

“THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Mark 12:1-12

Introduction.

This morning we are accomplishing two things at once, we are finishing our summer series on parables and we are restarting our series on the Gospel of Mark. In Mark's Gospel we are in the final week of Jesus' life. He has made His Palm Sunday triumphal entry into Jerusalem where He was confronted and questioned by the religious leaders. Jesus answered them in part with this parable.

The Parable.

This parable wasn't hard to figure out. In fact, even the hardhearted and hardheaded Jewish leaders figured out it was about them.

Jesus tells Israel's story in the form of a parable. The landowner is God. The vineyard is Israel. The winepress and tower are God's His provision and protection. The tenants are the Jewish leaders who are supposed to care for the Israel. The servants are the long line of prophets and Jesus is the owner's son. The tenants are about to be removed from the vineyard for their rejection of the servants and the Son, and the vineyard will be given to others.

This parable reveals four truths about God and His relationship with us.

Mark 12:1

First, we see the excessive love of God toward His people evidenced by His long-suffering and patience.

The owner's actions remind us of God's special kindness toward His chosen people. His love resembles the way a vineyard owner treats his vineyard, the way a farmer treats his land and livestock.

The owner did everything. He planted good vines on good land, put in a winepress, built a tower, hedged it in for protection from predators. These things represent a well-provisioned farm with everything necessary for success.

The mention of a winepress and a tower are meant to remind us of all the blessings and benefits God gave to Israel. He didn't just leave them on their own to figure things out or try to make a go of it. God helped them all along the way.

God gave Israel Abraham as their father and gave them Moses to lead them to a Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. He cast out seven nations from them. He delivered them and protected them from their enemies. He gave them good laws and commandments. He made a covenant with them promising they would be His people and He would be their God.

No nation was as unworthy. God passed over the great nations of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome. No nation received as many blessings and privileges. To the people of Abraham God made the greatest promises and gave the greatest privileges. Among her God preformed His greatest miracles.

In the words of **Isaiah 5:4** What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?

All that can be said about Israel can be said about the Gentile Church over the past 2000 years.

Such is the nature and character of our God. He goes above and beyond what we could ask or imagine. He does all things well and gives only good gifts. His steadfast love endures forever.

Mark 12:2-5.

Second, we see the incredible wickedness and sinfulness of the human heart evidenced by the tenants reprehensible response to the excessive love and long-suffering patience of God.

The landowner leased the vineyard to tenants to tend and care for His vineyard. He rightfully expected and deserved a good return, but His generosity was repaid with ingratitude.

The priests were to tend Israel, to cultivate and fertilize with sound doctrine and right worship. The harvest should have been justice and righteousness, love and obedience. When out of neglect and sin they failed, God sent prophets to rebuke, correct, to call to repentance.

The history of Israel is a history of repeated warnings, judgments, pardons, and then another cycle of warnings. Over and over and over again God sent His servants the prophets to warn the people and called them to repentance. The most blessed and most privileged people of God rebelled and resisted. They abused and beat and even killed the prophets of God.

The grand theme of Scripture is the love of God and the subtheme is the rebellious sinful response of mankind to His love. It's summed up well in the last chapter of II Chronicles:

II Chronicles 36:15-16 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.

Mark 12:6-9.

Third, we see the extravagant grace of God in sending His own beloved Son as the central and final mission of God.

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

The word finally marks this as the climax of the parable. This is the last sending, there will be no more. This is the central point in all of human history.

After what had happened to all his servants, what owner in his right mind would send his own son? No human owner would do this. This is no ordinary landowner. It points to the incredible grace of God.

Everything in this story about God is excessive. His excessive attention to every detail and every need, His excessive sending, again and again. His excessive going above and beyond to send His own son.

The son is unique among those sent. The servants were hirelings, the son was the heir; the servants were forerunners, the son is the father's last word. The son is beloved.

“The son goes as the father's representative, with the father's authority, to the father's property, to claim the father's due” (Edwards, *Mark*, p. 358).

This is the message of Scripture, the excessive love and grace of God to a most undeserving people who owe Him everything in return.

But the tenants reject even the owner's expression of love as do all today who deny or neglect him.

Mark 12:9-11.

Fourth, we see the fearful and awful judgment of God that comes upon all who oppose Him and all who refuse to submit to His authority.

This was the crowning offense. This was the point of no return that brought down judgment on the leaders of the people.

In the face of countless prophets and messengers, in the face of unnumbered blessings and miracles, in the face of the Son of God Himself, they not only didn't receive Him, they rebelled against Him and killed Him.

The builders who should know good stone when they see it reject the very best stone of all.

Jesus asks a question which then very uncharacteristically He answers. What will the owner do? The owner will kill the tenants and give the vineyard over to others.

Jesus announces God's impending judgment which came just thirty years later when Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple burned, and the Jews scattered all over the earth.

Has there ever been a nation that has been so patiently dealt with by her God? And how long will God forebear with America before He visits us with a very great judgment? How long will we try His patience? How long will we test His longsuffering? He has not yet dealt with us as our sins and iniquities deserve, but for how much longer?

How long until He does to us what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Babylon and Assyria, and to Greece and Rome? When will He remove the candlestick of the American Church for her compromise, her complicitness with the culture, for her failing to stand firm? Where is the righteousness that exalts a nation (Proverbs 14:34)?

Application and Conclusion.

From these four points let me make four applications.

First, all our love and especially all fathers' love should be excessive and invasive like our heavenly Father's love.

God came, He imposed Himself, He wasn't distant or absent, He was present and engaged. He took responsibility to provide and protect, to bless and be a blessing. He planted, tended and took responsibility for what was done. He wasn't silent, but spoke, correcting, rebuking, calling to repentance.

God's love is an intrusive love. The Father sent the Son. The Son invaded His creation by taking on our own flesh. When He ascended back to heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit to powerfully invade our world. We are called to the same kind of intrusive love, love that presses in, love that shapes and influences, love that speaks up.

When fathers or pastors or elders or friends confront our sin they aren't being nosey, they are loving us with the intrusive, invasive love of God.

It isn't love to remain aloof, to say nothing as friends, neighbors and relatives drift toward hell. It isn't love when we withhold the truth about sin and the judgment to come from those who most need to hear it. Love does, love acts, love speaks, love invades a broken world to speak the truth in love whatever the cost.

Second, this parable shows us how insane sin and rebellion are. The tenants rise up against the master. The builders reject the foundation stone. The priests of the church rise up against the head of the church. The clay fights against the potter. The creature denies its creator.

It's pure folly. What can it accomplish? It's a most unnatural thing when we sin against our holy God, when we repay generous grace and mercy with disobedience and self-interest.

And notice how sins starts and progresses. First the tenants beat the servants, then they got bolder and struck the servants and treated them shamefully, then they went so far as to kill one. It got easier until they did what would have at first been unthinkable, they killed the son.

The old English poet Alexander Pope once wrote:

“Vice is a monster of so frightful mien (appearance)
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

Sin progresses, greed grows, bitterness takes root deeper and deeper, anger turns to hatred, sexual immorality begins with a few pictures then videos then acts out. We fall for the lie that having more of what already doesn't satisfy us will somehow bring us the pleasure we seek. When you believe that you've entered what one pastor calls the cul-de-sac of stupidity where we think maybe more of what doesn't work will work.

Listen to the prophetic word of Scripture. Repent of the insanity and stupidity of sin and walk in wisdom and the fear of the Lord.

Third, this parable teaches that what we do with Jesus is of utmost seriousness. To reject or deny or ignore Jesus is wickedness of the first order.

This parable is a picture of man's hardheartedness toward God. In the face of amazing grace mankind looks at all the blessings as rights or the work of his own hands.

It's important that we hear the message of this parable and take it to heart. Jesus is never fully loved and obeyed until our sin is fully seen and feared.

Heed this warning. Fear any hardness of heart toward Jesus and toward sin. Fear any unrepentance in your own heart, fear any resistance to humbling yourself before God.

The tenants thinking was that if they killed the heir then the property would become theirs.

How else would you sum up the history of mankind, but the attempt to get rid of or kill God? The thinking of mankind is if they can kill God then mankind can become God. We want to be in control, we want the last word. We all have a natural aversion to authority.

If we can be rid of God, we can live for ourselves, we can live for our own pleasure without guilt. We can be free of all His demands on us, we won't have to pay rent anymore or give Him His due.

But there is no freedom in living for ourselves and for our lusts. Remember the prodigal son we took his inheritance and squandered it in his own pleasures. He soon found himself empty, guilty, ashamed. Doing what is wrong will never fully satisfy our hearts.

Freedom is found in Christ. Freedom is found in holiness and righteousness.

Pray for a change of heart, pray that God will not pass you by or wash His hands of you. Pray that He will not let your conscience grow cold or hard, pray that He will not let you go. Pray that He will create in you a clean heart and renew a right spirit in you. Pray that God will not leave you in your sin and hand you over to it.

Fourth, this parable is meant to strengthen and encourage our faith in the midst of persecution.

We don't need to fear the threats and persecutions of those who oppose Christ. The efforts of the most wicked men are fruitless and vain. Even the very gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Church.

No matter how evil their efforts, what they do will only serve God's purposes. This testifies to their impotence and God's mighty power to build His church and spread His kingdom.

Mark 12:10-11 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'?"

God ordain to build His church in this way, that the cornerstone would start out being rejected.

This gives us a clear picture of the sovereign providence of God. Not only did God see it coming, He used it for His glory. Jesus' rejection and humiliation and death were used by God for a greater good that is "marvelous in our eyes."

All through the parable it looks like the rebels are winning, but they don't prevail, God does.

What a hopeful message this was to Mark's audience which was the Christian church in Rome living under Nero's persecution.

What a hopeful message this is to the church in the West which is declining in compromise, confusion, division and materialistic success.

What a hope filled message this is to us in the midst of our fears, sins and weaknesses.

The vineyard continues to exist, not based on the actions of the workers, but based on the self-sacrifice of the Son. May the grace of God toward us result in greater love and worship in our hearts and homes.