

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 3: Session 7 – Holy Week

Class 19: Mark 12:1-12 – Parable of the vineyard tenants

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Explore (briefly) the motivations for theft/stealing (almost always due to a lack of trust about something)
- Read and discuss the parable. It provides a decent summary of why the Pharisees wanted Jesus dead.
- Focus on the “cornerstone” phrase about Jesus – relate it to “missing a key piece of a puzzle.”

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Sneakers*)
- 2 different puzzles (each w/ 24 pieces or so – it helps if the puzzles are similar colors. It’s not so easy to find cheap 24 piece puzzles -- I bought mine at a dollar store and I recommend you check at your local dollar store too). If you are going to have more than 6 people per team, you want to consider having more puzzles to keep the teams around 3 to 6 people. Have each puzzle stored in a zip lock bag (not in the box; but it’s ok to have the box covers there). **Make sure that you’ve taken two or three pieces** from each puzzle and **then switched** them with the other puzzle. In other words: Each ziplocked puzzle should have two or three wrong pieces.

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, one of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer; the teacher asking the question will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- **Here’s this week’s question:** *What is something/who is someone that feels solid/sturdy/dependable in your life that you trust?*

INTRO

- We are starting a new session of stories with today’s lesson. This session will look at the Pharisee’s motivation for Jesus’ arrest/death, his trial and his execution/crucifixion.
- In today’s scripture story, Jesus tells a story to the Pharisees about the Pharisees that explains why they want to, and eventually do, kill Jesus.

- One concept/idea that will help us better understand the story that Jesus tells is the idea of theft or stealing.
- To help us think and talk about stealing, let's watch this movie clip about a bank "robbery" from a movie made in the mid-90s called "Sneakers."

WATCH CLIP

ASK

- How much money was stolen? (\$100,000)
- And why did the "thieves" steal it? (to show the bank officials that it could be done – to help the bank people know what they needed to do better to protect their money)
- So did the "thieves" give the money back? (yes)
- Did it surprise you that the "thieves" gave the money back?
- Why do you think the "thieves" chose to give the money back? (because it wasn't theirs and because they trusted that the bank would pay them for their work)
- Do you suppose that the "thieves" might have kept the money or tried to steal the money again if the bank had NOT paid them – if the bank had said, "Thanks for the help!" and then didn't pay them? (maybe, maybe not – hard to say. But not getting paid would've definitely made it more *tempting* for the thieves to keep the money/try to steal it again)

TRANSITION TO SCRIPTURE READING

- So in the scripture story that we're going to read – Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is near the end of Jesus' ministry (and he knows it). The Pharisees are really mad at him – they've been upset with him almost since the start of his ministry – but for the first time (at least according to Matthew, Mark and Luke –the Gospel of John tells a very different story about Jesus' ministry) Jesus is actively teaching and doing his ministry in Jerusalem – in the big city.
- In fact, the story we're going to read happens while Jesus is in the Temple – one day after he *cleared* the money changers out of it – which really entertained and excited the crowd. And made the Pharisees very mad.
- But Jesus is not afraid – which is why he is now teaching in the Temple that he cleaned up.
- In today's story, Jesus is going to make the Pharisees even angrier. Because he's going to tell a story about them that makes them look really bad.
- **Note:** most likely, Jesus is telling this story on Tuesday of what we call "Holy Week." -- In other words, he's two days away from being arrested and three days away from being crucified.
- Let's listen to Jesus' story

READ Mark 12:1-12 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

1 He [Jesus] then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. **2** At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. **3** But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. **4** Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. **5** He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. **6** "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' **7** "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be

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ours.' **8** So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. **9** "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. **10** Haven't you read this scripture: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; **11** the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' ?" **12** Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

ASK (answers are in parenthesis)

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, "yep, that's interesting" or a, "Yeah, I find that to be weird, too" works]
- Whose vineyard is it? (the man in verse 1)
- Who runs the vineyard? (renters/farmers)
- Verse 2 is an explanation of the owner trying to collect some rent. Do the renters/farmers pay their rent for the vineyard? (No)
- What do they do instead? (They treat the person/people sent by the owner very badly.)
- How many times does the owner send people? (Many times)
- After all these people that the owner sends get mistreated, who does the owner send last? (his son)
- If you were the owner, would you have kept sending all those people? Would you have sent your child/son?
- Verse 12 – What do the Pharisees seem to know about the parable? (That the parable is about them. And because Jesus told this story about and against them, they want to arrest him. This also means that they then know, at least a little bit, who Jesus is in the story: The son of the owner...)
- Any guesses about what the vineyard represents? (The fun thing about stories is that the symbols can mean more than one thing. For example, the vineyard COULD be the world. But, Jesus since Jesus is telling this to the Pharisees, the original hearers of the story are going to understand the vineyard as ISRAEL.
 - **Fun fact:** vineyards produced wine, which in that time and place was important because it was like a water filtration system. The alcohol kept drinking water from going bad when you traveled – it also killed off bacteria. So that is an extra symbol that Jesus put in the story as a reminder that Israel is supposed to be this life-giving/life-saving thing.
- Who do you think the owner of the vineyard is supposed to represent? (God)
- Who do you think the renters of the vineyard are supposed to represent? (Those who are "in charge" of Israel...currently it is the Pharisees – but before the Pharisees, it would've been the kings of the Israelites)
- And who do you think the messengers and son of the owner are supposed to represent? (The prophets of Israel that came to Israel (i.e. *lived*) before Jesus did; Jesus would be the owner's son).

TELL

- There are a couple of things that Jesus is telling us about God in the parable:
 - 1. The owner of the vineyard sustains the life of the farmers and does not ask much in return;
 - 2. And, when God does not receive even that very little that God asks for, God is incredibly patient with the farmers despite how they treated the rent collectors/prophets.
- A couple things Jesus is telling us about the Pharisees in the parable:
 - 1. They are thieves. They use something that is not theirs and they refuse to pay for it.
 - 2. Because they are thieves, anyone who then tells them that they are not the owners (i.e. asks for their rent) are treated very badly.
- What we learn about Jesus from the parable:

- 1. He is not afraid of the thieving farmers.
- 2. He knows what the Pharisees want to do to him. And yet, he offers the Pharisees/farmers yet ANOTHER chance to do the right thing.
- So we talked about thieves/stealing at the start of class, how the thieves took something, but then stopped taking it and gave it back. But in the parable, Jesus is saying Pharisees **do not and will not** give back what they have taken.
- And because the Pharisees don't want to stop being thieves, then they are unable to receive the owner's messengers and son – because the messenger and the son are telling the Pharisees, "This isn't yours."
- This, then, is why Jesus wraps up the story by saying "This is why you reject me, just like the builders rejected the cornerstone."
- What Jesus means by this cornerstone language* (*for bonus notes about this phrase, see end of the lesson*) is that by killing Jesus, the Pharisees are not understanding the bigger picture; they are rejecting a big piece of the puzzle and because of it, they are going to lose the very thing that they are trying to hold on to – Israel/what God has given them but they are claiming to be theirs and theirs only.
- Let's do an activity that might help us think in another way about why the Pharisees don't accept Jesus and his message.

EXPLAIN PUZZLE ACTIVITY

- We are going to need to get into two (or more, depending on size of class) equally numbered teams
- To each team, I am giving you a puzzle in this zip lock bag.
- The goal for each team is to put its puzzle together faster than 5 minutes.
- Any questions?
- You may begin!

DO PUZZLE ACTIVITY

NOTES for Teachers about the activity

- If the kids ask for help, politely decline. Encourage them to use what they've been given in order to finish the task. Tell them "You've been given all that you need."
- If they ask permission to work with other groups, be noncommittal. Say, "I told you to put a puzzle together under 5 minutes – how you do that is up to you."
- Finally, if they are beyond stumped and time is running out, mumble and cough hints like, "What problem(s) are the other team(s) having?"

ASK

- So how did you feel when you realized your team didn't have all the right pieces?
- What made you think to see if the other team had your missing pieces?
- Is there anything that would've made you less likely to trade your puzzle pieces with the other team? (if it had been a competition, for example, and the teams were trying to beat each other – then it might've been difficult to trade; Or, if only ONE team had had the other team's pieces...it might have been more difficult to give the pieces away).
- What if there hadn't been the correct pieces – how might you have found a substitute for the missing pieces? (best answer I've heard: get the puzzle box and put the made puzzle on top of the picture on the box. Line it up perfectly so that the picture underneath corresponds with missing piece)

TELL

- So in the scripture story we just read, Jesus is telling the Pharisees that he, Jesus, is the missing puzzle piece.
- He says that at the end of the story when he says, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone/cornerstone."
- The Pharisees are missing an important piece of the puzzle about God and about life – but it's not because someone took it from them, like I did before class with your puzzle pieces. Instead, the Pharisees have rejected an important piece of the puzzle all by themselves.
- With the puzzle activity, if the rules had been to WIN instead of to FINISH, and everything else stayed the same, then it's VERY possible that neither team would've finished because they would've been worried about the other team winning and would not have *trusted* the other team.
- That's what's happening with the Pharisees. They've stopped trusting God because they think God is going to take away their things.
- If we think back to the movie clip, it's like the Pharisees had stolen the money – because they were paid to do so – but then they kept the money because they forgot what their job was.
- They forgot a big piece of the puzzle.
- Jesus is reminding them – in very strong terms – that their "things" that they are protecting have *always* been God's things.
- But according to the parable that Jesus told...do you think the Pharisees listen? Or will they keep rejecting the reminders and messages that God sends their way?
- In our next class, we will look at the decision that the Pharisees make about Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Bonus Notes:

RE: Jesus' statement about being the capstone. Translation-wise, this word can also be translated as "cornerstone" (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/capstone.html>)

A cornerstone, especially if a building sits on a slope, is the stone that supports the bulk of the weight of the building. Without it, the whole building wouldn't be able to stand.

If indeed Jesus actually used the word "capstone" – then the meaning is a little bit different. A capstone is decorative and sits at the top of a building or wall. It shows that the building/wall is complete. To not have a capstone would mean your building/wall is incomplete.

Either way, as a capstone or a cornerstone, Jesus is saying that he represents an important piece of the puzzle that the Pharisees insist on ignoring/rejecting.

In talking about how a cornerstone works, you might consider referencing a keystone. Keystones are very similar to how a cornerstone works (since they both bear all the weight). Keystones might make more sense architecturally to students since most buildings are not built on cornerstones, but compression arches (especially for tunnels and bridges) are still built. This video doesn't reference the keystone, but does a good job of explaining how arch design works:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDE1bfmQ9OE>