

CHAPTER 12

In this chapter, we have,

- I.** The parable of the vineyard let out to unthankful husbandmen, representing the sin and ruin of the Jewish church (v. 1-12).
- II.** Christ's silencing those who thought to ensnare him with a question about paying tribute Caesar (v. 13-17).
- III.** His silencing the Sadducees, who attempted to perplex the doctrine of the resurrection (v. 18-27).
- IV.** His conference with a scribe about the first and great command of the law (v. 28-34).
- V.** His puzzling the scribes with a question about Christ's being the Son of David (v. 35-37).
- VI.** The caution he gave the people, to take heed of the scribes (v. 38-40).
- VII.** His commendation of the poor widow that cast her two mites into the treasury (v. 41-44).

◀111▶ MARK 12:1-12

THE VINEYARD AND THE HUSBANDMEN

Christ had formerly in parables showed how he designed to set up the gospel church; now he begins in parables to show how he would lay aside the Jewish church, which it might have been grafted into the *stock of*, but was built upon the *ruins of*. This parable we had just as we have it here, ◀113▶ Matthew 21:33. We may observe here,

I. They that enjoy the privileges of the visible church, have a vineyard let out to them, which is capable of great improvement, and from the occupiers of which rent is justly expected. When God *showed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel* (◀117▶ Psalm 147:19), when he set up his temple among them, his priesthood, and his ordinances, then he *let out* to them the *vineyard* he had *planted*; which he *hedged*, and

in which he *built a tower*, v. 1. Members of the church are God's tenants, and they have both a good Landlord and a good bargain, and may live well upon it, if it be not their own fault.

II. Those whom God lets out his vineyard to, he sends his servants to, to put them in mind of his just expectations from them, v. 2. He was not *hasty* in his demands, nor *high*, for he did not send for the rent till they could make it, *at the season*; nor did he put them to the trouble of making money of it, but was willing to take it *in specie*.

III. It is sad to think what base usage God's faithful ministers have met with, in all ages, from those that have enjoyed the privileges of the church, and have not brought forth fruit answerable. The Old-Testament prophets were persecuted even by those that went under the name of the Old-Testament church. They *beat them*, and *sent them empty away* (v. 3); that was bad: they *wounded them*, and *sent them away shamefully entreated* (v. 4); that was worse: nay, at length, they came to such a pitch of wickedness, that they *killed them*, v. 5.

IV. It was no wonder if those who abused the prophets, abused Christ himself. God did at length send them his Son, his *well-beloved*; it was therefore so much the greater kindness in him to send him; as in Jacob to send Joseph to visit his brethren, ^{Gen 37:14}Genesis 37:14. And it might be expected that he whom their Master *loved*, they also should respect and love (v. 6); "*They will reverence my son*, and, in reverence to him, will pay their rent." But, instead of *reverencing* him because he was the son and heir, they *therefore* hated him, v. 7. Because Christ, in calling to repentance and reformation, made his demands with more authority than the prophets had done, they were the more enraged against him, and determined to put him to death, that they might engross all church power to themselves, and that all the respect and obedience of the people might be paid to them only; "*The inheritance shall be ours*, we will be lords paramount, and bear all the sway." There is an *inheritance*, which, if they had duly *reverenced the Son*, might have been theirs, a heavenly inheritance; but they slighted that, and would have their inheritance in the wealth, and pomp, and powers, of this world. So they *took him*, and *killed him*; they had not done it yet, but they would do it in a little time; and they *cast him out of the vineyard*, they refused to admit his gospel when he was gone; it would by no means agree with their scheme, and so they threw it out with disdain and detestation.

V. For such sinful and shameful doings nothing can be expected but a fearful doom (v. 9); *What shall therefore the Lord of the vineyard do?* It is easy to say what, for nothing could be done more provoking.

1. He will *come, and destroy the husbandmen*, whom he would have saved. When they only denied the fruit, he did not *distrain* upon them for rent, nor *disseize* them and *dispossess* them for *non-payment*; but when they killed his servants, and his Son, he determined to *destroy* them; and this was fulfilled when Jerusalem was laid waste, and the Jewish nation extirpated and made a desolation.

2. He will *give the vineyards to others*. If he have not the rent from them, he will have it from another people, for God will be no loser by any. This was fulfilled in the taking in of the Gentiles, and the abundance of fruit which the *gospel brought forth in all the world*, ^{<3016>}Colossians 1:6. If some from whom we expected well, prove bad, it doth not follow but that others will be better. Christ encouraged himself with this in his undertaking; *Though Israel be not gathered*, not gathered to him, but gathered against him, *yet shall I be glorious* (^{<3016>}Isaiah 49:5, 6), as a *Light to lighten the Gentiles*.

3. Their opposition to Christ's exaltation shall be no obstruction to it (v. 10, 11); *The stone which the builders rejected*, notwithstanding that, is become *the Head of the corner*, is highly advanced as the *Head-stone*, and of necessary use and influence as the *Corner-stone*. God will set Christ as *his King*, upon his *holy hill of Zion*, in spite of *their project*, who would *break his bands asunder*. And all the world shall see and own this to *be the Lord's doing*, in justice to the Jews, and in compassion to the Gentiles. The exaltation of Christ *was the Lord's doing*, and it is *his doing* to exalt him in our hearts, and to set up his throne there; and if it be done, it cannot but be marvellous in our eyes.

Now what effect had this parable upon the chief priests and scribes, whose conviction was designed by it? They knew *he spoke this parable against them*, v. 12. They could not but see their own faces in the glass of it; and one would think it showed them their sin so very heinous, and their ruin so certain and great, that it should have frightened them into a compliance with Christ and his gospel, should have prevailed to bring them to repentance, at least to make them desist from their malicious purpose against him: but, instead of that,

(1.) They *sought to lay hold on him*, and make him their prisoner immediately, and so to fulfil what he had just now said they would do to him, v. 8.

(2.) Nothing restrained them from it but the awe they stood in of the people; they did not *reverence* Christ, nor had an *fear of* God before their eyes, but were afraid, if they should publicly lay hold on Christ, the mob would rise, and lay hold on them, and rescue them.

(3.) They *left him, and went their way*; if they could not do hurt to him, they resolved he should not do good to them, and therefore they got out of the hearing of his powerful preaching, *lest they should be converted and healed*. Note, If men's prejudices be not conquered by the evidence of truth, they are but confirmed; and if the corruptions of the heart be not subdued by faithful reproofs, they are but enraged and exasperated. If the gospel be not a *savour of life unto life*, it will be a *savour of death unto death*.

MARK 12:13-17

THE QUESTION RESPECTING TRIBUTE

When the enemies of Christ, who thirsted for his blood, could not find occasion against him from what he said against them, they tried to ensnare him by putting questions to him. Here we have him tempted, or *attempted* rather, with a question about the lawfulness of paying tribute to Caesar. We had this narrative, ⁴¹²⁵Matthew 22:15.

I. The persons they employed were the *Pharisees* and the *Herodians*, men that in this matter were contrary to one another, and yet concurred against Christ, v. 13. The Pharisees were great sticklers for the liberty of the Jews, and, if he should say, It is lawful to give tribute to Caesar, they would incense the common people against him, and the Herodians would, underhand, assist them in it. The Herodians were great sticklers for the Roman power, and, if he should discountenance the paying of tribute to Caesar, they would incense the governor against him, yea, and the Pharisees, against their own principles, would join with them in it. It is no new thing for those that are at variance in other things, to join in a confederacy against Christ.

II. The pretence they made was, that they desired him to resolve them a case of conscience, which was of great importance in the present juncture; and they take on them to have a high opinion of his ability to resolve it, v. 14. They complimented him at a high rate, called him *Master*, owned him for a Teacher of the *way of God*, a Teacher of it *in truth*, one who taught what was good, and upon principles of truth, who would not be brought by smiles or frowns to depart a step from the rules of equity and goodness; “*Thou carest for no man, nor regardest the person of men, thou art not afraid of offending either the jealous prince on one hand, or the jealous people on the other; thou art right, and always in the right, and dost in a right manner declare good and evil, truth and falsehood.*” If they spoke as they thought concerning Christ, when they said, *We know that thou art right*, their persecuting him, and putting him to death, as a deceiver, was sin against knowledge; they knew him, and yet crucified him. However, a man's testimony shall be taken most strongly against himself, and *out of their own mouths are they judged*; they knew that he taught the way of God in truth, and yet rejected the counsel of God against themselves. The professions and pretences of hypocrites will be produced in evidence against them, and they will be self-condemned. But if they did not know or believe it, they *lied unto God with their mouth, and flattered him with their tongue.*

III. The question they put was, *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?* They would be thought desirous to know their duty. *As a nation that did righteousness, they ask of God the ordinances of justice*, when really they desired nothing but to know what he would say, in hopes that, which side soever he took of the question, they might take occasion from it to accuse him. Nothing is more likely to ensnare ministers, than bringing them to meddle with controversies about civil rights, and to settle landmarks between the prince and the subject, which it is fit should be done, while it is not at all fit that they should have the doing of it. They seemed to refer the determining of this matter to Christ; and he indeed was fit to determine it, for *by him kings reign, and princes decree justice*; they put the question fairly, *Shall we give, or shall we not give?* They seemed resolved to stand to his award; “*If thou sayest that we must pay tribute, we will do it, thou we be made beggars by it. If thou sayest that we must not, we will not, though we be made traitors for it.*” Many seemed desirous to do it; as those proud men, ²⁴²⁰Jeremiah 42:20.

IV. Christ determined the question, and evaded the snare, by referring them to their national concessions already made, by which they were precluded from disputing this matter, v. 15-17. He *knew their hypocrisy*, the malice that was in their hearts against him, while *with their mouth they showed all this love*. Hypocrisy, though ever so artfully managed, cannot be concealed from the Lord Jesus. He sees the *potsherd* that is *covered* with the *silver dross*. He knew they intended to ensnare him, and therefore contrived the matter so as to ensnare them, and to oblige them by their own words to do what they were unwilling to do, which was, to pay their taxes honestly and quietly, and yet at the same time to screen himself against their exceptions. He made them acknowledge that the current money of their nation was Roman money, had the emperor's image on one side, and his *superscription* on the reverse; and if so,

1. Caesar might command their money for the public benefit, because he had the custody and conduct of the state, wherein he ought to have his charges borne; *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*. The circulation of the money is from him as the fountain, and therefore it must return to him. As far as it is *his*, so far it must be rendered to him; and how far it is *his*, and may be commanded by him, is to be judged by the constitution of the government, according as it is, and hath settled the prerogative of the prince and the property of the subject.

2. Caesar might not command their consciences, nor did he pretend to it; he offered not to make any alteration in their religion. "Pay your tribute, therefore, without murmuring or disputing, but be sure to *render to God the things that are God's*." Perhaps he referred to the parable he had just now put forth, in which he had condemned them for not *rendering* the fruits to the Lord of the vineyard, v. 2. Many that seem careful to give to men their due, are in no care to give God *the glory due to his name*; whereas our hearts and best affections are as much due to him as ever rent was to a landlord, or tribute to a prince. All that heard Christ, *marvelled* at the discretion of his answer, and how ingenuously he avoided the snare; but I doubt none were brought by it, as they ought to be, to render to God themselves and their devotions. Many will commend the wit of a sermon, that will not be commanded by the divine laws of a sermon.

THE QUESTION OF THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees, who were the deists of that age, here attack our Lord Jesus, it should seem, not as the scribes, and Pharisees, and chief-priests, with any malicious design upon his person; they were not bigots and persecutors, but sceptics and infidels, and their design was upon his doctrine, to hinder the spreading of that: they denied that there was any resurrection, and world of spirits, any state of rewards and punishments on the other side of death: now those great and fundamental truths which they denied, Christ had made it his business to establish and prove, and had carried the notion of them much further than ever it was before carried; and therefore they set themselves to perplex his doctrine.

I. See here the method they take to entangle it; they quote the ancient law, by which, if a man died without issue, his brother was obliged to marry his widow, v. 19. They suppose a case to happen that, according to that law, seven brothers were, successively, the husbands of one woman, v. 20. Probably, these Sadducees, according to their wonted profaneness, intended hereby to ridicule that law, and so to bring the whole frame of the Mosaic institution into contempt, as absurd and inconvenient in the practice of it. Those who deny divine truths, commonly set themselves to disparage divine laws and ordinances. But this was only by the by; their design was to expose the doctrine of the resurrection; for they suppose that if there be a future state, it must be such a one as this, and then the doctrine, they think, is clogged either with this invincible absurdity, that a woman in that state must have seven husbands, or else with this insolvable difficulty, whose wife must she be. See with what subtlety these heretics *undermine* the truth; they do not *deny* it, nor say, *There can be no resurrection*; nay, they do not seem to doubt of it, nor say, *If there be a resurrection, whose wife shall she be?* as the devil to Christ, *If thou be the Son of God*. But, as though these beasts of the field were more subtle than the serpent himself, they pretend to own the truth, as if they were not Sadducees, no not they; who said that they denied the resurrection? They take it for granted that there is a resurrection, and would be thought to desire instruction concerning it, when really they are designing to give a fatal stab, and think that they shall do it. Note, It is the common artifice of

heretics and Sadducees to perplex and entangle the truth, which they have not the impudence to deny.

II. See here the method Christ takes to clear and establish this truth, which they attempted to darken, and give a shock to. This was a matter of moment, and therefore Christ does not pass it over lightly, but enlarges upon it, that, if they should not be reclaimed, yet others might be confirmed.

1. He charges the Sadducees with *error*, and charges that upon their *ignorance*. They who banter the doctrine of the resurrection as some do in our age, would be thought the only knowing men, because the only *free thinkers*, when really they are the fools in Israel, and the most *enslaved* and, prejudiced thinkers in the world. *Do ye not therefore err?* Ye cannot but be sensible of it yourselves, and that the cause of your error is,

(1.) Because ye do not *know the scriptures*. Not but that the Sadducees had read the scriptures, and perhaps were ready in them; yet they might be truly said not to *know the scriptures*, because they did not know the sense and meaning of them, but put false constructions upon them; or they did not receive the scriptures as the word of God, but set up their own corrupt reasonings in opposition to the scripture, and would believe nothing but what they could see. Note, A right knowledge of the scripture, as the fountain whence all revealed religion now flows, and the foundation on which it is built, is the best preservative against error. Keep the truth, the scripture-truth, and it shall keep thee.

(2.) Because ye *know not the power of God*. They could not but know that God is almighty, but they would not apply that doctrine to this matter, but gave up the truth to the objections of the impossibility of it, which would all have been answered, if they had but stuck to the doctrine of God's omnipotence, to which *nothing is impossible*. This therefore which God hath spoken once, we are concerned to hear twice, to hear and believe, to hear and apply — that *power belongs to God*, ^{<1621>}Psalm 62:11; ^{<1619>}Romans 4:19-21. The same power that made soul and body and preserved them while they were together, can preserve the body safe, and the soul active, when they are parted, and can unite them together again; for *behold, the Lord's arm is not shortened*. The power of God, seen in the return of the spring (^{<1943>}Psalm 104:30), in the reviving of the corn (^{<1624>}John 12:24), in the restoring of an abject people to their prosperity (^{<1672>}Ezekiel 37:12-14),

in the raising of so many to life, miraculously, both in the Old Testament and in the New, and especially in the resurrection of Christ (⁴⁰¹⁹Ephesians 1:19, 20), are all earnest of our resurrection by the same power (³⁰²²Philippians 3:21); *according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.*

2. He sets aside all the force of their objection, by setting the doctrine of the future state in a true light (v. 25); *When they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.* It is a folly to ask, *Whose wife shall she be of the seven?* For the relation between husband and wife, though instituted in the earthly paradise, will not be known in the heavenly one. Turks and infidels expect sensual pleasures in their fools' paradise, but Christians *know* better things — that *flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (⁴³⁵⁰1 Corinthians 15:50); and *expect* better things — even a full satisfaction in God's love and likeness (³⁹⁷⁵Psalms 17:15); they are *as the angels of God in heaven*, and we know that they have neither wives nor children. It is no wonder if we confound ourselves with endless absurdities, when we measure our ideas of the world of spirits by the affairs of this world of sense.

III. He builds the doctrine of the future state, and of the blessedness of the righteous in that state, upon the covenant of God with Abraham, which God was pleased to own, being after Abraham's death, v. 26, 27. He appeals to the scriptures; *Have ye not read in the book of Moses?* We have some advantage in dealing with those that have *read the scriptures*, though many that have read them, *wrest them*, as these Sadducees did, to *their own destruction*. Now that which he refers them to is, what God says to Moses at the bush, *I am the God of Abraham*; not only, *I was* so, but *I am* so; I am the portion and happiness of Abraham, a God all-sufficient to him. Note, It is absurd to think that God's relation to Abraham should be continued, and thus solemnly recognised, if Abraham was annihilated, or that the *living God* should be the portion and happiness of a man that is dead, and must be for ever so; and therefore you must conclude,

1. That Abraham's soul exists and acts as a state of separation from the body.

2. That therefore, some time or other, the body must rise again; for there is such an innate inclination in a human soul towards its body, as would make a total and everlasting separation inconsistent with the ease and

repose, much more with the bliss and joy of those souls that have the Lord for their God. Upon the whole matter, he concludes, *Ye therefore do greatly err*. Those that deny the resurrection, greatly err, and ought to be told so.

MARK 12:28-34

THE HOPEFUL SCRIBE

The scribes and Pharisees were (however bad otherwise) enemies to the Sadducees; now one would have expected that, when they heard Christ argue so well against the Sadducees, they would have countenanced him, as they did Paul when he appeared against the Sadducees (~~423~~Acts 23:9); but it had not the effect: because he did not fall in with them in the ceremonials of religion, he agreeing with them in the essentials, gained him no manner of respect with them. Only we have here an account of *one* of them, a scribe, who had so much civility in him as to take notice of Christ's answer to the Sadducees, and to own that he had *answered well*, and much to the purpose (v. 28); and we have reason to hope that he did not join with the other scribes in persecuting Christ; for here we have his application to Christ for instruction, and it was such as became him; not tempting Christ, but desiring to improve his acquaintance with him.

I. He enquired, *Which is the first commandment of all?* v. 28. He doth not mean the first in *order*, but the first in *weight* and *dignity*; “Which is that command which we ought to have in a special manner an eye to, and our obedience to which will lay a foundation for our obedience to all the rest?” Not that any commandment of God is little (they are all the commands of a great God), but some are greater than others, moral precepts than rituals, and of some we may say, They are the *greatest of all*.

II. Christ gave him a direct answer to this enquiry, v. 29-31. Those that sincerely desire to be instructed concerning their duty, Christ will *guide in judgment*, and *teach his way*. He tells him,

1. That the great commandment of all, which is indeed inclusive of all, is, that of *loving God with all our hearts*.

(1.) Where there is a commanding principle in the soul, there is a disposition to every other duty. Love is the leading affection of the soul; the love of God is the leading grace in the renewed soul.

(2.) Where this is not, nothing else that is good is done, or done aright, or accepted, or done long. Loving God with all our heart, will effectually take us off from, and arm us against, all those things that are rivals with him for the throne in our souls, and will engage us to every thing by which he may be honoured, and with which he will be pleased; and no commandment will be grievous where this principle commands, and has the ascendant. Now here in, Mark, our Saviour prefixes to this command the great doctrinal truth upon which it is built (v. 29); *Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord*; if we firmly believe this, it will follow, that we shall love him *with all our heart*. He is Jehovah, who has all amiable perfections in himself; he is *our God*, to whom we stand related and obliged; and therefore we ought to *love him*, to set our affections on him, let out own desire toward him, and take a delight in him; and he is *one Lord*, therefore he must be loved with our *whole heart*; he has the sole *right to us*, and therefore ought to have the sole *possession of us*. If he be one, our hearts must be one with him, and since there is no God besides, no rival must be admitted with him upon the throne.

2. That the second great commandment is, to *love our neighbour as ourselves* (v. 31), as truly and sincerely as we love ourselves, and in the same instances, and we must show it by *doing as we would be done by*. As we must therefore love God better than ourselves, because he is Jehovah, a being infinitely better than we are, and must love him with *all our heart*, because he is *one Lord*, and there is no other like him; so we must *love our neighbour as ourselves*, because he is of the same nature with ourselves; our hearts are fashioned alike, and my neighbour and myself are of one body, of one society, that of the world of mankind; and if a fellow-Christian, and of the same sacred society, the obligation is the stronger. *Hath not one God created us?* ³⁰²⁰Malachi 2:10. Has not one Christ redeemed us? Well might Christ say, *There is no other commandment greater than these*; for in these all the law is fulfilled, and if we make conscience of obedience to these, all other instances of obedience will follow of course.

III. The scribe consented to what Christ said, and descanted upon it, v. 32, 33.

1. He commends Christ's decision of this question; *Well, Master, thou hast said the truth.* Christ's assertions needed not the scribe's attestations; but this scribe, being a man in authority, thought it would put some reputation upon what Christ said, to have it commended by him; and it shall be brought in evidence against those who persecuted Christ, as a deceiver, that one of themselves, even a scribe of their own, confessed that he *said the truth*, and said it *well*. And thus must we subscribe to Christ's sayings, must set to our seal that they are true.

2. He comments upon it. Christ had quoted that great doctrine, that *the Lord our God is one Lord*; and this he not only assented to, but added, "*There is none other but he*; and therefore we must have no other God besides." This excludes all rivals with him, and secures the throne in the heart entire for him. Christ had laid down that great law, of loving God *with all our hearts*; and this also he explains — that it is loving him *with the understanding*, as those that know what abundant reason we have to love him. Our love to God, as it must be an *entire*, so it must be an *intelligent*, love; we must love him with *all* the understanding, *ex holes tes syneseos* — *out of the whole understanding*; our rational powers and faculties must all be set on work to lead out the affections of our souls toward God. Christ has said, "To love God and our neighbour is the greatest commandment of all;" "Yea," saith the scribe, "it is better, it is *more than all whole-burnt-offerings and sacrifices*, more acceptable to God, and will turn to a better account to ourselves." There were those who held, that the law of *sacrifices* was the *greatest commandment* of all; but this scribe readily agreed with our Saviour in this — that the law of love to God and our neighbour is greater than that of *sacrifice*, even than that of *whole-burnt-offerings*, which were intended purely for the honour of God.

IV. Christ approved of what he said, and encouraged him to proceed in his enquiries of him, v. 34.

1. He owned that he understood well, as far as he went; so far, so good. *Jesus saw that he answered discreetly*, and was the more pleased with it, because he had of late met with so many even of the scribes, men of letters, that answered *indiscreetly*, as those that had *no understanding*, nor desired to have any. He answered *nounechos* — *as one that had a mind*; as a rational intelligent man, as one that had his wits about him; as one whose reason was not blinded, whose judgment was not biassed, and whose forethought was not fettered, by the prejudices which other scribes were so

much under the power of. He answered as one that allowed himself liberty and leisure to consider, as one that had considered.

2. He owned that he stood fair for a further advance; “*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God*, the kingdom of grace and glory; thou art in a likely way to be a Christian, a disciple of Christ. For the doctrine of Christ insists most upon these things, and is designed, and has a tendency direct, to bring thee to this.” Note, There is hope of those who make a good use of the light they have, and go as far as that will carry them, that by the grace of God they will be led further, by the clearer discoveries God has to make to them. What became of this scribe we are not told, but would willingly hope that he took the hint Christ hereby gave him, and that, having been told by him, so much to his satisfaction, what was the great commandment of the law, he proceeded to enquire of him, or his apostles, what was the great commandment of the gospel too. Yet, if he did not, but took, up here, and went no further, we are not to think it strange; for there are many who are *not far from the kingdom of God*, and yet never come thither. Now, one would think, this should have invited many to consult him: but it had a contrary effect; *No man, after that, durst ask him any question*; every thing he said, was spoken with such authority and majesty, that every one stood in awe of him; those that desired to *learn*, were *ashamed* to ask, and those that designed to *cavil*, were *afraid* to ask.

◀125 MARK 12:35-40

CHRIST THE SON AND THE LORD OF DAVID

Here,

1. Christ shows the people how weak and defective the scribes were in their preaching, and how unable to solve the difficulties that occurred in the scriptures of the Old Testament, which they undertook to expound. Of this he gives an instance, which is not so fully related here as it was in Matthew. Christ was *teaching in the temple*: many things he said, which were not written; but notice is taken of this, because it will stir us up to enquire *concerning Christ*, and to enquire *of him*; for none can have the right knowledge of him but *from himself*; it is not to be had from *the scribes*, for they will soon be run aground.

1. They told the people that the Messiah was to be the *Son of David* (v. 35), and they were in the right; he was not only to descend from his loins, but to fill his throne (⁴¹³Luke 1:32); *The Lord shall give him the throne of his father David*. The scripture said it often, but the people took it as what the scribes said; whereas the truths of God should rather be quoted from our Bibles than from our ministers, for there is the original of them.
Dulcius ex ipso fonte bibuntur aquae — The waters are sweetest when drawn immediately from their source.

2. Yet they could not tell them how, notwithstanding that it was very proper for David, in spirit, the spirit of prophecy, to call him *his Lord*, as he doth, ⁴¹¹Psalm 110:1. They had taught the people that concerning the Messiah, which would be for the honour of their nation — that he should be a branch of their royal family; but they had not taken care to teach them that which was for the honour of the Messiah himself — that he should be the Son of God, and, as such, and not otherwise, *David's Lord*. Thus they *held the truth in unrighteousness*, and were *partial* in the gospel, as well as in the law, of the Old Testament. They were able to say it, and prove it — that Christ was to be David's son; but if any should object, *How then doth David himself call him Lord?* they would not know how to avoid the force of the objection. Note, Those are unworthy to sit in Moses's seat, who, though they are able to preach the truth, are not in some measure able to defend it when they have preached it, and to convince gainsayers.

Now this galled the scribes, to have their ignorance thus exposed, and, no doubt, incensed them more against Christ; but the *common people heard him gladly*, v. 37. What he preached was surprising and affecting; and though it reflected upon the scribes, it was instructive to them, and they had never heard such preaching. Probably there was something more than ordinarily commanding and charming in his voice and way of delivery, which recommended him to the affections of the common people; for we do not find that any were wrought upon to *believe* in him, and to *follow* him, but he was to them as a *lovely song of one that could play well on an instrument*; as Ezekiel was to his hearers, ⁴³³Ezekiel 33:32. And perhaps some of these cried, *Crucify him*, as Herod heard John Baptist gladly, and yet cut off his head.

II. He cautions the people to take heed of suffering themselves to be imposed upon by the scribes, and of being infected with their pride and hypocrisy; *He said unto them in his doctrine, "Beware of the scribes* (v.

38); stand upon your guard, that you neither imbibe their peculiar opinions, nor the opinions of the people concerning them.” The charge is long as drawn up against them in the parallel place (Matthew 23); it is here contracted.

1. They affect to appear *very great*; for they go in *long clothing*, with vestures *down to their feet*, and in those they walk *about the streets*, as princes, or judges, or gentlemen of the long robe. Their going in such clothing was not sinful, but their *loving* to go in it, priding themselves in it, valuing themselves on it, commanding respect by it, saying to their long clothes, as Saul to Samuel, *Honour me now before this people*, this was a product of pride. Christ would have his disciples go with *their loins girt*.

2. They affect to appear *very good*; for they pray, they make *long prayers*, as if they were very intimate with heaven, and had a deal of business there. They took care it should be known that they prayed, that they prayed long, which, some think, intimates that they prayed not for themselves only, but for others, and therein were very particular and very large; this they did *for a pretence*, that they might seem to love prayer, not only for God's sake, whom hereby they pretended to glorify, but for their neighbour's sake, whom hereby they pretended to be serviceable to.

3. They here aimed to *advance* themselves: they coveted applause, and were fond of it; they loved *salutations in the marketplaces*, and the *chief seats in the synagogues*, and the *uppermost rooms at feasts*; these pleased a vain fancy; to have these given them, they thought, expressed the value *they* had for them, who did know them, and gained them respect for those who did not.

4. They herein aimed to *enrich* themselves. They *devoured widows' houses*, made themselves masters of their estates by some trick or other; it was to screen themselves from the suspicion of dishonesty, that they put on the mask of piety; and that they might not be thought as bad as the worst, they were studious to seem as good as the best. Let fraud and oppression be thought the worse of for their having *profaned* and *disgraced* long prayers; but let not prayers, no nor *long prayers*, be thought the worse of, if made in humility and sincerity, for their having been by some thus abused. But as iniquity, thus disguised with a show of piety, is *double* iniquity, so its doom will be doubly heavy; *These shall receive great damnation*; greater than those that live without prayer, greater than they would have received for the wrong done to the poor

widows, if it had not been thus disguised. Note, The damnation of hypocrites will be of all others the greatest damnation.

MARK 12:41-44

CHRIST COMMENDETH THE POOR WIDOW

This passage of story was not in Matthew, but is here and in Luke; it is Christ's commendation of the poor widow, that cast *two mites* into the treasury, which our Saviour, busy as he was in preaching, found leisure to take notice of. Observe,

I. There was a *public fund* for charity, into which contributions were brought, and out of which distributions were made; a poor's-box, and this in *the temple*; for works of charity and works of piety very fitly go together; where God is honoured by our worship, it is proper he should be honoured by the relief of his poor; and we often find *prayers* and *alms* in conjunction, as Acts 10:2, 4. IT is good to erect public receptacles of charity for the inviting and directing of private hands in giving to the poor; nay it is good for those who are of ability to have funds of their own, to *lay by as God has prospered them* (1 Corinthians 16:2), that they might have something ready to give when an object of charity offers itself, which is before dedicated to such uses.

II. Jesus Christ had *an eye* upon it; *He sat over against the treasury, and beheld now the people cast money into it*; not grudging either that he had none to cast in, or had not the disposal of that which was cast in, but observing what was cast in. Note, Our Lord Jesus takes notice of what we contribute to pious and charitable uses; whether we give liberally or sparingly; whether cheerfully or with reluctance and ill-will; nay, he looks at the heart; he observes what principles we act upon, and what our views are, in giving alms; and whether we do it as unto the Lord, or only to be seen of men.

III. He saw *many that were rich cast in much*: and it was a good sight to see rich people charitable, to see *many* rich people so, and to see them not only cast in, but cast in *much*. Note, Those that are rich, ought to give richly; if God give abundantly to us, he expects we should give abundantly to the poor; and it is not enough for those that are rich, to say, that they

give as much as others do, who perhaps have much less of the world than they have, but they must give in proportion to their estates; and if objects of charity do not present themselves, that require so much, they ought to enquire them out, and to *devise liberal things*.

IV. There was a *poor widow that cast in two mites, which make a farthing* (v. 42); and our Lord Jesus highly commended her; *called his disciples* to him, and bid them take notice of it (v. 43); told them that she could very ill spare that which she gave, she had scarcely enough for herself, it was *all her living*, all she had to live upon for that day, and perhaps a great part of what she had earned by her labour the day before; and that forasmuch as he knew she did it from a truly charitable disposition, he reckoned it more than all that put together, which the rich people threw in; for they did *cast in of their abundance, but she of her want*, v. 44. Now many would have been ready to censure this *poor widow*, and to think she did ill; why should she give to others, when she had little enough for herself? Charity begins at home; or, if she would give it, why did she not bestow it upon some poor body that she knew? What occasion was there for her bringing it to the *treasury* to be disposed of by the chief priests, who, we have reason to fear, were partial in the disposal of it? It is so rare a thing to find any that would not blame this widow, that we cannot expect to find any that will imitate her; and yet our Saviour commends her, and therefore we are sure that she did very well and wisely. If Christ saith, *Well-done*, no matter who saith otherwise; and we must hence learn,

- 1.** That *giving alms*, is an excellent good thing, and highly pleasing to the Lord Jesus; and if we be humble and sincere in it, he will graciously accept of it, though in some circumstances there may not be all the discretion in the world.
- 2.** Those that have but a *little*, ought to give alms out of *their little*. Those that live by their labour, from hand to mouth, must *give to those that need*, ~~4008~~ Ephesians 4:28.
- 3.** It is very good for us to straiten and deny ourselves, that we may be able to give the more to the poor; to deny ourselves not only superfluities, but even conveniences, for the sake of charity. We should in many cases pinch ourselves, that we may supply the necessities of others; this is loving our neighbours as ourselves.

4. Public charities should be encouraged, for they bring upon a nation public blessings; and though there may be some mismanagement of them, yet that is not a good reason why we should not bring in our *quota* to them.

5. Though we can give but a *little* in charity, yet if it be according to our ability, and be given with an upright heart, it shall be accepted of Christ, who requires *according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not*; two mites shall be put upon the score, and brought to account, if given in a right manner, as if they had been two pounds.

6. It is much to the praise of charity, when we give not only *to our power*, but *beyond our power*, as the Macedonian churches, whose *deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality*, ^{² 2 Corinthians 8:2, 3. When we can cheerfully provide for others, out of our own necessary provision, as the widow of Sarepta for Elijah, and Christ for his five thousand guests, and trust God to provide for us some other way, *this is thank-worthy*.}