

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 17: Questions, Conflicts, and True Devotion -- Mark 12:1–44

Picture the temple courts now alive with crowds. Jesus has cleansed the temple. He has refused to be intimidated by the religious leaders. He has settled in to teach. Mark 12 is the long final day of teaching in the temple before the cross, and the religious establishment of Jerusalem comes at Him from every direction. Chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, each delegation bringing the trap they hope will silence Him. He answers them all. He turns their tests into teaching. And when none of them dare ask Him another question, Mark hands us the last quiet scene in the temple, a poor widow dropping two small coins into the offering box.

Jesus starts the day with a parable. A man planted a vineyard, built a tower, leased it to tenants, and went away. When he sent servants to collect the fruit, the tenants beat and killed them. Finally he sent his own beloved son, saying, “They will respect my son.” The tenants killed the son too, thinking they could seize the vineyard for themselves. Jesus quotes Psalm 118 about the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone, and the religious leaders realize He has told the parable against them. They want to arrest Him on the spot, but the crowd protects Him, so they walk away looking for another approach.

What follows is a series of carefully calibrated traps. Should we pay taxes to Caesar? If a woman has seven husbands in this life, whose wife is she in the resurrection? Which is the greatest commandment? Then Jesus turns the table and asks them His own question. How is the Christ both the son of David and David’s Lord? They cannot answer. The crowd hears Him gladly.

And the chapter ends with two contrasting pictures of devotion. The scribes, in long robes, taking the best seats, devouring widows’ houses, praying for show. And a real widow, walking quietly to the temple treasury and putting in two of the smallest coins available, which together added up to less than a penny. Jesus calls His disciples over and says, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (12:43–44). Mark 12:1–44 is a chapter about the questions men ask, the questions Christ asks, and the kind of devotion that ends up mattering most when all the words are over.

Group Discussion: In Mark 12 the religious establishment came at Jesus from every angle, mostly with questions designed to trap rather than to learn. Each delegation walked away unable to answer Him. The chapter ends with a poor widow whose two small coins Jesus says are worth more than all the large gifts of the wealthy. What does this combination of “clever

questions answered” and “quiet devotion honored” teach us about what Christ actually values, and how does it shape what real Christian devotion looks like in our own day?

Personal Reflection: Jesus saw a widow put in “all she had to live on” and called her gift greater than the large gifts of the rich. The Lord is still watching the offerings of His people, and He measures by what is left, not by what is given. Where in your own life would Christ-shaped giving (of money, time, attention, or love) cost you in a way that resembles the widow rather than the rich, and what would the first step toward that kind of devotion look like?

Read Mark 12:1–44

Study Questions

1. In the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–12) Jesus pictures a vineyard owner sending servants and finally his “beloved son” to a band of tenants who beat the servants and kill the son. He then quotes Psalm 118:22–23 about the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone. What is Christ teaching about the consistent rejection of God’s messengers across the Old Testament, His own identity as the “beloved son,” the meaning of His death at the hands of the religious leaders, and the way God answers that rejection through the resurrection and the church?
2. The wicked tenants imagined they could seize the vineyard for themselves by getting rid of the heir. Where in your own life are you tempted to act as if your time, your gifts, your money, your relationships, or your future are yours to seize rather than the Owner’s vineyard entrusted to you, and what would honest stewardship look like in that area?
3. The Pharisees and Herodians try to trap Jesus with the question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (12:14). Jesus calls for a coin, asks whose image and inscription it bears, and says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (12:17). What is Christ teaching about the legitimate but limited authority of civil government, the proper Christian relationship to the state, and the prior allegiance every disciple owes to God (compare Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17; Acts 5:29)?
4. In our own day, Christians can be tempted either to over-spiritualize and disengage from civil life, or to over-politicize and let political loyalties displace allegiance to Christ. Where do you sense those temptations at work in your own heart or in the church around you, and what does faithful Christian citizenship under Christ’s lordship actually look like?
5. The Sadducees, who deny the resurrection, propose a contrived scenario about a woman with seven successive husbands. Jesus tells them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (12:24), explains that in the resurrection people “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (12:25), and grounds the doctrine of resurrection in God’s self-revelation as “the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (12:26–27). What is Jesus teaching about the reality of the bodily resurrection, the nature of life in the age to come, the trustworthiness of Scripture, and the power of God to raise the dead (compare 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)?

6. The hope of resurrection should reshape the way Christians live this present life. Where in your own thinking and decision-making are you still functioning largely as if this life were the whole story, and how would deeper confidence in the bodily resurrection of Christ and of His people change your priorities, your patience, and your courage this week?
7. A scribe asks Jesus, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” (12:28). Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (the Shema) and Leviticus 19:18: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (12:29–31). What is Christ teaching about the heart of all God’s law, the unity of love for God and love for neighbor, the proper summary of New Testament obedience, and how this great commandment shapes the whole Christian life (compare Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:13–14; James 2:8–13; 1 John 4:7–21)?
8. The scribe responded to Jesus’ answer by agreeing wholeheartedly, and Jesus told him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (12:34). Where in your own walk are you not far from the kingdom (you have the right answer about loving God and neighbor) and yet not yet living the answer (the love is more theory than practice), and what would actually loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself look like in this season?
9. Jesus turns the questioning around and asks, quoting Psalm 110:1, how David can call the Christ both his “son” and his “Lord” (12:35–37). What is Christ revealing about His own identity as both the human son of David and the divine Lord whom David worshiped, and how does this question expose both the inadequacy of merely human categories for Christ and the necessity of confessing Him as Lord (compare Acts 2:32–36; Romans 1:1–4; Philippians 2:9–11)?
10. The chapter ends with two contrasting pictures of devotion: the scribes who love attention and devour widows’ houses, and a poor widow who puts in two small coins, “all she had to live on” (12:38–44). As you close this lesson, where in your own life of giving (money, time, attention, energy, love) are you giving out of abundance in a way Christ commends, and where could the Lord be inviting you to widow-style devotion this season?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 118:22–29, the stone the builders rejected and the day the Lord has made; Romans 13:1–7, the Christian’s relationship to civil government; 1 Corinthians 15:12–28, the necessity of the bodily resurrection of Christ and His people; Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Leviticus 19:18, the great commandments Jesus joined together; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9 and 9:6–15, the joyful, sacrificial generosity that flows from grace.