

Week 16: Mark 12:1-13:37: Preparing the Disciples for Jesus' Death

Hook



Main Point: Jesus wants true-faith, not empty-religion, servants who love and care for the world the way He does.

Q: Have you ever owned an imitation or knockoff of something? How did it compare to the real thing?

If imitation is truly the sincerest form of flattery, then Walt Disney received a stunning compliment in 1961 with the opening of Nara Dreamland in Japan. The park was originally intended to be a licensed replica of Disneyland in Anaheim, but negotiations between the two companies fell through. By the time the deal collapsed, construction was already underway, so Nara Dreamland pressed forward as an imitation. Despite their best efforts, it lacked the precision, creativity, and attention to detail that Walt Disney himself brought to the original. The park managed to survive until 2006, but it could never match the experience of the real Disneyland — especially once Tokyo Disneyland opened in 1984 and Universal Studios Japan in 2001. In comparison, Nara Dreamland simply fell short. ¹

Q: Why do you think a knockoff Disneyland would struggle to compete with the genuine article?

Q: In what ways were the religious leaders Jesus encountered like imitation shepherds — appearing to lead faithfully, but missing the heart of God?

Transition: Like Nara Dreamland tried to capture the wonder of Disneyland without its heart, the religious leaders in Jesus' day imitated faith without truly knowing God. They had all the right appearances — the rituals, the rules, the robes — but lacked the love, humility, and truth that come from genuine relationship with Him. In today's passage, Jesus exposes the difference between imitation religion and authentic faith. He shows that God doesn't want hollow performances; He wants servants who love Him deeply and care for His world faithfully.

RECAP: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books, they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark's focus on Jesus' action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw that every part of Jesus' ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but in a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

In lessons 5 through 7, we saw Jesus behaving differently than the typical religious leaders of His day and flipping their social systems upside down. Some people reacted positively to Him, and others reacted negatively, especially those who didn't want their world turned upside down, because the status quo was working in their favor.

In lessons 8 through 10, Jesus performed three God-sized miracles that show us He is not only sent from God, He is God. Most responded negatively to Him, misunderstanding who He was and what He was trying to teach them, even His disciples.

In lesson 11, we saw see how God's heart, and our mission, is not just for the children of Israel but the whole world. In lessons 12–13, we saw that the Jewish people and even the disciples didn't know who Jesus really was or why He came. In lesson 14, we saw that the kingdom of God values marriage, children, humility and faith. In lesson 15, we saw Jesus fulfill the roles of prophet, priest and king.

In this lesson, Jesus will talk about His first and Second Coming. These are bookends to this section, with His teaching about true faith, not fake religion at the center. He will use a parable to tell the disciples what will happen to Him in Jerusalem – He will be killed and rise again – and who the culprits will be. Then He will tell them about the end times, what will happen when He returns and that no one knows the day or hour. They were in Jerusalem. It was His last week of earthly life. Jesus was preparing His disciples for His death.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus wants true-faith, not empty-religion, servants who love and care for the world the way He does.

Mark 12:1–12 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Parable: Jesus will be rejected and killed by the religious leaders.

Q: Why did the Jewish religious leaders want to arrest Jesus after this parable?

Q: Why do you think Jesus decided to speak in a parable here?

Parables were a common teaching device of Jesus. They are stories that typically convey one main point. Jesus usually told stories about common, everyday things – coins, sheep, vineyards, mustard seeds, etc. – because He was “speaking their language,” meeting the people with the Gospel where they were. Sometimes the people didn’t understand the parables because their hearts were hardened. The stories served both to reveal and conceal, revealing truths to those open to understanding and concealing it from those who were spiritually blind or resistant (Isaiah 6:9–10; Matthew 13).

Although they weren’t always funny, Jesus’ parables functioned kind of like jokes; they typically had a “punchline” the original audience “got” without really thinking about it. Most of the parables had a “gut-punch” moment at the end, something that caught people off guard with the truth. As modern readers, we sometimes miss the gut-punch moment because we don’t come from the same cultural background as the original hearers, so we must have the parables explained to us. This can make the parable lose its “punch,” the same way having to explain a joke makes it not funny anymore. Even if we don’t experience Jesus’ parables the same way, we can know that for His original audiences, Jesus’ parables usually caught them off guard and hit them right between the eyes with a challenging truth. That’s why, in this case, this parable angered the religious leaders and made them want to arrest Him.

This parable was based on a parable God told about Israel. In the Old Testament, Israel is often portrayed as a vine God had planted (Isaiah 5; Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 17). In Isaiah 5, God planted “the choicest vine” (Israel) on a fertile hillside. He did everything to take care of it, but it only yielded bad grapes (bloodshed, distress, injustice). So, God tore it out (sent them into exile). When the audience heard Jesus’ opening words, that parable from Isaiah would have immediately come to mind. In this story, the owner rented the vineyard to some farmers. At harvest time, he sent a servant to collect fruit. Giving the

owner a percentage of the crop was the typical payment. But they beat the servant and sent him away. This happened several times until the owner sent his son, whom he thought they would respect. But instead, they killed him, hoping that meant they would get the vineyard as an inheritance for themselves.

The servants in this story were the prophets God sent to Israel over the generations, calling them to repent – the prophets they rejected, beat, and even killed. The son, of course, was Jesus. The tenants were the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus asked the crowd so they would come to the conclusion before He said it – what will the owner do? Kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. God’s punishing those religious leaders would be just. The leaders wanted to arrest Jesus because of His parable, but they were afraid of the crowd, so they left.

They were in Jerusalem; it was Jesus’ last week of life. He was preparing His disciples for what would happen in just a few days and making sure they knew who His enemies were – these religious leaders who were supposed to teach the people about God but didn’t recognize His prophets when they came. Who didn’t listen to the call to repent. Who were more concerned about their own power than caring for God’s people and His world. May we be able to recognize these kinds of people in our midst, to discern those who really are God’s servants and follow in His ways, living like Jesus and caring for His “vineyard” the way He would.

Q: How can we recognize those who are true servants of God? What do their lives look like?

Q: What kind of opposition does the Church face today? Who are the enemies of Christ?

Mark 12:13–44 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Challenging Questions: God desires real faith and love, not empty religion.

Q: What questions did the religious leaders ask to try to trap Jesus?

Q: How was the poor widow different from the rich people in the temple?

This is a long section, but essentially the same thing happens over and over. Those same religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with their questions, and Jesus couldn’t be trapped. We’ll hit the highlights to get through it all:

Question #1 – Is it right to pay the tax to Caesar? The Pharisees and Herodians (supporters of Herod) who asked Him this tried to flatter Him first, but Jesus saw through their flattery. He knew they were just trying to trap Him. Jesus asked them whose face was on the coin. Caesar's. Then give back to Caesar what is his (taxes) and give to God what is God's – everything.

Question #2 – Because of the Mosaic law of levirate marriage, which they described in their question (Deuteronomy 25:5–6), if a woman was married seven times, whom will she be married to "at the resurrection," (meaning the resurrection of the dead at the end of time)? This question came from the Sadducees, who didn't even believe in the Resurrection; they were obviously trying to trick Him. They thought this kind of question proved there was no afterlife, like a "gotcha" moment in their debate. Jesus told them first that there is no marriage in heaven. Then He went further and said they were wrong about the Resurrection in general, pointing to Exodus² for proof. God said "I *am* the God of [the patriarchs]" – present tense, not past. If death ended our existence, He would have said "I was ..." But God is the God of the living; His people will live eternally with Him in His kingdom.

Question #3 – A teacher of the law heard Jesus answer well and asked which commandment is most important. Jesus answered, first, love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength – the *Shema*, the Hebrew prayer they recited twice a day – and second, love your neighbor as yourself. These two laws are two sides of the same coin; you cannot have one without the other (1 John 4:20). The teacher agreed that both are more important than all sacrifices, referring to the words of the prophets about empty religion (Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 6; Amos 5; Hosea 6; Micah 6). Jesus told him He was not far from the kingdom of God.

They were amazed with Jesus' answers, and from then on, no one dared to ask Him any more questions. They simply could not compete with His wisdom. Mark gave us another example. Jesus asked the crowd if Messiah was David's son, why did David call Him Lord? (Psalm 110). The people were amazed at His understanding of the Scriptures. Jesus told them to watch out for the religious leaders who liked to have all the honors of their position, but "devour widow's houses" and make lengthy prayers only for show. This points back to this same kind of empty religion the prophets had warned Israel about. Anyone who could oppress widows did not share the heart of God, who has special concern for the vulnerable (Psalm 146:7–9).

As He was teaching, He sat down across from where the temple offering boxes were. There were 13 wooden boxes with trumpet-shaped bronze funnels. The sound the coins made against the metal would have indicated to everyone around how much people

offered to the temple. Many rich people threw in large amounts so everyone could see how “righteous” they were, but Jesus told His disciples that the poor widow who put in two small coins gave more than they did. They gave out of their excess, but this woman gave all she had. In this whole section, Jesus showed that He valued true devotion and authentic faith over any show of religion.

Q: Where do we see empty religion in our world today? Where do we see true faith?

Q: How can we develop a heart like the heart of God for the world?

Mark 13:1–37 [Read]

Talking Point 3: End Times: No one knows the day or hour Jesus will return.

Q: Why didn’t the disciples need to be anxious about what they would say at the trial?

Q: Why should we always be ready for Christ to return?

Q: Think of a time you may have needed the right words to defend your faith. What happened?

As they were leaving the temple, one of the disciples pointed out how beautiful the building was. This was not the temple Solomon had built (957 BC); that one had been destroyed (586 BC). This was the one the remnant built when they returned from exile (539 BC), but Herod had spent 46 years renovating and expanding it to more than twice the size of Solomon’s original temple to try to win the favor of the Jewish people. It was a glorious building. Jesus responded that this building would be destroyed. Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Him privately later when that would happen and what the signs would be. Like many prophecies, there was a near-future and a far-future fulfillment. The temple would be destroyed in AD 70 as a foreshadowing of the last judgment that will happen when Christ returns.

- Many false prophets will come, claiming to be Messiah, and lead many astray.
- There will be wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines.

But Jesus said this is only the beginning of “the birth pains.” Paul described creation as groaning like a woman in childbirth as it waits to be reborn (Romans 8:22). This is the beginning of the labor, and the pains will get more frequent and intense as we get closer to the end.

- The disciples will be persecuted and put to death.
- Many will turn from the faith and betray and hate each other.
- Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

- The love of most will grow cold, but he who endures to the end will be saved.
- The Gospel will be preached to the whole world, then the end will come.

The end: The abomination that causes desolation, prophesied by Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Like many Old Testament prophecies, this had both a far-future fulfillment (the end times) and a near-future fulfillment in the Greek emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who persecuted the Jews and desecrated the temple (165 BC). The revolt against him is what the Jews celebrate in Hannukah. The final Antichrist of the end times will be like him and will ultimately desecrate the temple.

- There will be a “great distress” (tribulation) like there’s never been before, but it will be short for the sake of the elect.
- False prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders and deceive people.
- But when Jesus really comes, we will know because He will come on the clouds, visible to all across the world, and the angels will blow loud trumpets.
- He will gather His elect from the four winds.

Jesus went back to the metaphor of the fig tree. When the leaves start to come out, you know summer is near. Jesus said “this generation” will not pass away until these things have happened. The Greek word for generation (*genea*) can refer to one’s contemporaries (all those living at a given time) or to a group of people descended from a common ancestor. In this context, it carries a dual meaning, both senses at the same time. “This generation” means both the Jews living in Jesus’ time who would see the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD and those who will be living at the time of the time of the Great Tribulation who will see the end-time events. Both those generations together will see “all these things.”³

Jesus closed this section by telling them that no one but the Father knows when this time will come. It will be like the days of Noah, when people were just living their lives and suddenly the flood came. Therefore, be ready always. Jesus told a parable to illustrate what He meant by being ready. When a master goes on a long journey and leaves his servant in charge, the wicked servant will party, beat his fellow servants, and do as he pleases, but the righteous servant will care for his master’s other servants and household the way the master would. This is parallel to the parable He taught in the beginning of this section, making bookends that show us what it looks like to be faithful servants of Jesus in the time between His first and Second Coming – caring for His people and building His kingdom while we wait for His return.

Q: What does it look like for us to be God’s servants in the world, caring for His world the way He would until Christ returns?

Q: Why would Jesus wait so long to return in judgment? What is the purpose of these thousands of years of the church age? What is our mission during this time?

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Took

Main Point: Jesus wants true-faith, not empty-religion, servants who love and care for the world the way He does.

Most teachers find themselves delivering today's lesson at the end of December, a joyous time full of symbols and traditions that remind us of Christ's incarnation. But did you know that one of the most recognizable, and most published, Christmas hymns isn't a about Christmas at all? *Joy to the World* was originally a poem, written in 1719 by English hymn writer Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 98.⁴ The words look forward to the day when the whole earth receives her King, sin and sorrow will be no more, and Christ's ruling of the earth in a way that the nations will take an active role in revealing the glory of God.⁵

This Christmas season, allow the decorations, music, and festivities to cause you to look back to the manger and forward to the throne. Christ is returning! We do not know the day but we know with certainty that He is coming back – are you ready?

THINK: Reflect on the meaning of true faith versus empty religion. What does it look like to really follow Jesus in our day-to-day lives in our world today? How are we like servants the master left in charge of His kingdom? How can we be good caretakers of His world? How can we grow fruit in the world? How can we care for His people and grow His kingdom?

PRAY for God to grow your heart to be more like His, to give you the kind of love for the world that He has, a love for the vulnerable and even for your enemies. Pray for Him to give you wisdom and understanding to listen to prophets who call us to repent and turn back to Him when we have strayed. Pray for Him to grow your faith and guard you from empty shows of religion but show you what it means to truly follow Him with your whole heart.

ACT: Care for the world. Choose something you can tangibly do to care for God's world this week. It could be helping another person, especially caring for the vulnerable, or it could be caring for God's creation. Choose one thing you can do to care for God's world for Him. Pray specifically for God to lead you in what He wants you to do for Him this week.

¹ https://insidethemagic.net/2021/07/nara-dreamland-ad1/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² The Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Torah as authoritative, so giving them evidence from Exodus would be helpful.

³ John D. Grassmick, "[Mark](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985).

⁴ <https://cbn.com/article/holidays/story-behind-song-joy-world>

⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/joy-to-the-world-a-classic-christmas-hymn-reconsidered/>