

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 12:1-12

Life Lesson

God entrusts His work, His Word, and His people to us as stewards, not owners. When pride, entitlement, or self-made authority replace humble submission, even religious faith can become a means of rejecting God rather than of worshiping Him. This parable calls us to examine our hearts, respond to God's patience with repentance, and receive the Son in obedience before hardened hearts turn grace into judgment.

Examine Scripture

He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went away. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the farmers to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard from them. 3 But they took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent another servant to them, and they hit him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 Then he sent another, and they killed that one. He also sent many others; some they beat, and others they killed. 6 He still had one to send, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those tenant farmers said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. 8 So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the farmers and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven't you

When the Cat's Away . . .

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus taught in parables. At first, he did so to help his hearers understand what he was teaching. However, more often than not, parables were meant to make the teaching harder to understand so that "he who has ears listen" (Matt. 13:9). In fact, in Matt. 13, the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables. He responded, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them . . . That is why I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: You will listen and listen, but never understand; you will look and look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown callous; their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn back—and I would heal them" (Matt. 13:11-15). So, Jesus spoke in parables because the people, especially the religious leaders, had rejected God and His authority. Parables were judgments on their hard hearts and deaf ears.

Yet there are times when the meaning of the parables is so clear that everyone understands them. We have such a parable in our text. The religious leaders understood that the parable was a judgment against them: "They were looking for a way to arrest him but feared the crowd because they knew he had spoken this parable against them" (v. 12). Jesus was not mincing words; He was not hiding the meaning. He wanted the religious leaders to know the exact meaning of this parable, for it was both a prophecy of His death and a judgment on their rejection of Him.

Typically, in the hermeneutical process, the interpretation of parables follows certain "rules." For example, in general, parables teach one major point. In other words, you should not press multiple meanings out of the parable; there is one major point being taught. Also, the major point is typically found at the end of the parable; it is the "gut-punch" at the end. Another key hermeneutical rule for parables is that they are not allegorical. In other words, not every character or

read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 11 This came about from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?" 12

They were looking for a way to arrest him but feared the crowd because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. So they left him and went away.

- Underline "them" in (v. 1) and write "religious leaders" above it.
- Bracket (v. 1) and write "Isaiah 5" to show a direct quote.
- In the margin, write the following:
 - Owner= God
 - Vineyard= Israel
 - Tenant Farmers= Religious Leaders
 - Servants= Prophets
 - Son= Jesus
- Place an * at (vs. 10-11) and write "Ps. 118" in the margin.
- Underline "they knew he had spoken this parable against them" and write "religious leaders" above it.
- Draw a line from (v. 12) to (v. 1) showing who Jesus is speaking to.

Personal Notes

detail has a hidden or spiritual meaning. The only time we can accept a parable as allegorical is when Jesus alludes to the allegory Himself, such as in the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13).

Likewise, in this parable, Jesus gives us clues to its allegorical interpretation. The first clue is that Jesus is recalling an Old Testament allegory of Israel. In (v. 1), Jesus begins the parable: "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower." It is almost a direct quote from (Isaiah 5). The religious leaders, along with any faithful Jew, would have understood the allusion to the Old Testament allegory of Israel's judgment through the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the temple. Their ears would have perked up as Jesus recalled the very words of the judgment against Israel and used them to teach a parable.

Another clue is that Jesus himself interprets the parable allegorically. Jesus uses (Psalm 118:22-23) to interpret the parable: "Haven't you read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came about from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?" (vs. 10-11). Jesus leaves little doubt that the religious leaders are the tenant farmers and that He is the son in the parable. Again, we know the religious leader understood His point because of their reaction: "they knew he had spoken this parable against them" (v. 12).

If the parable is interpreted allegorically, what does everything represent? Let's begin with the obvious. As already mentioned, the tenant farmers are the religious leaders. They are the central characters of the parable and the focus of the interpretation, so they receive the most attention. The next obvious is the son and heir. There is little doubt or argument that this represents Jesus Himself. The killing of the son reprints Jesus' crucifixion. The owner of the vineyard is the Lord, as He is the owner, father, and ultimate judge. The vineyard represents Israel, just as it did in (Is. 5). What about the servants the owner sent before sending his son? Most commentators agree that these servants represent the Old Testament prophets who were rejected and killed. Jesus alludes to this in (Matt. 23:29-32): "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets' blood.' So you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors' sins!" Some commentators even suggest that the winepress represents the temple altar and the tower represents the temple itself. However, since these have little significance in the outcome of the parable, it is unlikely that they need to be allegorically interpreted.

Personal Notes

Now, with some background and understanding, let's dive into the text.

V. 1

Jesus is still addressing the religious leaders who challenged His authority in (Mark 11). Again, the parable begins with a strong recall of (Isaiah 5). Jesus is not only recalling the previous judgment on Israel but also proclaiming a new judgment against the religious leaders. God entrusted His people to the priests and religious leaders: "Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went away" (v. 1). In most cases, a new vineyard would take up to five years to become profitable and fruitful. Thus, tenant farmers would invest substantial time and labor in the vineyard before seeing a return. This could produce a sense of entitlement in them. Therefore, the vineyard was leased to tenant farmers; it was not granted to them. It was still the owner's vineyard; they were only to care for it and work it to produce abundant fruit. The religious leaders were not the "owners" of the faith; they were entrusted to lead the people in true worship of God. Yet, as we have seen previously in Mark, they have made their own "adjustments" to the Law and to its interpretation to suit their own needs and desires. They began to take unlawful ownership of what God entrusted to them. The entitlement of the religious leaders over hundreds of years became so intense that they rejected the very Law in which they were entrusted and would soon reject the very Messiah they awaited.

Vs. 2-5

At the harvest time, the owner sent for what was rightfully his. Yet, the tenant farmers, who have worked the vineyard but did not own it, refused to submit to the owner's authority. Every servant that was sent, they rejected, beat, or even killed. The Greek provides even more gruesome images of how the servants were treated. When the first servant came, "they took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed" (v. 3). The word for "beat him" is "kero" which means to punch severely or flog. The second servant came and they "hit him on the head and treated him shamefully" (v. 4). The word here is "kephalio;" it literally means to crush the head in." The third servant came and they "killed that one" (v. 5). The parallel account in (Matt. 25) shows that they stoned him to death. Even after this, the owner sent more servants; some beaten and some killed. So, this is a violent parable. These tenant farmers are not just selfish and entitled; they are evil and completely depraved.

The religious leaders were probably shocked at first by such grotesque language, but what began as shock toward the words Jesus used slowly became shock toward His insinuation. They are the tenant farmers! They are the ones who are evil, depraved, sinful, rejecting the

Personal Reflection

1. In what ways might I be confusing stewardship with ownership in my relationship with God? Are there areas of my life where I subtly act as if what God entrusted to me were mine?
2. How do I typically respond when God's Word confronts or challenges my assumptions, habits, or sense of authority? Do I respond with humility and repentance, or with defensiveness and justification, as the tenant farmers did?
3. What voices of God have I been tempted to ignore or resist through Scripture, faithful teachers, or the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Why? What might my resistance reveal about the condition of my heart?
4. Am I engaging Scripture in a way that truly transforms me, or merely in a way that informs or affirms me? How can I move from simply "reading" God's Word to truly hearing it with a responsive heart?
5. How does this parable shape my understanding of God's patience and His judgment? In what ways does it call me to gratitude for His grace today and to an urgent response before my heart grows hardened?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

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Law and the Prophets, and eventually rejecting God Himself. These religious leaders were now exposed for rejecting the Prophets and the Word of God. Instead of being moved to repentance, they became even more indignant toward Jesus!

Vs. 6-9

Since the tenant farmers rejected everyone else, the owner concludes he must send his son and heir. He will be treated with respect because he represents his father. Yet the tenant farmers conspire to kill the son: "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours" (v. 7). Notice that their concern is only that they will be the owners of the vineyard. They want the inheritance. With the son coming, the father must be dead; therefore, if the heir dies, the tenant farmers would legally receive the land. The hardness of the tenant farmers is solidified in their treatment and murder of the son.

If the religious leaders have rejected the Law and killed the prophets, surely they would receive God's Son, the Messiah. Consider the incredible patience God showed toward Israel and the religious leaders; He gave them the Law, sent prophet after prophet, and eventually sent His own Son. Yet instead of softening under God's grace, their hearts only hardened further. God is patient, but He will judge. God demonstrates incredible patience toward us, yet one day we will be held accountable.

Vs. 10-11

Now, here is the interpretation of the parable. As mentioned, it is a quote from (Ps. 118). But notice how Jesus introduces the quote: "Haven't you read this Scripture" (v. 10). The religious leaders should have known what they were doing since they were to be the experts in Scripture. They should have seen God's mercy and grace. They should have seen who Jesus was. They should have responded in complete repentance. But, they have not truly read the Scriptures; at least not in a way that transforms their hearts! Their own ideas, desires, and rules trumped Scripture, and they were no longer accountable to God's Word.

V. 12

Guilty! The verdict is handed down, and judgment is upon the religious leaders. Yet, instead of responding in repentance, they sought to eliminate the problem: Jesus. In their eyes, He was the problem, not them! So, their evil plans commenced. Although Jesus had just prophesied what they would do to Him in the parable, their eyes were too darkened to see it. They still chose rejection over acceptance; sin over repentance; legalism over grace; death over life.