tried to let them consider the exact meaning of a text often quoted, let them weigh each word with reverent care, and they would see that the predicted Messiah was not merely Son of David according to earthly descent, but was God Himself

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord? 12:35-37



- And that when He claimed to be Son of God, when he asserted, "I and My Father are one," He was vindicating for Himself only what the prophet had affirmed of the nature of the Christ
- Jesus' point is that the psalm refers not only to an earthly descendant, one less than David, but also to one who is greater than David since the prophet David calls this person "Lord"
- "Lord" is a title that implies the person to whom David speaks is far above David and must point therefore to the promised Messiah

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord? 12:35-37



- Observing that His doctrine was superior to that of any of the sects among them; particularly His reasoning about the Messiah, people listened with great attention
- *the common people* The success of the Savior in His preaching was chiefly among the common or the poorer class of people
- The rich and the mighty were too proud to listen to His instructions



Beware of the Scribes 12:38-40

- These verses are a condensation of the woes recorded at length by St. Matthew chapter 23
- The body of that set of men (the Scribes), were very bad in their principles and practices, and therefore to be avoided
- *in long robes*, Was a rich robe which reached down to the ankles, and was adorned with fringes
- The scribes took pleasure in this kind of display
- It made them feel very particular and different from others and out of the common way of apparel; and so were observable and taken notice of by others

Beware of the Scribes 12:38-40



- Our Lord warned His disciples against placing their heart in their garments; in the outer appearances like some Jewish religious leaders, who used to conceal their evil and malice underneath their outer attires; getting worldly dignity, while bearing evil hearts
- *best seats in the synagogues*, Where the rulers of the synagogue, and the elders of the people sat
- *who devour widows' houses*, They took advantage of their helpless condition and confiding character to obtain possession of their property



Beware of the Scribes 12:38-40

- The reference is still to the scribes who through their greed swallowed up the property of helpless widows
- And through their hypocrisy, in the hope of thus more effectually imposing upon their victims, lengthened out their prayers
- Jesus proclaims that the judgment for their heartless acts against the poor will be severe
- The most important points in their character were pretension and self-importance, greed, and religious hypocrisy

The Widow's Two Mites 12:41-44



- This beautiful story comes in with powerful effect, after the repulsive picture of the greedy praying scribe and the image of widows victimized by the hypocrites
- One can imagine what comfort it would bring to the poor, who constituted the majority of the early Gentile Church
- *sat opposite*, In full sight of
- *the treasury*, The place where the chests stood into which money was put for various uses
- *saw how*, In what manner, with what motives

The Widow's Two Mites 12:41-44



- Among the many that came to offer their gifts freely, there came one that was particularly taken notice of by Christ
- She was a "widow", had no husband to provide for her, and was a "poor" one
- She had no substance left her by her husband to support her with; very likely she was an inhabitant of Jerusalem
- *two mites*, The word translated "mite" denotes a small coin made of brass - the smallest in use among the Jews

The Widow's Two Mites 12:41-44



- “Such offerings are not evaluated according to their weight, but according to the good will by which they are offered.” St. Jerome
- In contrast to the hypocritical, pretentious and money loving scribes, Jesus points out a poor widow who does not place material wealth before her duty to God
- Trusting God with a faithful and generous heart, she gives what little she has to support the poor
- Her contribution counts more to God because she gave out of her poverty and so the percentage of her gift is far greater than the large donations others give out of substantial wealth

The Widow's Two Mites 12:41-44



- *their abundance*, Of their superfluous store
- They have given what they did not "need"
- They could afford it as well as not, and in doing it they have shown no self-denial
- Let us not forget that Jesus still sees the treasury
- He knows how much, and from what motives, men give to His cause
- He looks at the heart, and what our views are, in giving alms; and whether we do it as unto the Lord, or only to be seen of men



Discussion

- What two main points is the parable of the Wicked Tenants making? What do some of the details of the parable represent in the Jerusalem of Jesus' day?
- How does Jesus use Scripture to discuss the resurrection of the dead with the Sadducees? How can the text Jesus alludes to be considered a proof-text for them?
- What in your life belongs to "Caesar" (the state, your career, your secular or social commitments), and what belongs to God? In terms of the time you spend on each, how much of your life actually is given to God?



Discussion

- What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? And who is that neighbor?
- What do you think Jesus meant by telling the scribe that he was “not far” from the kingdom of heaven? Was Jesus commenting on his understanding of theology or his faith? What would he say of yours?
- What is one way that you can show your love to God more clearly this week? What is one way that you can love your neighbor (i.e., someone in need) more this week?

Discussion



- What is the significance of Jesus quoting Psalm 110? How did it challenge the views of the people that the Messiah would be both the *Son of David* and *Son of God*?
- What is your approach to supporting the Church financially? What can you learn from Jesus' observation about the poor woman's contribution?