

Parable of the Tenants: God's Mercy

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Text: Mark 12:1-12

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Series: If God were One of Us

Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of Mark, chapter 12.

I want to tell you the story of my cousin who I'm going to call "Chet". First memory is at a wedding of 3 year old Chet at a wedding in a three piece tuxedo. In the dictionary next to "cute" kid was Chet's picture. Chet had *everything*. His dad was the Vice President of a major international manufacturing company. He is a financial wizard who can make ventures profitable. About five years ago, Chet found himself carefree cruising down a Wisconsin highway with his mom. The car in front of him was moving too slow for Chet's taste, so he did something careless. He shot out of the double yellow line on that two lane highway and he began to race alongside this vehicle. The competing vehicle sped up and it became a race. Chet was intent on winning. But at 70 plus MPH things happen so fast. An oncoming car carrying someone's grandparents was head on with Chet, and in a split second Chet careened as quickly as he could but could not avoid a head on collision with the other vehicle. The point of impact was the passenger side where his mom was sitting. She died instantly. Chet sustained brain injuries that he's never fully recovered from.

What a simple thing we think it is to turn off our eyes and ears to a warning. Every day we see those quiet yellow lines on the highway, and we ignore them to our own peril. In the same way there are those double yellow lines of warning. There is the clear Word and the still small voice of the Spirit that we ignore at our own peril. How I want us today to listen to the voice of Jesus today. I want us to fully surrender to His voice and His Word today. I want to warn us all as Jesus warned the people of His day.

We ignore God's Word to our own peril. Today we are going to see the beautiful message of God's mercy, and we are going to see the majestic authority of God to bring judgment on those who would ignore His message. This is a thrilling and yet frightening passage of Scripture.

We are going to see four warning signs on our pathway to seeing the mercy and majesty of God. We are going to see:

1. A **Curious** Story
2. A **Cutting** Meaning
3. A **Catastrophic** Context, and
4. A **Compelling** Invitation

We continue in our series in Mark entitled, "What if God were One of Us?" Mark is a book of the Bible written to the Romans. Mark likely received the bulk of the info here

from the Apostle Peter before he died in approx. 64AD. It's a fast paced book—tons of action, constantly hearing the words, “immediately” and “it came to pass”. This book is written with a focus on the slaves of the Roman Empire. This was a burden for Peter and John Mark carries it forward.

Today we pick up in Mark 12 in the last week of Jesus' life. Jesus dies on Friday. He tells the parable we are going to read on Wednesday.

The Bible is a book that searches us and uncovers us as we read it. I find the good, the bad, and the ugly about myself in the pages of the Scriptures. Every time the Scriptures are opened, I am brought to a confrontation. I can repent, receive, and trust God's Word completely, or I can harden my heart and choose not to be effected by the truth at all.

I say this because the people listening to Jesus this day chose not to repent when they heard Jesus' uncover the awful state of their souls. They chose to plug their ears, and ignore the Word, and in two days these very people would crucify Jesus. Instead of bowing down before Christ and embracing Him as Lord and Christ, they resolve to be rid of His influence once and for all.

Murder in the Air

Now murder was in the air. Jesus specifically references His own death in the parable. It's called the “Parable of the Tenants”. This is a parable of warning. A parable is an earthly story that illustrates a heavenly meaning. This specific parable is found in the three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We are going to look at it in Mark 12.

Giant Arrow

Have you ever driven down the road and seen a giant arrow sign all lit up, warning you to get in the right lane? That's what today's message is. Get aligned with Jesus.

Christ had reached the city with fanfare and adoration. He had cleansed the Temple—now for the second time. He had done it before at the beginning of His ministry. He cried out, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'—But you have made it a den of robbers” (**Mark 11:17**). Christ has warned them sternly and rebuked them, and now it is about to get sharper than ever.

Jesus is uncovering the true state of these people's soul. He's not being cruel. He's compassionate. It is good when Jesus uncovers us.

You're here today, and there are areas of your life where you have ignored the Word of God and have closed your ears to the Spirit's voice. Perhaps you have never come to know Christ and you've always been cold. Perhaps you know Jesus, but His sweetness is distant. You cannot say that the joy of the Lord is your strength.

I wonder if there is someone who is here—maybe just one person—and you have rejected Christ in your life. Maybe you are passive about it. But you are not following Him. He

Who made you see right through you. Those who rejected Jesus eventually crucified Jesus.

The parable is frightening and disturbing to anyone with a hard heart, but it is shockingly reassuring to those who will open their hearts today and be humble and broken before our heavenly Father who wants to lavish His love on us.

I. Let's first see a **Curious** Story

Let's listen to the words of Jesus. **Mark 12:1**, "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."

The Vineyard Explained

A vineyard is one of the most common sites in ancient Israel. Hundreds of vineyards would have dotted the landscape.

- **Planting** the Vineyard – So the man planted the vineyard—*grape vines* are planted perhaps on a sloped hill on this man's land.
- **Producing** at the Winepress – There was a *winepress*. That's basically *a very large rock with a box carved into it where they would squash the grapes with their feet*. There would be a trough where the juice would flow to a lower vat that would catch the wine.
- **Protecting** with the Pit & Fence – Vineyards were vulnerable to wild animals, to robbers. And so in order to protect vineyards, they were always hedged about. This man protected the vineyard with a pit around it to protect it.
 - Probably this was something like a mote with water around it.
 - Then it says he fenced the vineyard. Sometimes that there would be a thorny hedge of bushes around it and other times there would be a stone wall around the vineyard.
- **Protecting** with the Tower – Then it says he built a *tower*. "A tower was for three purposes: security, shelter and storage. A tower would allow someone to watch and be sure no one was trying to invade. It would also be a place of shelter in the event of weather problems."¹ So the man has carefully prepared the vineyard. Everything should go very well. He's done everything necessary for the land to flourish with grapes.
- The **Leasing** of the Vineyard – then it says he "leased it to tenants and went into another country." He went quite far – all the way to an entirely different country.

¹ John MacArthur. *Comments on Matthew 21:33ff.*

The Fruit of the Vineyard

The man comes to collect the increase of his vineyard at harvest time. When the “season” of harvest came, he sent a servant to claim some of the fruit. **Verse 2**, “When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.” The tenants were sharecropping. They were not the owners. They were managing this beautiful vineyard. So they owed it to the owner to give the owner some of the increase and profit of this vineyard. So the owner sends his servant to receive the fruit.

A Shocking Turn of Events

Instead of being grateful and sending in a portion of the profits, they take the servant and beat him. They whip him and bloody him and sent him away empty handed. Another they strick on the head. Some they killed. Matthew tells us they stoned some of them.

Verse 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.”

What should the owner do?

He should kick out the tenants from His vineyard! It’s so shocking. He sends His son, **Verse 6**, “He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”

Application: And here we see the everlasting mercy of God. God would have you. He would have all of you. He would have you now. There is nothing in you that can keep you from being forgiven and fully reconciled in your life. God’s mercy is not based on you, but based on His own merciful character. Look at the mercy of God!

II. Now let us see the **Cutting** Meaning

The meaning is obvious here.

- God is the owner
- The tenants are those who receive the Word of God. Specifically here, the Pharisees and their ancestors.
- The servants who were beaten and killed are the prophets and preachers God sends

Here we see the mercy God has to those who turn to Him and the judgment for those who ignore Him and take advantage of His goodness.

III. Now we come to a **Catastrophic** Context. This is the last week of Jesus’ life. It’s Wednesday and He’s going to give His life for the world on Friday. He’s

prophesying His own death. He's giving hope to believers and warning the religious hypocrites.

In verse **6**, Jesus predicts His own death! "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."

IV. Finally we hear a **Compelling** Invitation. **Verse 9** asks, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" What does God do when we ignore His Word? What does He do with Israel? He sets them aside. Here we come to a compelling invitation this morning.

A. B. Look at the **danger** these people are in.

Verses 9-11, "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?'"

This is referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone of the church, God's kingdom. He is the heir of the vineyard. It is Christ who died for the church. Yet He comes to His own and His own receive Him not. He is rejected. But then He becomes the Chief Cornerstone, the Head of the Church, the King of kings and Lord of lords! Jesus is quoting Psalm 118:22-23 that Jesus is quoting. Peter quotes this in 1 Peter 2:6-8. Ephesians 2 says Jesus is our cornerstone and foundation!

1Co 3:11, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

B. Now look at the **damning** response. They continue in their way. Verse **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."

In two days Jesus is going to be hanging on a Cross. He's going to be rejected. He's going to be crucified and He's going to rise again. The invitation is subtle.

He's pointing at them in a sense. Are you the builders that reject the stone? Are you going to reject the Christ? Will you finally listen, or will you ignore God's warning like everyone else?

Conclusion:

Listening without Changing is Dangerous

This parable reminds us that listening to the Gospel on a regular basis is a dangerous thing if you do not surrender at the Cross of Christ. If you hang out in the darkness, the light begins to really bother you and offend you, and eventually, you don't want to be

around the light. You cannot be neutral with truth. You must either embrace it or be hardened in unbelief.