

Gospel of Mark 21 - Chapter 12, verses 1 – 17:-

The introduction to this week's scripture makes it clear that Mark, in writing his Gospel has been selective in which portions of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ he uses. "*He began to speak to them in parables.*" (verse 1 – compare with Matthew chapter 21, verses 28 - 32).

Verses 1 – 9, the Parable of the Vineyard:- The "vineyard" is a familiar picture of the People of Israel in the Old Testament. (Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 – 7; Jeremiah chapter 12, verses 10 and following, and Psalm 80 verses 8 – 18). The reading from Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 – 7 would be a regular reading in the liturgy of the Synagogue. Please read carefully these verses from the prophet Isaiah, written over 700 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the time it was written the prophet foresaw judgement and exile coming for the apostate People of God. In today's study, the Lord Jesus has retold it, placing it in a new context to fit the time of his ministry. The oppression faced by many of the early prophets is clearly listed in Hebrews, chapter 11, verses 32 – 40. (In Jewish tradition the prophet Isaiah himself was 'sawn in two'.)

Although on many occasions the Lord Jesus appeared reluctant to be regarded as the Messiah, here there is a clear indication of the death that Jesus was going to die and the judgement which was to come on Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in A.D.70. The 'vineyard' was to be removed from the hands of its tenants and given to others. (verse 9)

Verses 10 – 12, The Cornerstone:- The quotation here is taken from Psalm 118, verses 22 – 23. This text was used in the early preaching and teaching of the Apostles. See Acts chapter 4, verses 8 – 12; Romans chapter 9, verses 30 – 33 and 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 4 – 8. There are a number of "corner stones" to trip over around Chudleigh. A large stone supporting the corner of a building, or one left jutting out at the bottom of the wall of a building was to prevent damage from cart wheels as the vehicle 'cut the corner'. On a dark night passers by could easily trip over these obstructions. The stone referred to in these verses is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He was rejected by the "*builders*" (the Jewish leadership) but the foundation stone of the New Temple of God. See 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 11 – 17.

"*The chief priests and the scribes and the elders*" Mark chapter 11, verse 27 were the ones seeking the arrest of the Lord Jesus. At this point he was popular with "*the multitude*" and the leaders would fear a riot if they arrested him.

Verses 13 – 17, Direct Confrontation with the Authorities:- Some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians were sent by the 'leadership' to 'entrap' Jesus. The word used is for an animal snare. The combination of the Pharisees and the Herodians is strange because the Pharisees were vehemently opposed to paying the hated "poll tax" to Caesar. The Herodians were known as collaborators with the Roman occupiers and fully supported paying the tax! A bit of a smarmy comment about the Lord Jesus being completely impartial (verse 14). The coin requested by the Lord Jesus was the equivalent of a day's wage for a worker, one of the commonest Roman coins. The mint and production of the coinage was strictly controlled by the Roman authorities. As with our coins they showed the head and inscription of the sovereign (Emperor). Paying the imperial dues meant a continuation of the mechanism of the state. As then – so now!

What is owed to the Lord God comes up next week when we look at Mark chapter 12 verse 29 – 30.

Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head the cornerstone;
Chosen of the Lord and precious,
Binding all the Church in one.
Holy Sion's help for ever,
And her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city,
Dearly loved of God on high;
In exultant jubilation
Pours perpetual melody,
God the One in Three adoring
In glad hymns eternally.

The opening hymn of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Service in St. Paul's Cathedral on the 3rd June.
From the Latin of the 7th - 8th cent. Translated by John Mason Neale (1818 - 1866)