

THE MASTER ... Who knew how to preach  
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(MARK 12:1-12)

When the Lord Jesus instituted a new order of preaching, the reasons for His phenomenal success seemed to be three-fold. He was sure. He knew and believed what He uttered. He was simple. Even a child could understand His sermons. He was a story-teller. People of all ages appreciate a good story, and it is worthy of consideration that the Lord's messages were filled with parables and illustrations. The study before us supplies a notable example of this fact.

Christ . . . the final word-Mark 12:1-6

This is perhaps the most all-embracing of the Master's sermons, for in the short span of six verses He encompassed the Old Testament. (i) God's Garden. This must be the world into which He placed the husbandmen. Eden was but the initial stage of a greater program. Within the orbit of the divine will, God's servants would discover superlative enjoyment. Alas, sin interfered. (ii) Great guilt. " And at the season God sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive . . . the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent . . . another servant . . . and another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some." This part of the parable reflected Old Testament history, where the sin of men and the patient love of God were seen in bold relief. (iii) Glorious Grace. " Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son." Thus God spoke His final word, and made a supreme effort to reach guilty men. This was God's only Son. Christ was greater than the law; Christ was greater than the prophets who spoke of the law; Christ was the Son of God, and no preacher can overemphasize these claims. "God, who at sundry times and in divers places spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Heb. 1: 1-2).

Christ . . . the final hope-Mark 12:7-9

Perhaps these verses are among the most potent in the Testament. The Lord knew what would transpire, and predicted some startling events. (i) An inexcusable crime. He knew the people would crucify Him, and He said so. Their action would not be the product of a sudden brainstorm; It would be premeditated murder. They would face the challenge of His message, and deliberately reject the Son of God. (ii) An inescapable condemnation. Since Christ represented God's final endeavor to reach sinners, there could be no other Saviour. When people rejected Christ, " God gave them up " (Rom. 1: 24-26). (iii) An indescribable calamity. " What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen . . . " There are people who dislike this teaching; but we do well to remember that these words were spoken by Christ Himself. " It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Our Lord's parable speaks of the destruction of the husband-men; and not even the most imaginative mind can read into that utterance a message of recurring hope.

Christ ... the final triumph-Mark 12:10-12

" And they sought to lay bold on him . . . for they knew that he had spoken this parable against them . . . " The

THE MASTER ... Who knew how to preach entire story can be read aloud in seventy-five seconds, yet within that time the Lord expressed eternity. The depth of divine love, the immensity of human guilt, the reality of God's wrath: all found a place in the discourse. This was preaching at its scintillating best, but one other detail was needed to complete the picture. He continued, " And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" The cross had no terrors for Christ, for He recognized it to be the highway to eternal exaltation. The rejected stone would not be permitted to stay in desolate isolation. The Supreme Architect would decree that it be reclaimed and placed in a position of magnificence-the head stone of the corner. (i) The stone of shelter. Most people struggling against icy winds have been glad to reach the corner of a building and walk into a place of calm. (ii) The stone of strength. The corner stone unites other stones in the building. The death of Christ guaranteed that there would be other stones; and these, God planned to unite in a living temple. (iii) The stone of support. This is particularly true of the head corner-stone, for upon it rests the roof of the building. It is a thrilling thing to know that the Lord Jesus will be our support throughout eternity. Evil may win occasional victories, but the last great triumph rests with Christ. Hallelujah!

#### Making Things Understood

Preaching the Gospel is a waste of time if the preacher tells his message in a way incapable of being understood by his listeners. The Saviour was a Master-preacher because everybody understood what He meant.

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When a schoolboy was asked to explain the game of cricket, he said, " You have two sides, one out in the field, and one in. Each man in the side that's in goes out, and when he is out he comes in, and the next man goes in until he is out. When they are all out, the side that's been out in the field comes in, and the side that's been in goes out and tries to get those coming in out. Then when both sides have been in and out-including not outs-that's the end of the game." During the broadcast commentaries on the English Cricket Test Matches, the speakers from time to time explained the terminology of this fine old game. This became necessary because certain listeners new to the sport found it difficult to understand what was meant when the commentator frequently said, " He is bowling at the south end, and listeners will like to know that he has two fine legs, a square leg and a long leg." Newcomers to the game wondered if he were an expert talking about centipedes!

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In contrast to the ambiguity of the foregoing paragraph, the poem " He died for me," by an unknown author, seems a classic in making things clear-

His holy fingers formed the bough-  
Where grew the thorns that crowned His brow;  
The nails which pierced His hands were mined  
In secret places He designed.  
He made the forest whence there sprung  
The tree on which His body hung;  
He died upon a cross of wood,  
Yet made the hill on which it stood.  
The spear which spilt His precious blood,

THE MASTER ... Who knew how to preach  
Was tempered in the fires of God;  
The grave in which His body laid  
Was hewn in rocks His hands had made.

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Churchyards, in spite of their sombre surroundings, can be most interesting. The people of earlier generations were not as formal in their choice of epitaphs as we are, and consequently some of the older inscriptions on the tombstones are worthy of attention. For example, let me cite an instance said to come from Northern Ireland. A tramp who spent a night among the tombs was attracted to the message engraved on one of the stones-

Stop, traveller, stop! as you pass by:  
As you are now, so once was I;  
As I am now, so you will be:  
Prepare yourself to follow me.

Possibly the tramp sheltering from the storm leaned against that stone, and had time in which to think. Before he continued his journey the following morning, he scratched beneath the strange verse the additional two lines-

To follow you I'd be quite content,  
If I only knew which way you went.

.....  
Daddy, that was the first sermon I ever understood in all my life." So spoke one of the most charming girls I ever met. She was a high-school girl in her early teens; she had passed with honors every exam, and seemed set to gain the highest academic degrees. Her father was a respected business man who had more than a love for gambling; her mother was a nominal member of the Baptist Church. I was a young preacher at that time, and conducting an evangelistic crusade in their district. Edith for the first time heard and understood the Gospel, and I was thrilled to lead her to full commitment to Christ. When she made her first confession to her father, he was stirred; but for a while disguised his true feelings. Edith's mother unashamedly confessed her delight, and re-dedicated herself to the service of her daughter's Saviour. Within a few weeks that gracious girl went home to heaven, and we were immeasurably poorer when she left us. I shall remember the day when I led her father to Christ-he was won not through my preaching, but through the glorious testimony of his beloved child. And through all the years that family has remained true to Christ. It is better to speak one sentence which is understood than to utter a thousand which only confuse listeners.

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