

God's Servant Predicts His Rejection

Mark 12:1-11

A parable is a little story with a big meaning. Jesus loved to use these little stories to teach profound truths about His Person and His plan.

Jesus' parables can be divided into five specific categories. Jesus teaches Kingdom Parables, Salvation Parables, Wisdom Parables, Spiritual Life Parables and finally Judgment Parables. The story in front of us is one of several "Judgment Parables". The main thrust of Jesus' Judgment Parables is to awaken us to the danger of our sin and rebellion against God. Once awakened to repentance, we discover that Jesus is THE KING worthy of our worship.

In Mark 12, Jesus speaks this judgment parable to the Pharisees out of mercy toward them. **His purpose is to help the religious leaders see that they are defying God the Father in their desire to kill Him.** He uses this parable to extend one more invitation to God's grace before they seal their judgment forever. Listen to Jesus' story . . .

A man purchases a piece of property and he decides to develop it. He cultivates the soil, creates tiered terraces, plants grapevines and builds trellises for the vines to climb. He labors long in the desert sun. The land owner collects many rocks and uses them to build a stone wall around this new vineyard to keep animals from nipping at the vines and destroying them. He then hammers away at the stone ground under the soil of his vineyard, chipping away at bedrock to first fashion a wide, shallow upper basin where the grapes would be squeezed. Then he digs a narrow deeper basin where the juice would flow and collect into an underground vat. Finally, the landowner builds a tower where wine and farming tools are stored, but also where he can keep watch for worthless marauders who may try to steal his wealth.

Then as harvest season approaches, he receives news that requires him to travel away from home for an extended trip. He will not be home when the grapes are ready. So . . . he reaches out to some needy farming families in the community. He says, *"Hey, I have this lush vineyard about ready to be harvested. I have already finished most of the work but I have to be away for a long season. Would you be interested in living on my property, harvesting the grapes? In return, I will give you a very generous portion of all you harvest? Let us say, "40% of the crop."*

The tenant farmers exclaim, *"That is a great deal! Of course we will do this."* As the landowner hands the keys to the vineyard to the farmers, he says, *"I really love this vineyard. I have put my sweat into making it what it is. Take good care of it while I am away!"* With smiles, the tenants say, *"We will!"*

When the season to pick the grapes arrives, the landowner sends some of his servants back to his vineyard. He tells them, "We are being generous to the tenants allowing them to keep 40% of the produce. But I am sending you to gather for me the part of the harvest that is due to me."

The first servant arrives and the tenants angrily argue with him. They refuse to give any of the fruit to the servant. In hostility they beat him bloody and sent him away. When he limps back to the landowner, the landowner sees the cuts and bruises that mark his servants face and body. The servant tells every part of the story to the landowner. The landowner in patience sends another servant. But again the tenants treat him with the same abuse and contempt. When he arrives back, the landowner sends another servant, and this time the tenants murdered him. And so in infinite patience the landowner sends MANY other servants to the tenants. The tenants mercilessly beat some and they kill others.

Finally, after all this, the landowner calls his son. He says, *"I am asking you to go to the tenants and receive from the vineyard what is due to us. They will surely respect you since you are my son."*

But when the son arrives to the tenants, they huddle together and reason together, "Hey, this is the son. He is going to own this vineyard someday. Come. Let us kill him and then WE WILL BE THE ONES who inherit the vineyard!"

And they took the son and killed him and threw his body outside of the vineyard.

Jesus stops at this part of the story and he asks the Pharisees to finish the story. Jesus asks, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" He waits patiently for an answer. One of the Pharisees speaks what they are all thinking, *"He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will be faithful to give him the fruits of their seasons."*

Jesus lets their answer linger in the air. Then Jesus asks these Bible scholars, "Have you not read this scripture?" He then quotes from "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."

At this the Pharisees know that Jesus is teaching this parable about them. They are fuming at Jesus and want to arrest Him. But they know that the crowd is still for Him so they sulk away quietly.

The landowner is God the Father.

The vineyard is Israel . . . God's chosen nation.

The tenants are the past and present religious leaders in Israel.

The landowner's journey represents the time until Jesus returns in glory to settle all accounts once and for all.

The fruit that God expects to from His vineyard is repentance and worship.

The servants are the OT prophets.

The Son is Jesus the Messiah.

The death of the Son is the cross of Jesus.

The miserable death of the wicked tenants at the hands of the landowner is the final judgment of the wicked by God.

The chief cornerstone is the resurrected Son.

The other tenants are the Gentiles who will be grafted into God's chosen nation.

Main Idea: Jesus' death brings joyful life to those who love Him, but miserable death to those who reject Him. Jesus will be exalted at the end of the age and His enemies will be severely judged.

The parable teaches so much about God and His dealings with us. It reminds us that while God is patient that He is also just. Let us consider the seven scenes from this story so that we might learn much of the Father's love for us.

Scene 1: The Father plants a vineyard for His glory.

Everyone in Jesus' day knows what Jesus is referencing when He speaks of a vineyard. The OT is rich with allusions to the nation of Israel being the vine of God. Jesus uses the specific words of Isaiah 5 to begin this story in Mark 12.

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well." (Isaiah 5:1-2 NIV)

Jesus begins the story by reminding us that God labors for His people. He set His love upon a people before they were a people. He promised Abraham that He would make a great nation to come from him and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Israel.

Much of the OT history is summarized for us in 12:1. God plants Israel in a desert land. He nurturs the plant through the supernatural birth of Isaac when

Sarah is 90 years old and Abraham is 100. Then God plants a wall around Israel by placing Joseph in Egypt and feeding them in that foreign land during a time of famine. Then God protects them as they multiply during those 430 years in Egypt. Then God leads them out of Egypt through 10 plagues. The LORD provides for them during the 40 year wilderness wandering with manna from heaven and water from the rock. The LORD breaks down the walls of Jericho to bring them in to the land.

Time does not allow us to speak of all the work that God performs to make His people a beautiful vineyard producing the fruit of true worship.

The psalmist wonders at God's love and labor for His choice vine in Psalm 80:

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.” (Psalm 80:8-9 [NIV](#))

So strong is the connection of Israel as the vineyard that we Gentiles may be tempted to think that this story has little to say for us. But like many messages in the Bible that are written for the Jews, we miss God's intended benefit if we think that it has nothing to do with us.

Just as we see God laboring in the OT to produce a worshipping nation, so in the NT we find God laboring through His Son and by His Spirit to include us Gentiles in His plan for blessing. Jesus promises to labor to include us in His gracious plan when He tells Peter,

“... I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18 [ESV](#))

The Father has planted us in His kingdom. He has built fences to protect us from the evil one and from our own sin. He has watered and cared for us by His Spirit. He has built a tower to keep constant watch over our bodies, mind, soul and community. He has sent servants to nurture and instruct us. And did He not send His Son to us knowing that His Son would die for us? He has done all these for us and so much more!! How could we begin to measure the efforts that our Father has made for us so that we flourish in this life and the life to come?

Friends, what would be our life if the Father did not labor to make us to be His vineyard? We would be wild desert thorn bushes with no ability to live a fruitful

life. We do not make our lives into something. It is not our labor that makes us significant. It is the Father's labor on our behalf.

Truth: The Father labors in love for us so that we can enjoy Him and glorify Him.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight" (Ephesians 1:3-8 [ESV](#))

Application: Let us drown out thoughts of self-pity with songs of praise to Him who in love has done all for us.

Scene 2: The Father gives the tenants a great opportunity for vast reward.

The deal that the landowner gave to the tenants was a once in a lifetime opportunity! Normally tenant farmers have to do the lion share if not all of the work of building barns, cultivating the soil, planting the crops, protecting the crops through the summer months. Here the tenants were given an opportunity to come and receive the benefit of the vineyard even though almost all the work had already been completed!

The tenants are the past and present religious leaders. They are the ones that God gave stewardship to simply manage well the resources that He turned over to them.

The religious leaders had SO MUCH to gain by simply being faithful. They did not have to be talented or super smart or creative in order to succeed beyond their wildest imaginations. They only had to be faithful to the Father.

Yet they threw all their reward away. What loss of eternal reward! And why? Simply because they were so self-willed, so self-focused, so self-ruled. They were not grateful to God but greedy for self-glory.

God gave them the opportunity for be more than compensated for their little roles in helping His people become worshippers. Instead, like Satan before them, they sought the glory that the Father deserves.

Before we shake our heads at them. If you are a member in God's church, the same compensation and reward is offered to you too! Jesus story presses the issue with us. "Am I a good steward of the opportunity that God has given me to

build His church? Am I ready to give to the Master what He expects to receive when He returns?"

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 ESV)

"Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward." (2 John 1:8 ESV)

"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6 ESV)

Truth: In the church age, every one of us in God's family is given the opportunity to receive vast reward for caring for Jesus' church and managing well the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to us.

Scene 3: The Father sends His servants to receive the fruit that is due to Him.

The servants represent the OT prophets.

God speaks to His chosen nation and to the spiritual leaders through servants like Moses and Samuel and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Zechariah and many more!

He sends His servants for one purpose: **So that His people will be ready to give God the fruit of repentance and worship!**

In this parable, we learn that God specially holds the spiritual leaders responsible for listening to and receiving by faith the word of His servant/prophets who represent the Word of God to them.

How might this truth apply to us today?

Friends, the LORD still sends His servants to speak His Word to us so that we are ready to fulfill our stewardship to the LORD. He sends His servants so that we would be ready to present the fruit of repentance and worship to God at the proper time.

Who are these servants who speak the Word of God to us today?

First, these servants are the human writers of God's Word. They are the prophets and apostles. God secures a perfect record of His message to us through them. The Holy Spirit's ministry guarantees that God's message to us is

still a living and active message. This means that the written Word is no less lively, no less personal, no less powerful than if God's prophet stood right in front of us and used his voice to speak God's message to us.

Second, these servants are pastors and teachers whom God appoints to teach the Word that the prophets and apostles speak.

Finally, these servants are ordinary brothers and sisters who share the truth of God's Word with us in everyday situations.

The point is this: God holds us accountable for the way we receive the message He sends to us through His servants. The Lord sends servants to us for our good. And He will hold us accountable for HOW WE LISTEN TO THEM.

Application: Let us honor the message that God sends to us through His servants. Let us respond to His servants with the knowledge that the message is not the word of man but the very word of God to us.

Scene 4: The tenants treat the Father and His servants with contempt.

Instead of receiving the Landowners servants with the honor that they deserve, the tenants treat the Father's servant with contempt. They not only disregard the message that they are sent to give. But the tenants hate the message so much that they abuse the servants of the owner.

This part of the story teaches us the true nature of the human heart. Though God labors for our good. We resist His rightful authority in our life.

Truth: The Bible tells us plainly the true state of our heart. By nature we are enemies of God.

The Pharisees are very smart, educated people. They know that Jesus is talking about them when He describes the tenants. They know Jesus is accusing them of rejecting God and His messengers. And they are steaming mad about it.

If you ask a Pharisee, "Are you an enemy of God?"

They would have the same response that most everybody does. They would be outraged by the question! "Of course not!"

Yet Jesus tells them plainly in this parable, "**You have made yourselves enemies of the Father.**"

But before we wag our finger of condemnation at them, please know the truth to them is the truth to you and me. “We are natural born enemies of God.” HOW SO?

Jonathan Edwards preached a helpful sermon on this topic. In that sermon, Edwards explains, **“We are natural enemies of God in our . . .**

1. View of God. We think such low thoughts of God. We find many of God’s qualities such as His holiness and righteousness to be repugnant. We say things like, *“I could not worship a God who sends anyone to hell.”* Of course we cannot worship a God that we naturally hate. This is the problem of our soul.
2. Desires. We desire to be able to define truth for ourselves. We desire to follow our own heart. We desire to be free of submission to God. This is one reason that many utter nonsense slogans like, “Love is love.” Or “Co-exist” Or “We all worship the same God.” We think those things because our desires are at war with God.
3. Wills. We want to do what we want to do. So we hate God for His limitations upon our freedom. We reject His commandments because we think they impede us from our happiness. We argue against His laws because we think they get in the way of our fulfillment.
4. Affections. By nature, we love the things God hates and we hate the things God loves. Our hearts are opposite of the Lord on so many levels and in so many ways.
5. Practice. Our life choices oppose God’s glory and authority. We reject His right to order our lives. So we get comfortable living in ways that contradict His honor. We measure the goodness of our life, not by the LORD, but by our own sense of morality and by societies norms.

Question: How will God respond to those who hate Him?

The answer surprises us! First, God is patient and gracious. Second, God is severe.

Scene 5: The Father sends His Son and the tenants put the Father’s Son to death.

This part of the story where the Father sends His Son to the tenants makes no sense.

“He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” (Mark 12:6 [ESV](#))

We ask, “Does not the Father know that the tenants are wicked and will treat His son the way that they treated the servants before Him?” Answer: **Of course He does!**

But this part of the story is told to teach us about **the Father’s HEART not the Father’s mind.**

The Father’s heart beats with patience and kindness toward people who do not deserve patience and kindness.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17 [ESV](#))

Jesus KNOWS that the Pharisees are currently conspiring to put Him to death YET he tells this parable to jar them awake from their spiritual darkness . . . **to help them realize that they are part of a scheme that is a vile offense to the Father in Heaven!**

Jesus uses this parable to announce plainly, **“I am God’s Son! What you do to me you do to my Father!”**

But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.” (Mark 12:7-8 [ESV](#))

Jesus teaches this story on Tuesday and on Friday He will be condemned and hung on a cross outside of Jerusalem. Jesus knows what is going to happen to Him. Yet He does not flinch. He is not the victim. **He willingly lays down His life for the forgiveness of our sins.**

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 [ESV](#))

Jesus ends this part of the story with a question, “What will the owner of the vineyard do?”

You can imagine the emotions this story brings to those hearing it. The death of the son is **an outrageous offense!** No evil committed by the tenants prior to the premeditated murder of the son elicits the kind of outrage in a Father's heart.

Truth: The crucifixion of Jesus is the greatest sin in all human history. No other evil compares to it.

Scene 6: The Father severely judges the wicked tenants.

"He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others." (Mark 12:9 [ESV](#))

*"They said to him, "He will put **those wretches to a miserable death** and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.'"" (Matthew 21:41 [ESV](#))*

This parable is not so much telling us the meaning of Jesus' death for His people, but the meaning of His death for those who reject Him.

Let us consider the patience of God toward us! How much patience must the LORD grant to us before we repent of our sins before Him? How much grace much the LORD show before we fall down in worship before Him who is the majestic King?

Friend, we never need to fear submitting to God's Son. He does not come to condemn, but to bless and to save us.

"Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the LORD." (Isaiah 26:10 [NIV](#))

God is slow to anger, but His judgment will come to those who do not repent.

The Father's wrath will be fierce upon all those upon whom it falls. Jesus teaches more about hell than anyone else in scripture. He longs for us to avoid the judgment that is to come! Here Jesus describes this judgment as a "miserable death".

Hell is not a metaphor or a symbol. It is a real place where misery abounds and soul's despair.

Recently, three giants in their respective fields have died. Ozzy Osbourne. Hulk Hogan. John MacArthur. At the moment of death, Ozzy and Hulk and Pastor

John did not cease to exist. Upon death, their souls separated from their body and each soul was taken by God to a destination.

What happened to them will happen to each one of us (unless the Lord returns first). Upon our death our soul **either** enters the presence of Jesus **or** the horror of judgment. The arrival to that place is immediate. There is no second chance. No purgatory to repair what we did not do here. There is no pause in our consciousness.

One pastor recently put it this way, *“When a man dies, something happens. Not figuratively. Not emotionally. Something happens. His soul is torn from his body. He does not drift into unconscious stardust. He does not become a memory. He stands. Awake. Aware. Known.”* Rich Bitterman

The place we go is ENTIRELY determined by how we received God’s Son in this life. If you do not choose Jesus in this life, you will be without Him forever and ever. You will face the wrath of the Father for your rejection of His Son.

Truth: If you are in Christ through faith, your sins are forgiven, your name is written in God’s book, you are adopted into God’s family and will live forever with Him. EVERYTHING about your eternal future rests upon what you do with God’s Son.

The condemnation of those who reject the Son is NOT due to the Father’s gracelessness or meanness or unfairness. The condemnation of those who reject the Son is due to the hatred in their heart for the Father.

The last scene in Jesus’ parable reminds us that human hatred does not diminish the Son’s glory, but is used by God to advance it.

Scene 7: The Father makes His Son the center of everything.

Have you not read this Scripture: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” (Mark 12:10-11 [ESV](#))

“Have you not read this Scripture?” Jesus points to the Bible as the source of all authority about life, about God, about judgment and about the future. Then Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22-23.

Truth: God holds us accountable to read and to understand and to apply the Word that He sends to us!!

This is one reason why sitting under the teaching of the Word on Sunday is such a spiritual necessity! What we are doing is more than listening to a nice lesson. We are listening to God speak to us so that we will obtain His blessing, do His will and avoid His judgment.

“Have you not read this Scripture?” Remember Jesus asks this to a group of Bible scholars. The Pharisees memorized most of the OT. They know what the Bible says and yet they do not have ears to hear so they do not profit from it. **Friends, do you have ears to hear? Do you profit from the Word that you hear taught or that you read?**

Illustration: Teenager showed me notes. Happy heart telling me what they learned from the sermon that day! May her tribe increase!

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” (Mark 12:10-11 [ESV](#))

The Father does not allow His Son’s death to be the last word over His Son’s life. God exalts His Son in the face of man’s rejection. God uses His Son’s death to bring glory to Jesus.

As the Temple is built in Jesus’ day, some stones are discarded as being not worthy to be used in any part of the wall. One stone will be chosen to be the cornerstone . . . the stone of prominence that all will see as central to the whole structure. The builders see Jesus and discard Him. He is not part of God’s temple at all. But the LORD takes that stone and makes Him the center of everything for all eternity. This is the Lord’s doing. And it is marvelous!!

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:8-11 [ESV](#))

When you look at Jesus, do you set Him aside as Someone that you can do without? Or do you place Him at the center of all your life?

Main Idea: Jesus' death brings joyful life to those who love Him, but miserable death to those who reject Him. Jesus will be exalted at the end of the age and His enemies will be severely judged.

The God who offers salvation now is the God who will judge in righteousness hereafter. Therefore, if you will not have Jesus as your Savior now, in the day of his grace, you will have him as your Judge when you stand before his throne at the final day.