*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 8 - 13

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, March 8 Mark 12:1-12**

*“Parable of the wicked tenants”*

Absentee owners who contracted with tenants to farm their land in return for a share of the crop were common in Israel. In Jesus’ parable, the owner of the vineyard is God; the vineyard is Israel; the tenants are the rulers of Israel; the servants of the owner are the prophets of God; and, the son and heir of the owner is Jesus Christ. The time comes when the owner/God sends his servants/prophets to gather the grapes/spiritual fruit to which he is entitled. Sending his prophets to call his leaders and people to accountability, the tenants persecute his servants and send them away empty-handed. Perhaps in reference to John the Baptist, the last servant who comes is killed.

To this point in the parable, Jesus has referred to past history. Now, in the present, he refers to the owner sending his only Son with full authority to collect what is owed. There is opportunity for the tenants to show him the same respect that they would give to the owner, but they do not. Instead, they kill him and bring down judgment upon themselves.

*You, Father, have made your Son the cornerstone of my relationship with you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 9 Mark 12:13-17**

*“Can one pay taxes to Caesar and still honor God?”*

The Jewish religious leaders send some Pharisees and supporters of Herod to ensnare Jesus in a carefully laid trap. They ask a yes or no question about an explosive issue, taxes. Can one pay taxes to Caesar and still give allegiance to the God of Israel? Are people traitors to God for supporting Caesar’s rule? If Jesus openly rejects paying taxes to Caesar, he will be subject to arrest for treason. But if he endorses the tax, he will undermine his support among the people who chafe under Roman rule.

When Jesus asks them for a Roman coin, which he does not possess, they must dig through their purses to come up with one. When they do so, he asks them to identify whose image it bears. When they answer, “Caesar’s,” Jesus is ready with his answer to their question. Caesar’s coins belong to him because they bear his image. However, we belong to God because we bear God’s image. Thus, we owe God our whole selves, which he will later describe as loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (12:30).

*While I may owe the IRS something, Lord, I owe you everything. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 10 Mark 12:18-27**

*“As to whether the dead will be raised”*

Mark introduces the Sadducees as those who do not believe in resurrection. They bait Jesus with a teasing conundrum based on the law of levirate marriage, which prescribed what should happen when a man died with no heirs. Having married seven brothers consecutively during her lifetime, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? If resurrection is real, it will be completely chaotic – she clearly can’t be married to all seven at the same time. Thus, they think they have shown belief in the resurrection to be ridiculous.

Jesus’ response reveals that the Sadducees are deceived about their view of the resurrection because they are ignorant of Scripture and underestimate the power of God. He first corrects their assumption that, if resurrection were real, life in the resurrection would be a continuation of life on earth. Then he draws their attention to the biblical witness that God is the God of the living. God’s statement in Genesis that he is the God of those who have died shows that the dead have been raised to new life. Resurrection is, indeed, real.

*I believe, Lord, in the resurrection of the dead. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 8 - 13

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, March 11 Mark 12:28-34**

*“The greatest commandment”*

A teacher of the law asks Jesus: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” The question assumes a distinction among the various commands found in God’s law. The teacher is not asking which laws need to be obeyed and which can safely be ignored. He is asking, “What is the fundamental principle of the law on which all the individual commands depend?” Jesus gives a traditional reply from the daily confession of Israel known as the *Shema* which means “to hear.” It is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The confession proclaims that God is the only God, and one is to love him with one’s whole being: heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Jesus couples the command to love God with the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18). Love is our inner commitment to God that is expressed in all our conduct and relationships. Those who do not show love to others can hardly claim to love God (see 1 John 3:14-18). The statement that no other command is greater than these two means that the other commands simply spell out different ways in which to apply these two primary ones.

*There is nothing more important, Lord, than to love you and neighbor. Amen.*

**Friday, March 12 Mark 12:35-40**

*“Whose Son is the Messiah?”*

Jesus offers a puzzle about David’s Son, coming close to revealing his messianic identity as not only the Son of David in the sense of human lineage but also as the Son of God. He cites the official position of the teachers of religious law that the Messiah, when he comes, will be the Son of David. They are correct, but only partially. Their view needs to be supplemented because they do not fully comprehend who the Messiah is. To that end, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 to point out a conundrum.

If the Messiah is the Son of David, why does David address him as Lord? It is hardly customary for fathers to address their sons this way. One expects quite the reverse. David must be referring to someone greater than him and to a regime greater than his. Jesus does not wield the political and military authority of David, yet he is greater than the great king of Israel, and the kingdom that he brings is greater than that of “our father David;” it is the kingdom of the Father.

*As the Son of God, Jesus, you have brought us into your Father’s kingdom. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 13 Mark 12:41-44**

*“The widow’s offering”*

Jesus’ presence in the temple began with his condemnation of the buyers and sellers for the animal sacrifices and ends with his commendation of a widow who sacrifices her all for God. He situates himself near one of the thirteen shofar-chests (containers shaped like a trumpet) that stood around the court and served as collection boxes for the people’s offerings. Watching the people drop their money into the box, he disregards the wealthy donors who throw in large sums that are announced by the loud clang they make in the trumpet bell. The rich are still rich even after a sizeable offering.

Instead, Jesus singles out a woman whose offering makes only a tiny clink. He praises this woman for giving “all she had to live on.” While religious leaders may prefer the large gifts, in the divine currency exchange these can swiftly deflate to nothing. God cares not about the money but about the giver’s heart. The woman gives God all of her heart, soul, and substance, and thereby shows radical trust in God to provide for her.

*You gave your life, Lord, making the greatest sacrifice of all. Amen.*