

Setting the scene.

- We've just entered the last third of Mark. The author spends one third of the book on Jesus' final seven days.
- Jesus has been moving toward Jerusalem and has just come through Jericho. The days begin to be filled with some dramatic events and tension. What have we seen lately?
 - The (humble) triumphant entry (return to Bethany).
 - The (illustrative) cursing of the fig tree (re-entry to Jerusalem).
 - The (enough is enough) temple clearing (leaving the city).
 - The dead fig tree (re-entry to Jerusalem).
 - This is where we pick up.
- This is an authoritative Jesus, but also a humble Jesus – he's come to change how things are done, but how does he change things? (Proverbs 3.34).

Mark 11.27-28

- It isn't surprising that Jesus' actions over the past couple of days has drawn the attention of the temple leadership. Where Jesus has clashed with varying religious leaders outside of Jerusalem, this encounter is with the comprehensive group of Jewish "top dogs" (leading priests, teachers/lawyers and elders).
- The Lord has come to his temple and rather than coming to learn from him, they affront him, demanding to know the foundation of his authority.

- This is the outright clash with the religious leadership of Jerusalem that sets the wheels in motion for arrest and death.
- Their question is meant to be a rhetorical one and one intended to trap him. They're not genuinely asking, they are accusing, refusing to acknowledge his rightful kingship over Israel and the temple.

11.29-33

- Jesus answers in typical rabbinical fashion, by answering a question with a question.
- In response Jesus asks a question which forces the temple leadership to articulate their assessment of Jesus and his ministry. Rather than outright answering their question, Jesus asks *them* a question in which they would effectively have to answer their own question.
- Since John endorsed Jesus and the two had overlapping ministries, the temple leadership would, by affirming John's "authority from heaven", affirm Jesus' authority also. But, if they chose to answer by concluding John's authority was not valid, they would oppose the popular opinion that he was a genuine prophet.
- Jesus masterfully evades a direct answer to their question but in doing so asks a veiled question that reveals his own perspective about his authority.
- In a way Jesus is saying, "I know who I am. Who do you say that I am?"
- This is yet another window into the grand reveal and outright

statement Jesus will ultimately make about himself in chapter fourteen. Mark is intentional in doing this for us – it is unique to his gospel.

- Jesus' time has still yet to come, and Passover, just a few days away will be the culmination of the dramatic build up.
- The temple leadership's response is, in essence, a refusal to answer - a denial of Jesus' authority and identity.
- So, though Jesus' words with the temple leadership already reveal his own perspectives about himself, his next words make things even more clear.

12.1-11

- It's been a point of contention whether this is a parable or an allegory. It's a safe bet to call it both.
 - A parable tells a particular story that highlights a key point or truth. Because of this, every aspect in a parable is not meant to symbolize certain details. An allegory, on the other hand, is a story where each detail or component represents important details.
- This story is a combination of both. It highlights a central truth, but allegorically depicts Jesus' perspective of Israel's history.
 - The vineyard is Israel.
 - The vineyard owner is God.
 - The tenant farmers are Israel's religious leadership.
 - The servants sent to collect what was due the vineyard owner are Israel's prophets, many of who were mistreated,

rejected and killed over the years- including John, whom Jesus has just referred to.

- Jesus is the vineyard owner's son.
- The story illustrates Jesus' view that the temple leadership is a part of a long line of rebels, opposed to God's rule and ways. Israel had continually failed to obey God through its history, choosing to follow their own way, living as their own gods.
- This would have been extremely offensive to the leadership listening – because they honored the prophets, in hindsight, but Jesus says they're just like the unrighteous leadership of old. They are selfish, they are full of pride and they are rejecting God's humble advances.
- Jesus affronts the leadership by saying they've done the same thing. All the hypocrisy, pride and selfishness they had exhibited as "leaders" put them at odds with God's humble, selfless character.
 - It's important to note that Jesus' story is directed at the temple leadership, not Israel in general. In the story the vineyard is not destroyed, just those who run it.
- The high point of the story is the owner's sending of his son, a rightful heir, one, if anyone, would be worthy of respect.
- The tenant farmers refuse to recognize the authority he holds and kill him too. They want to own and control the vineyard. They run this vineyard with selfish violence.
- And what of the end of the story? What does this mean for the leaders he speaks to? Does God finally lose patience with the evil

being done and annihilate those he's not happy with?

- First, we should consider what we've already established, that this is neither pure parable nor pure allegory. We therefore shouldn't assume this is a literal "kill". This may be yet another detail directing us to a main truth, not predicting and depicting a literal event. In fact, we know this isn't a literal event, as God did not act this way once Jesus had died. The victory, instead, was through the resurrection and the growth of the early church.
- Second, we should consider the story's context. This kind of event did happen in Jesus' day, so the end of the story is a predictable one – evil tenants would have been dealt with in this manner. The point of the story may be to show the folly of the leaders in their rebellion against God and the unavoidable realities of opposing a sovereign being. Good will overcome evil – even when evil looks like it's won – as we will see later in Jesus arrest and death.
- Third, we might consider this ending as prophetic. God, through Jesus, *will* wrestle his kingdom from these leaders and re-establish a new community through his disciples. Also, it should be noted that Jesus has before predicted doom for Jerusalem, and the sacking of the city and destruction of the Temple does come about in 70AD.
- Of course, we should remember that the judgment cast on these leaders is not a judgment necessarily applicable for everyone who reads Jesus' words.

- The quotation Jesus uses is from Psalm 118 – the same Psalm sung by the people as he entered the city, one typical at Passover.
 - Psalm 118 speaks *of Israel as* the cornerstone, a people rejected by the world's nations, but God had established and blessed non-the-less, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt.
 - Jesus replaces Israel with himself by citing this Psalm 118 – In essence saying, “You may reject me, as the nations rejected Israel, but I will be the gateway for the world to God, not Israel. Not you, blind guides, whitewashed tombs.”
- He is calling these leader pagan and idolatrous, saying that they are opposing God, and he is re-ordering Israel's faith around himself entirely.
- How will he do this? Jesus will become the outsider, so we can be insiders. He will be rejected so we can be accepted.
- Not surprisingly, those listening don't respond well to Jesus' little story.

12.12

- Remember how this incident began – with the temple leadership asking Jesus about authority.
- What begins with Jesus' apparent evasion of their direct question has ended with a stinging indictment of their leadership and faith, and the hint at his own beliefs about himself.
- Jesus can't be arrested, however, since the crowd hold firm beliefs about him, so the temple leadership leaves.

What in the world does this have to do with us?

- What does Jesus' story say about us?
 - We don't own the vineyard.
 - Leaders will be held accountable for how they care for the vineyard.
- What does Jesus' story say about God's nature, human history and the future?
 - God is God. He owns and cares about the vineyard and he is sovereign.
 - God is patient. Consider his gentle patience throughout the entire Old Testament.
 - God is just. He will put right what is wrong.
 - Think about the recent events in the last chapter. Why does Jesus clear out the temple? People are being taken advantage of and others are being kept at arms length from God. In Mark we see Jesus continually reaching out to those who everyone thought God either wasn't interested in or had rejected. God cares about how we operate in the world. God cares about how we ultimately treat one another.

We saw in the story that Jesus speaks of removing the evil from Israel and re-ordering it, and in fact, the world around himself.

- What kind of community does Jesus reorder around himself?
What kind of a world does Jesus envision? What do we see so far?

- A world (beginning with a new community) that bears fruit (Mark 11.12-14, 20-21).
- A world (beginning with a new community) that embraces diversity and honors the outsider – “a place of prayer for all nations.” (Mark 11.15-17). This is a community that isn’t about itself – it’s others-focused.
- A world (beginning with a new community) that pursues forgiveness and humility (Mark 11.24-25).

In the weeks following we’ll see what other marks this new community oriented around Jesus has (giving to God what is God’s, loving our neighbor as ourselves).

Discussion Questions

How can we bear fruit?

How can we be others-oriented?

How can we live in humility and forgiveness?

Also:

What interests you about this story and Jesus’ interactions with these leaders?

What did you learn about God through Jesus in the past couple weeks of Mark we’ve been in? (chapters 11-12)