

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
**Senior Pastor Titus Green**  
**January 28, 2024**  
**The Stone The Builders Rejected**  
**Mark 12:1-12**

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This morning, we are continuing our verse-by-verse study of the Gospel of Mark. In just a couple of days, Jesus will be arrested and crucified. In our study last Sunday, Jesus went to the temple where He turned over the tables and chairs and condemned the corrupt religious system.

The next day, He heads straight back to the temple where He is confronted by the religious leaders. They want to know what authority He has to condemn them and take over the temple. They don't really care about the answer, they are just hoping He will say something that will cause the crowds to turn on Him. And, for a minute, it seems like He avoids the question and isn't willing to say where He got His authority.

But, that isn't the end of the conversation. Not by a long shot. Jesus stays in the Temple and continues engaging with the religious leaders. And that brings us to our text for this morning. Jesus tells the leaders where He gets His authority, and they get the message loud and clear.

Let's dig into this text a little at a time. We'll actually start by looking at the first and the last verses.

***Mark 12:1&12***

***1 And he began to speak to them in parables.***

***12 And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.***

This passage begins and ends with a bunch of "them's" and "they's." The whole point of Jesus' parable is about "them." And that begs the question: Who are "they?" Well, let's look back at a few verses from last week.

*Mark 11:27–28...And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?"*

So, "they" are the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. But that's only part of "them."

***Mark 12:13 And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.***

"They" are also Pharisees and Herodians. But wait, there's more.

*Mark 12:18 And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question...*

Now you have the Sadducees. So, in the verses surrounding our texts, there are 6 different groups of people who are part of “them:” chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees.

And I’m sure that clears it up for all of you...no, I’m not sure of that at all. So, let me give you a quick explanation of those six groups.

### **Chief Priests**

God instituted the priesthood after the people of Israel left Egypt during the Exodus. The priests were the leaders of worship and sacrifice at the Temple. The Old Testament Law provided for a high priest, also referred to as the chief priest. He was the leader of the priests and the one who performed the ceremonies on behalf of the nation of Israel on the Day of Atonement each year. However, by the time of Jesus, there was a whole group of chief priests who were led by one high priest. So, over time the priesthood had changed from what God had instituted – the biggest change being that most of them were corrupt. You can read Malachi 2 for a vivid rebuke of the priesthood.

### **Scribes**

The scribes were highly educated men who made it their life’s work to be experts in the Old Testament Scriptures, also known as the Law and the Prophets. They were the ones who were used by God to preserve the Old Testament by painstakingly making copies of the text. They were also called on to settle disputes about interpretations of the Law. Essentially, they were the lawyers/bible scholars of ancient Israel.

Like the priests, the scribes of Jesus’ day were largely corrupt. In Matthew 23, Jesus brings a scathing list of condemnations against them.

### **Elders**

To be an elder meant that you were recognized as a wise, influential leader in your sphere of influence. Elders were called upon to give advice on various issues or to resolve conflicts between people. Each city had a council of elders. The priests had a council of elders. The king had a council of elders. And the whole nation had a council of elders...

### **Sanhedrin – Council of Elders**

The highest, most powerful group of elders was known as the Sanhedrin. They were the ruling body and high court of Israel. At the time of Christ, they were made up of 70 influential men who were led by the high priest. Although they were patterned after the 70 elders that Moses established during his leadership, the Sanhedrin wasn’t a formal part of the Law of Moses. It seems that, over time, they just gained more and more power until they saw themselves as the highest authority in Israel. Can you imagine government agencies assuming power beyond their constitutional rights? That must have been a nightmare.

In many ways, the Sanhedrin was the Supreme Court of Israel and had jurisdiction over religious, civil, and criminal issues.

And, like the chief priests and scribes, they were corrupt. That’s because many members of the Sanhedrin were the corrupt chief priests and scribes, as well as elders. So, when Mark says the chief

priests and scribes and elders confronted Jesus, that's a reference to the Sanhedrin, or members of the high court of Israel.

But, what about those other three groups? What role do they play? Well, the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees were kind of like political parties mixed with church denominations.

### **Pharisees**

The Pharisees were mostly middle-class men who were leaders in synagogues and communities throughout Israel. They held the most sway over the common people. The name Pharisee comes from the Hebrew word for "separate." The idea is that they saw themselves as being so holy that they were set apart to God away from the rest of the people. But by the time of Jesus, they were mostly a bunch of self-righteous hypocrites. Since they were like a political party, some of the priests and members of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees (minority party).

Pharisees held several distinct doctrines. They taught that:

1. God is in control, yet the choices of people affect the course of history.
2. There will be a resurrection from the dead.
3. There is an afterlife where people will be punished or rewarded.
4. The Messiah will set up His Kingdom on the Earth.
5. The spiritual realm is real, including angels and demons.

### **Herodians**

The Herodians were a group of leaders who were more concerned with political power than religious purity. Their name comes from their support of the Herods, who were a series of kings appointed by the Roman Empire to rule over Israel. The Herodians were hated by the Pharisees. Pharisees were loyal to the idea that the Messiah would overthrow Rome and every other ungodly government once He set up His Kingdom. Herodians were just fine with Rome so long as it benefited them.

### **Sadducees**

The Sadducees were mostly affluent men who served in high-ranking positions of authority. Most of the priests and members of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees. They differed pretty dramatically from the Pharisees in their doctrine. For instance, they taught:

1. God is largely uninvolved in the everyday lives of people.
2. There is no resurrection of the dead.
3. There is no afterlife, so there will not be eternal punishment or reward.
4. There is no spiritual realm – no angels or demons.

While they were opposed to the teaching of the Pharisees and held more official power than the Pharisees, the Sadducees were often forced to compromise with the Pharisees because the majority of common people were deeply influenced by the Pharisees.

Okay. So, those are the people Jesus is talking about in our story. The members of the three political parties of Israel – Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. The various leadership roles in Israel –

priests and lawyers and elders. That's who our story is about. And one of the reasons I want you to see them in detail is because they provide a snapshot of Israel as a whole. They represent the entire nation. From commoners to the affluent, from conservatives to liberals, from traditionalists to progressives, the whole nation is represented in this group of people. And they are bitterly opposed to each other until they become galvanized by a single, common threat to their whole way of life – Jesus.

Now, with that in mind, look at the parable of Jesus.

**Mark 12:1**

***1 And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.***

Before I tell you something about this verse, let me tell you this: Life is like a box of chocolates. Did you know that? Do you know where that's from? It's from the movie "Forest Gump." If you were an adult (or close to it) during the 90s, there's a good chance you knew that without me telling you. What's the point? The point is that Jesus starts His story by making a similar kind of reference that all the Jewish leaders would have known. In Isaiah 5, the Lord sent a message to Israel and compared them to a vineyard that belonged to God. And Jesus words His opening line in nearly identical language as Isaiah 5.

Jesus is making it clear that God is the owner of the vineyard.

**Mark 12:2-5**

***2 When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.***

Jesus continues the story by saying the tenants beat and kill the owner's messengers. Since the vineyard is Israel and God is the owner, who were the messengers that were beaten or killed? The prophets who brought God's word to His people.

*Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*

The Jews rejected the prophets of God. Keep that in mind.

**Mark 12:6-8**

***6 He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and***

***the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.***

Jesus continues the story by saying the owner of the vineyard sent His beloved son to the vineyard. This beloved son was rejected and killed. Now, I’ll give you one guess as to who the Son is – His name is Jesus.

Don’t miss this: Jesus is answering the question about where He got His authority to come to Jerusalem and confront the corruption and sin of the Jewish leaders. He had the authority of God Himself because Jesus is the Son of God – He’s God in the flesh.

And we are getting close to the point of the parable.

***Mark 12:9***

***9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.***

Jesus says, “What do you think God will do to those who reject His authority by rejecting His Son?” Then, He doesn’t even give them a chance to answer. He says God will destroy them and give their place to others.

That’s the point of the parable and it gives us the big idea for this morning:

**Big Idea: Those who reject the Authority of God will be rejected by the God of all Authority**

Jesus is standing face to face with the highest human authorities in the nation of Israel. These are the men who represent every facet of Jewish society – from religion to politics and everything in between. And He doesn’t mince words. Because they had rejected the authority of God, they were being rejected by God.

Listen to the way John says it in His Gospel - *John 1:10–12 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,*

Jesus was born into the nation of Israel. He lived among the people God had chosen from all the people on earth to experience His blessing. Jesus preached throughout Israel and displayed His miraculous power there. Yet, every political party and every layer of government and every organized religious group rejected Him outright. Now, we know that in the future, God has a plan to gather the nation of Israel back to Himself. But, during the life of Jesus, the nation of Israel rejected God’s Messiah and, as a result, they suffered rejection from God. In 70 AD, the city of Jerusalem was leveled by the Roman Empire and the people of Israel were scattered for nearly 2,000 years.

And, even though the primary audience for Jesus' parable was the group of national and religious leaders who were standing in front of Him, His message is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago. Those who reject the authority of God will be rejected by the God of all authority.

In Romans 11, Paul is talking about God's judgment on the nation of Israel. In verse 21, he says, "*For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.*"

That's not just a warning to our nation (although it certainly is a warning to our godless nation), that's a warning to all of us. You and I aren't the exception to the rule of God. Those who reject the authority of God will be rejected by the God of all Authority. What a sobering thought.

So, in the few minutes we have left, I want to consider two ways Jesus says the leaders of Israel rejected the authority of God. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will help us take inventory of our lives. May we not be like the hard-hearted religious leaders of Israel. May we bow before the authority of God in our lives.

So, how did they reject the authority of God?

1. They rejected the authority of God's Word.

***Mark 12:2-5 When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.***

We already saw that these verses are a reference to the prophets of God. The prophets were sent by God to deliver His Word to His people...the New Testament Apostles were an extension of the prophets of Old.

*Ephesians 2:19–20 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,*

We'll get to Jesus as the cornerstone in just a few minutes, but for now I just want you to see that the apostles and prophets who delivered the word of God to us laid a foundation of truth upon which our entire faith is built. That means, when we reject the word of the apostles and prophets – the Bible – we are rejecting the word of God and His authority on our lives.

So, the question for us this morning is, "What role does the Word of God play in your life each day?" Every day you and I live, we are making decisions about how we will live. And we are either submitting our lives to the authority of God's word or we are rejecting the authority of God's word.

So...

- How do you determine how you will live and the decisions you will make?

- How do you decide the way you will relate to your spouse?
- How do you decide the way you will raise your children?
- How do you decide the way you will spend your money?
- How do you decide the way you will make your plans and pursue your dreams?

Is your life lived according to the Word of God or the spirit of this age?

Friend, be sober-minded. Don't be deceived by the way our world says we are to live. God has set a path for us to walk in His word, the Bible. His Spirit says, "here is the way, walk in it." And we are either living in submission to the authority of God's Word or we are rejecting it.

Is there any part of your life that you know is out of alignment with what God says in His word, the Bible? What needs to change in your life for you to be right in the light of God's word?

## 2. They rejected the Authority of God's Son.

***Mark 12:6-8 He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.***

The tenants had two options: They would either recognize the son as the rightful owner of everything or they would reject him in an effort to take control of everything. There's no middle ground here.

The culmination of God's authority is embodied in the person of Jesus – you can't submit to the word of God without submitting to Jesus because He is the One the entire Bible is all about. He is the Cornerstone of everything God is doing in the world today. That means the way we submit to the authority of God is ultimately expressed in bowing before Jesus as Lord. It looks like laying our lives down before Jesus and saying, "Jesus, you are my King. My life and all that I have belong to you, not me."

So, let me ask you, do you believe your life belongs to Jesus or do you believe your life belongs to you? Maybe the better way to ask that is, "Do you live like you believe your life belongs to Jesus or you?"

What do you need to lay down before the Lord Jesus today? Your kids? Your marriage? Your job? Your future? Your past? Your finances?

We bow before the authority of God by submitting our whole lives to the authority of His Son who is the Word made flesh.

And, as we close, I just want to show you one more thing that I pray will be a catalyst for us to bow before the authority of God. Look at the last thing Jesus says in this parable.

**Mark 12:10-11**

***Have you not read this Scripture: “ ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”***

This is a quote from Psalm 118. That’s the same passage of Scripture the people were quoting when they cried “Hosanna” and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” at the Triumphal Entry of Jesus in the last chapter. And what is He saying? He is saying that even though the people had rejected the authority of God, they couldn’t overthrow the God who is in authority. Yes, they would crucify Jesus. But that didn’t derail the plan of God. That accomplished the plan of God. Jesus is the cornerstone. He is the foundation of all God is doing in the world today, namely providing a way for people who have rebelled against the authority of God to be forgiven and restored to Him.

In rebellion, we crucified Jesus. Yet, the death of Jesus was the very way God was accomplishing His plan to provide salvation and forgiveness to all who would trust in Christ.

So, for all of us who, in various ways, have rejected God’s authority, people like me who have already blown it, hear the Good News – our sin isn’t greater than God’s sovereign grace.

In other words, our sin can’t overthrow the authority of God. He will accomplish all of His good purposes, no matter what and He chooses to use His sovereign authority to save and forgive and bless anyone and everyone who will bow before Jesus as Lord.

And here’s what that means. When you surrender your life to God, you aren’t losing anything, you are gaining everything God has to give. You are joining the side of a God who cannot lose.

Last week, I went to my kids’ soccer game in Orlando. Both teams showed up but there were no refs. The other team was responsible for providing the officials but apparently there was some miscommunication. That meant they had to forfeit the game and give the win to our team. But, since both teams were already there, they decided to go ahead and play the game even though our team had already been given the win.

It was the best game of the year. Our kids played better than they had all year. They weren’t anxious or fearful or timid. They played like pros. Nearly every kid scored a goal. They absolutely destroyed the other team. It was an absolute blast. You know what made the difference? They knew they couldn’t lose no matter what. They were already on the winning side.

And that’s what happens when you submit to the authority of God by bowing before King Jesus – you join the winning side. You become part of the team that cannot lose no matter what because Jesus has already secured the victory through His death at the cross and His resurrection from the dead. He will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. He will establish His Kingdom, and no one will stop Him. Our nation and the rest of this world may reject the authority of God, but that won’t stop the God of all Authority. He is using His sovereign power to pour out grace and blessing on everyone who bows before Jesus.

So, join the winning side. Bow before Jesus today and enjoy the ride.