

them : Parachuting into the text it's easy to not clearly know who this "them" is that Jesus is addressing, and who later responds so negatively to the parable and aims to entrap Jesus into a public act of treason (punished by death) in v. 13. Rereading Mark 11:27, "Again they [Jesus and the disciples] came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him..." The context of a brouhaha between Jesus and the religious authorities continues to unfold after his paradoxical and triumph parade with palm branches into Jerusalem and condemnation of the Temple institution and hierarchy.

PARABLES: Mark introduces plural parables, but only relates one in this section. Possibly it's been edited, or a selective choice to emphasize a point in the larger unfolding story.

A MAN PLANTED A VINEYARD This image comes from Isaiah 5 in which a vineyard stands for Israel and the man (land owner) for God. While we might not make that immediate connection when we hear it, those in Jesus' day most likely would have. This same imagery is also attested to in other Rabbinical writings, establishing it as well known and used.

In the context of Jesus' day landownership was a big hot button issue. A majority of the land was owned by a minority of absent landowners, what we might call the 99% vs 1%. This was despite the theological foundation of the Torah in which the Earth and everything in it belongs to God alone.

this one they beat over the head : some see this as a reference to John the Baptizer who was beheaded.

beloved son: this adjective evokes the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac in Genesis 22 and is the same term used by the divine voice from the heavens which speaks at Jesus' baptism and the Transfiguration: "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are **my Son, the Beloved**; with you I am well pleased.'" Mark 1:11 [Baptism] "Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is **my Son, the Beloved**; listen to him!'" Mark 9:7 [Transfiguration]

But those tenants said to one another : It's the farmers who collectively decide to kill the son, like the leadership of the nation/Temple. The phrase is identical with the words of Joseph's evil brothers in Genesis 37:20 and likely an echo of the story of Joseph and his fratricidally jealous brothers. Contradictorily, their reaction is also rational, the arrival of the far away owner's son could indicate the death of the former. They could kill the son and then claim the land on the legal principal that ownerless property goes to the first person on the spot who can establish a claim of occupation.

Mark 12:1-17

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ Then [Jesus] began to speak to **them** in PARABLES.

"**A MAN PLANTED A VINEYARD**, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

² When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ And again he sent another slave to them; **this one they beat over the head** and insulted. ⁵ Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. 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 So they seized him, killed him, and *threw him out of the vineyard*. ⁹ What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

¹⁰ 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 amazing in our eyes?"*

threw him out of the vineyard: Curiously Matthew 21:39 and Luke 20:15 change the order to ‘threw him out of the vineyard and killed him,’ reflecting the OT law that the blasphemer is to be put to death “outside the camp” in Leviticus 24:14, 24. This could also be a direct parallel to the memory that Jesus suffered crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem Hebrews 13:12-13; John 19: 17, 20.

The poetry of verses 10-11 is a quotation of Psalm 118:22-23, verses 25-26 of that same psalm were recited by the excited crowd at Jesus’ triumph parade in Mark 11:7-11. “Here’s the text of Psalm 118:21-26 (NRSV)

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

²³ This is the Lord’s doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷ The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.

Pharisees and some Herodians: The former were the religious group that resisted Roman occupation and acculturation. They might have been opposed to paying such taxes as profane or heretical. The latter are most likely those that supported King Herod and his dynasty, a Roman appointed tetrarch or collaborative ruler (think of Vichy France) and would probably have insisted on paying Roman taxes. Already there is internal inconsistency and tension in this rhetorical questioning.

we know Curiously these same leaders did not know from where John the Baptizer derived his authority just a bit ago in the story (see Mark 11:33) but now they are certain that Jesus is truthful and teaches the way of God. Another inconsistency in their thought and actions.

taxes to the emperor : Joel Marcus translates this as “tribute money” a head tax which was a sign of subservience to and occupation by Rome.

DENARIUS: a valuable Roman coin, Matthew says it was worth a day’s wages for labor. The coin in our story, according to archaeologists, most likely contained a portrait of Tiberius on one side and the other inscribed with “Tiberius Caesar, son of the deified August, himself Augustus” – basically asserting that the emperor was Lord of all things.

¹² When **they** realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but **they** feared the crowd. So **they** left him and went away.

¹³ Then **they** sent to him some **Pharisees and some Herodians** to trap him in what he said. ¹⁴ And they came and said to him, “Teacher, *we know* that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to **pay taxes to the emperor**, or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a **DENARIUS** and let me see it.” ¹⁶ And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And **they** were utterly amazed at him.