

Mark 12:1—12
February 24, 2019

We have been following Jesus with the gospel of Mark as our guide. As we have followed him around we find new and enduring reason to keep following him.

Our journeys with Jesus have taken us to the Jerusalem and her temple. On two days in a row, Jesus has caused an uproar at the temple. Two weeks ago we witnessed Jesus clearing and cursing the temple because the Jewish leaders turned the house of prayer into a den of inequity.

Those leaders did not take too kindly our Lord's actions. And so, the next day in front of everyone they ask him—where do you get the authority to challenge our authority?

Jesus responded in a roundabout way showing the watching crowds the frauds these religious leaders really were. As we saw last week, Jesus refused to play their little religious reindeer games.

He would not answer their question. But he wasn't done with them. The episode with Jesus standing before the chief priests, scribes and elders is not over. Jesus did not walk away.

We are going to join Jesus again now that he has everyone's attention fastened up him. Jesus puts a bullseye on the religious leaders and takes aim and fires with a parable broadside.

And make no mistake, these leaders know they are in his sights. Here is the main idea that Jesus will tell them but they will refuse to hear.

PROP: God loves the undeserving.

God loves in the face of hate.

The chapter division here is misleading. These chapter divisions were inserted centuries after the writing of this letter. Sometimes they are helpful, sometimes they are confusing.

Here the transition from chapter 11 to 12 is confusing. So, I'm going to read beginning in 11:27 and I want you to ignore the big 12 on the left side of that column in your Bible.

I want you to see and feel the flow—

“And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, [28] and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” [29] Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. [30] Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.” [31] And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ [32] But shall we say, ‘From man’?”—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. [33] So they answered Jesus, “We do not

know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

“And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. ² When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. ⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture:

“ ‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
¹¹ this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

¹² And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.” Mark 11:27—12:12

Let us see how God loves in the face of hate.

1. A Vineyard + Tenants: Mark 12:1-5

An unnamed man goes to all the work to cultivating a spot of land for a vineyard. He goes all the way outfitting this parcel of land with all the elements needed to produce and process the fruit.

He planted the vineyard

He constructed a fence around the vineyard to define his boundary. The fence also kept marauding foxes and jackals at bay.

The owner fashioned a winepress so that all the grapes could be processed there on site.

Lastly, He built a state of the art security system for the time by constructing a watchtower.

From nothing, this land owner has hewn out of the wilderness a safe place for a cultivated vineyard to flourish from vine to harvest to wine.

This unnamed owner next leased the day to day management to a clutch of tenants who would live on site. The deal would have probably have been—the tenants do all the harvest work and the owner would give them 50% of the harvest.

The owner hires the tenants, presumably formalizes a contract and moves away.

It takes about 4 years after planting to be able to get a harvest of any kind from a vineyard. The tenants work the land that whole time and when the time for harvest comes, they gather all the grapes, press them out and store them in casks.

Then it is time to split the proceeds—but something unexpected happens,

Vs. 3,

³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

Okay. Let's try that again.

⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.

The treatment of the tenants gets worse. The first time, they send him away. The second time they whack him on the head and call him names.

Let's try that again,

⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.

Do you see the escalation?

At first these tenants ignore the wishes of the owner and send the servant away.

Then the tenants whack the servant for his trouble and send him away.

Then the tenants kill this poor servant who was coming in obedience to the owner. They had a deal and these tenants were breaking the contract.

You might not be aware that the image of a vineyard was one that the OT uses for the nation of Israel. The crowd knew this. The chief priests, scribes and elders knew this.

Remember last week when I said that Mark is a NT continuation of Isaiah?

The greatest of Prophets spoke on behalf of God to the people of God and said,

“Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
[2] He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes...”

[7] For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry!”

Isaiah 5:1-2,7

Jesus is telling an old story and giving it a new twist. The vineyard was the nation of Israel. The whole audience knew this.

The servants that were treated shamefully were the prophets sent from God.

- Some like Elijah were driven away.
- Some like Jeremiah were beaten and put in the stocks.

- Some like Zechariah and Uriah were killed.

Everyone gathered in the temple courts that day understood where Jesus was going. Israel worshiped other gods and was carried off into exile.

They all knew the history of their nation and how that history ended.

“The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. [16] But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.” 2 Chronicles 36:15–16

What they did not understand maybe this moment is that Jesus was not taking aim at the Jewish leaders who failed 600 years before. But he was looking at these leaders. These chief priests, scribes and elders.

Like we have seen these spiritual leaders were not leaders at all. They were out for personal gain and treated the temple as their own property and not the house of God.

Well, God had come to his house and then the story takes a turn.

The focus now turns to the Tenants and the Son.

2. Tenants + The Son: Mark 12:6-9

Vs. 6,

“He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”

Does that sound like a good plan?

If you had that vineyard—would you send your only son, the son you loved to these bloodthirsty tenants? At this point all the owner has reaped from his vineyard was insults and trouble.

I wouldn't send my son. I'd call out the National Guard grind these guys into dust. But that is not what the owner does—he sends his son.

The rest is predictable.

Vs. 7,

“But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.”

Do you see the action of the tenants?

They stand in their watchtower that was built by the owner to protect the vineyard and these guys use it to protect themselves and maintain power. They spy the son of the owner coming down the road.

Let's kill him and all of this is ours! You see, they think the only way that the son could show up was if the owner was dead. Kill the son keep the property.

At least that was their thinking. And in the story of Jesus that is exactly what they did. Not only that they treated the body in the most shameful way imaginable.

They threw it out to be picked on by animals and rot on the hot sun.

The tenants acted like the owner would never come and get justice. They must have reasoned that because we were able to beat and kill the servants we can do the same to the son.

The Owner won't come. We can do what we want.

False.

Vs. 9

⁹What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

These tenants thought the owner was a fool. A weakling. Someone they could walk all over. Kill the servants and the son and all of this could be ours! There will be no day of reckoning. We can get away with this forever.

No.

These tenants had confused patience with powerlessness.

The owner came and destroyed the tenants and gave the tending to the vineyard to others.

Just because these tenants could get away with these actions for a while does not mean that they could continually get away with this.

Jesus looks them flush in the face and says, and quotes again from Psalm 118 (which we have seen three weeks in a row) the old pilgrim song.

Vs. 10,

¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture (most can't read so we know he is talking to the religious leaders):

“ ‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
¹¹ this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

It is here that Jesus brings the story home. He tells the religious leaders what all this means. Jesus uses Psalm 118 to switch metaphors.

He goes from a vineyard to a temple.

The cornerstone is the first stone set on the foundation—it is important because all of the other stones in that building will be set with reference to that stone. The cornerstone is first and most important.

In other words, the builders rejected Jesus and in some mysterious majestic turn of divine providence it turns out to be marvelous.

How can we understand what Jesus is saying?

The son is killed and he becomes the most important and first bit of construction for a new temple.

How did a rejected stone become the most important stone in a new building?

That is why the Psalmist says all this is marvelous in our eyes.

Jesus the Son was rejected and killed by the religious leaders but his death did not lead to us undoing but to his exaltation.

How?

Because the death of the son was all a part of the plan of God all along. The only way this rejected stone could become the most important building block in a new vineyard is if the that cornerstone can't be destroyed.

How was the son rejected so that he could become the cornerstone?

Mark tells us.

Vs. 12,

¹² And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away."

These leaders planned to arrest him and kill him and—spoiler—that plan would work. To use the language of our passage, the tenants who killed the son are the same builders who rejected the stone.

It would seem if they knew that Jesus was talking about them that they would say, "Hey lets not be like that owner who killed the son."

But alas, their stubbornness had hardened into unrepentance. They showed themselves to be just like the wicked tenants of the vineyard. And these tenants would pay what they due to the owner.

Jesus is telling these religious leaders—don't confuse God's patience with powerlessness. This is one of the more straightforward allegorical parables.

The Owner: God the Father

The Servants: The Prophets
The Tenants: The Jewish Leaders
The Son: Jesus Christ
The Vineyard: The people of God

What are we meant to take away from this parable?

God loves the undeserving.

- *God loves even the obstinate*

The most nonsensical aspect of this story is how the owner kept sending servant after servant to these wicked tenants even though they received the same rough treatment.

Why?

I would submit to you that it is the surprising love of God. I say surprising because of all the people in the story we read the hardest to be patient with are the wicked tenants.

What was he doing?

Giving these leaders one, two, three, seven, eleven chances to see the error of their ways. Any one of us would have said—STOP the madness.

What do they say the definition of insanity is? Something like 'Doing the same thing over and over and hoping for a different outcome.'

"It I were God and the world treated me as it treated him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces."

Martin Luther

But, Sometimes love looks insane. Especially love expressed through patience.

Especially God's love toward the undeserving.

See the lovingkindness of God here. He sees Israel's wicked leaders and sends messenger after messenger.

The love of God is never going to make real sense to our minds. None of us would ever send our only sons into the clutches of these wicked tenants. If we did it, it would be as a leader of a special forces squad.

But that is not the logic of heaven.

God reaches out in loving forgiveness to those who repeatedly reject him. We know this because he reaches out with his beloved son toward sinners.

Do you know why this is helpful to us?

Because God's love for us does not make intuitive sense. It has no facsimile here on earth. No one in your life is patient toward you. God pursues people with an ever loving, never tiring, always running always forgiving embrace.

Here is the logic: If Father can pursue people like these wicked tenants—how much more us?

Here is the honest truth, we are all a bit more stubborn than we would like to admit. The Lord in his goodness has been patient and kind.

It is not for no reason that he reveals himself as the

"The Lord, the Lord a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."

Exodus 34:6-7

Slow to anger.

That means he is slow to be angry toward those who deserve him to be angry at him.

That is you and me.

In the face of:

- Hate he gives love.
- Murder he gives mercy.
- Defiance he gives grace.
- Rejection he gives forgiveness.
- Strife he gives kindness.
- War he gives gentleness.
- Death he gives life.

Why?

Because this God loves the undeserving.

He loves those that are unsafe to love. Do you see this? This God does not love those who are easy to love he loves us—in his love he does not take rejection from us as final.

He answers rejection with love.

None of us love in the face of hate.

- We hate in response to rejection.
- We hate in response to being taken advantage of.
- We hate in response to being misunderstood.
- We hate in response to being wronged.
- We hate in response to being maligned.

- We hate in response to being ignored.
- We hate in response to being snubbed.
- We hate in response to being insulted.
- We hate in response to being shamed.

He does not.

Instead of responding to with hate our God loves in the face of hate.

But God is not like us.

God loves in the face of hate.

I know God doesn't just love safe people because he loves me.

I'm so glad he is different than I am.

But that is not his final answer.

But God will not tarry forever. He will come and settle accounts.

- *God is patient not powerless*

Patience can sometimes be misunderstood as weakness. And if you are one who would take advantage of God's patience toward you—don't think he is weak or unable to punish.

He is coming.

You might say—he is coming for you wicked leaders—especially.

There is a sobering word for wicked leaders here.

Sometimes leaders can think wrongly about what God sees or doesn't see. These tenants could have had a big harvest of fruit and thought, "Here is the blessing of the Lord." But Blessing is not always seen in numbers or money or natural success.

Sometimes unscrupulous leaders seem like they can get away with anything they want. Not true. The Lord Jesus will move decisively against leaders who do not protect and tend the vineyard appropriately.

These tenants acted like they owned the vineyard—like they were able to do what they pleased with it—when they were merely servants, not owners.

All leaders would be wise to remember we are mere servants, not owners.

If you want to be a leader—be careful. James tells us that teachers and leaders will be judged with a stricter judgment.

God patient even toward you who try and erase him from your lives.

He is also coming for those who would try and erase God from their lives.

You might not be a leader but maybe you are living like these wicked tenants. You are rejecting messages and messengers of hope that come your direction. You do what you want how you want when you want and your life is falling apart.

See Jesus pursing you in love here.

God loves in the face of hate.

PRAY

[24] The LORD bless you and keep you;

[25] the LORD make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;

[26] the LORD lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24–26