

Mark 12:1–12

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[0 : 00] 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. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard, and they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully, and he sent another and him they killed. And so with many others, some they beat and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, They will respect my son. 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. What will the owner of the vineyard do?

He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 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. 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. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Good afternoon. It's a joy to be in God's house with God's people and to be able to open up God's word on this afternoon. Join me in prayer, please, before we get started. Dear Lord, thank you for this wonderful day and this glorious opportunity to be in your presence and in the presence of your people. And I would pray that you would be glorified and may the word that has cleansed me and warned me and guided me and guided me. May it be such to your people. This afternoon is our prayer in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. What a story we have before us. And that story itself is not understood apart from its context, its immediate context of chapter 12 and what precedes in chapter 11, but also the historical context text of the text. And that story itself is not understood. And that story itself is not understood. It is not understood. But it is passion week. Jesus has entered into Jerusalem. On last week's text, we found chapter 10, verse 17, Jesus was on his journey to Jerusalem, where he would eventually be delivered over to the religious leaders, condemned to death, executed under the authority of the Roman government, just as he had predicted that he would. The third prediction of his death is found in chapter 10 and verse 32. Turn over there with me and we'll take a look at this third prediction, that Jesus gave of his death. And they were on the road, notice, going up to Jerusalem. And Jesus was walking ahead of them and they were amazed. And those who followed ahead and taking the 12, he began to tell them what was going to happen to him, saying, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

[4 : 21] Third prediction. So in this week's text, he has arrived in the holy city. There in Jerusalem, there in Jerusalem, on Sunday, he was met by the shouting crowds saying, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed is the coming of our father David. Hosanna in the highest. Jesus, chapter 11 and verse 10. But it would be downhill from there. By the end of the week, the shouts would be different. Not bless him or Hosanna in the highest, but crucify him. Crucify him. Chapter 15, verse 13. Jesus had exercised caution up to this point in his interaction with the Jewish leaders, huh? He did not want to call undue attention unto himself. But here in this week, that kind of restraint would no longer be exercised, huh? The week that we know as Passion Week would be marked by various confrontation. Jesus, however, was calculated in his actions. And you might say that was a little bit of sparring going on in Jerusalem that week. The day after his triumphal entry.

[6 : 06] He cursed the fig tree that was barren. Barren, it was a symbol of the barren nation. We see that chapter 11, verses 1 through 14.

The barrenness of the nation was reflected in its prayerlessness. It was a deficiency of worship, of being right with God.

What had been ordained as a place of prayer, the temple, was being used for commercial advantage. Chapter 11, verse 15. And the very outrage of God was expressed through his son. Huh? When he drove out these money-making merchants from the precincts of the temple. The religious leader's response to what Jesus did is found in chapter 11 and verse 18.

Notice there with me, chapter 11 and verse 18. Jesus had stirred them up.

[7 : 32] And the question follows, Jesus, who gave you the authority to do this? Jesus, who put you in charge?

He wasn't a priest. He wasn't a card-carrying Pharisee or Sadducee. He had not been licensed or ordained by them.

They hadn't authorized his actions in the temple. Jesus, who left you in charge? Jesus.

Notice you see this in verses 27 through 33 of the chapter. And they came to Jerusalem again. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him.

And they said to him, by what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you the authority? Who authorized you to do these things?

[8 : 35] Jesus, he set them up yet again. Look at verse 29. He said to them, I will ask you one question. Answer me. And I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

You tell me now. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? Answer me.

Jesus said. And they discussed with one another. They conferred a little saying. Hmm. If we say from heaven.

It will say. Why didn't you believe him? But shall we say from man? Then they were afraid of the people for they all held that John was a prophet.

They were caught in a dilemma. Which way were they going to go? So they answered Jesus.

[9 : 40] We do not know. Jesus said to them. Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. Oh, don't you just love Jesus? I wonder how Jesus would spar a little in the classrooms here on the campus of U of C.

I bet you he could put some PhDs to shame. With his interaction. Notice what Jesus did here. He brought John the Baptist into the picture.

He brought him into the picture. Notice how he did it. Had not this same John challenged the religious leaders and the people of his day when he preached to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance?

This is what he said. Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Luke chapter 3, verse 8. And had not the same John said that after me, check it out, after me, comes he who is more than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

[11 : 05] I baptized you with water. I baptized you with water. But he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Here's the deal that Jesus was getting across.

Because the authorization of Jesus, like that of John before him and others before John, had come from heaven.

John was a heaven-sent servant, a heaven-sent prophet with authorization from God and stood in the train of the Old Testament prophets before him who announced the coming of Jesus himself.

Such was the backdrop of this parable that Jesus preceded in the text that's before us. A refusal to acknowledge the source of Jesus' authority and John's, the last of the Old Testament prophet.

Since they refused to acknowledge the source of the authority, perhaps a little story would help them. That's the context of what we have here.

[12 : 19] A story would help bring them to their senses. And perhaps a story would bring them to repentance.

Wasn't that what Nathan did? When David, the great king, had committed the double sins of adultery and murder, and he had gone on for a while, living under the cloud of that Psalm 32, teaches us that unconfessed sin is uncomfortable.

You ever feel that kind of dynamic when perhaps you've crossed the line and you found yourself living with it, but it just wasn't right?

And it was a story that brought this great king to the point of saying, I'm the man. And here it was. You know, a story, it helps to cast somebody else as the bad guy when the bad guy is really before us. Or we're the bad guy.

[13:32] And the role of the hero, and it can have profound effect on the hero. Have you ever done that with your children? Come on, I just want to tell you a little story.

The next day you know, so-and-so is crying because they get the story. Jesus used the story here. And so Jesus tells the story that explained the fruitless victory that had been cursed.

The story further gives the real reason for the fruitlessness of the people. He had cursed the victory coming in.

Why? Because of the failure to bring forth fruit. The parable that Jesus told was constructed to call several things to the attention of his hearers.

Then, and friends, to call our attention to today. The first thing we notice in verse 1. You say, well, Pastor Jay, what do you see there?

[14:43] This is the provision of a gracious owner. That's the part, the provision of a gracious owner. The owner of this vineyard, the owner of this land is both gracious and generous.

Kindness and graciousness of the owner of the vineyard comes into view in verse 1. Look at there. 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 Ronpress and built a tower and leashed it to the tenants and went into another country.

Because of his audience in that day, the situation in Palestine came into focus. It was a great way for Jesus then to connect with his audience.

Wealthy, absentee landlords were common in Palestine and particularly in Galilee. And while the wealthy owned the land, the land would be leased out to tenant farmers who would then farm the land.

And then they were to set aside a portion of the produce for the landowner as payment for leasing or renting the land. At harvest time, the agents would come, the agents of the landowner would come, and they would collect the rent.

[16:09] So we see here the efforts of the landowner here in planning the vineyard, providing everything that was needed for a successful business operation of the tenants who occupied the land.

What was going on? A wall was erected for protection. A pit was dug where the grapes were trodden by foot. But that's the way they did it.

And a vat, the juice would flow to vats where it was collected. Also on the property, there was a tower where tools were stored, but also it doubled as a shelter for the vineyard workers during the time of harvest.

In the telling of the story, Jesus had an Old Testament, both concept and story in mind. Particularly, he was alluding to God's word to Israel in Isaiah chapter 5.

Israel had been likened into a vineyard that had been planted by the Lord himself with the expectation of the harvest of grapes.

[17:18] But instead of grapes, and you need to refer to that later, Isaiah 5, chapter 5, verses 1 and following, the owner found that there were unusable wild grapes instead of the kind of grapes that could be used.

Here, the landowner had provided everything that was necessary for a good harvest. He leased the property, and he goes to another country.

And here, very clearly, the owner represents God, who had graciously provided for his people. The psalmist in Psalm 80 also speaks of the Lord's vineyard, of the vine planting role.

This is what he said, verses 8 through 11. You, and he's sort of praying, talking to God. He says, you brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it.

You cleared the ground for it. Huh? You took deep, it took deep root and filled the land, speaking about Israel. The mountains were covered with the shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.

[18:30] It set out its branches to the sea and its roots to the river. God planted Israel in the land and was looking for fruit to come from her.

Huh? In verses 2 through 9 of today's text, this thing shifts from the owner to the tenants. A gracious owner, in verse 1, is contrasted with ungrateful tenants.

Huh? Ungrateful tenants. Ungrateful tenants. Ungrateful tenants. And what we see in verses 2 through 8 is the folly of these ungrateful tenants.

They had rejected the owner's servants. We see that. When the time for the season for fruit came, the owner sent a servant to collect what was due to him.

His share of the produce that comes from the land that had previously been leased out. Shirley and I have been in the Hyde Park area, or actually live in North Woodlawn, for three years now, going into our fourth year.

[19 : 39] And because the market is not the best, we still have a home in Oak Park. And in preparation to get the most recent lessees in the property, we went to work on the building, on the property.

It's been in good shape, but we thought that we would raise it up to the next level. Floors were sanded. Put in nice countertops. Put in a dishwasher, washer and dryer in the basement.

And sure enough, somebody says, I want to be in your property. Sops threw up a lease. Guess what? If when time comes for the rent to be due on the property that has been fixed up and made nice, and the money doesn't show up, I don't know if I'm going to be so gracious.

As in the tax. Because a contract has been drawn up, something has been leased out, and there are expectations that go along with that kind of contract.

They'll pay in order to keep us happy. If rent is not paid, landlords generally have legal recourse in order, hear me, to collect the monies that are due to them.

[21 : 19] The mistreatment that the owner's service endured would be intolerable. Notice in the text, the escalation of the mistreatment.

Look at verse 3. This was after when he sins to collect some of the produce of the vineyard. Verse 3. They took him, the servant, and beat him, sent him away empty-handed.

Again, he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And look at verse 5. And they sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others, some they beat and some they killed.

Mistreatment. Intensification of mistreatment. The initial charge of not giving the owner what was due, it really amounted to stealing, didn't it?

And things progressed from there. And such was the condition when Jesus stepped on the scene. Huh? There had been a history, a track record of the abuse of God's servants.

[22 : 31] The tenants had really hijacked the vineyard, and were doing in, on God's property, their own thing. Huh? Prophets that got in the way, calling God's people to righteousness and to covenant keeping, were in danger of losing their very lives.

The tenants had assumed here the role of the owner. It was akin to a rental situation where the tenants had changed the locks, and the owner couldn't even get in.

The original lease had been set aside, and an edited version was in its place. One that did not have the endorsement, one that did not have the signature of the owner.

But the history of the nation, and if you know your Old Testament, you know that it included warnings of the prophets, and that the rejection of the prophets. Listen to one scripture that always comes to mind to me in situations like this.

2 Chronicles chapter 36, verses 15 and 16. Listen, because it echoes what Jesus is saying here. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them, this is God's people, by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

[23 : 49] But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising the words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of God arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

Stephen challenged the religious people of this day, saying, in Acts chapter 7, you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised and hard in ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, Stephen says.

What in fact was due from God's people that he didn't get from them? What was it that, by reason of being God's people in God's land, under God's covenant, what were they in arrears on?

Huh? As a nation, had not the Lord given, had not given, they had not given the Lord his rightful service, his rightful worship.

[25 : 11] Now, they had a farm, Amos challenged them, and Amos chapter 5, he says, I'm not going to listen to your songs, they make me sick, I'm not going to, your solemn assemblies and your feasts, away with them, but let justice run down as waters, and righteousness is a mighty stream.

That's real worship. They had not given God the thanksgiving, they had not given him the surrender that was due to him. We were talking in our Sunday school class earlier, they had not given him the faith or the joy that was really rightfully a part of the relationship with God.

These are the things that they and we ourselves, the service, the surrender, the rightfully God's, I beseech you, therefore brothers, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, that your spiritual service of worship, that is due to the living God.

Those who had rejected God's servant, who had been sent by God, John, and those who, and other in the tradition of Old Testament pop, were here in our texts, they were on, and listen to this, they were on the verge of rejecting God's son.

And because of this, the parable of Jesus included what we see here, particularly in the next verses. Look at verses 6 through 8.

[26 : 47] The tenants rejected the owner's son. Huh? He had still one other, a beloved son, chapter 1, verse 11, chapter 9, verse 7.

Finally, he sent them, him to them saying, ah, they will respect my son. Though the gracious actions of the owner had been spurred, the owner didn't stop, did he?

He sent his beloved son, the very heir, in hopes that he would be respected. Huh? Wow. What kind of person would send his son to undeserving tenants that are right and right for eviction?

But he sent him anyway. Patient, long-suffering, and whose mercies seemingly and are unending.

Huh? The sending of the son, verse 6, the plot against the beloved son in verse 7, the murder of the beloved son in verse 8.

[28 : 00] The parable anticipated the murderer's treatment that would be Jesus' life. And here they were, friends, rather than recognizing or respecting the son, they disrespected him, they would eventually kill him and cast him away from them.

And he has not been recognized by them as a whole, giving him the honor that's due him even today.

the owner, the folly of the tenants, but notice in verses 9 through 12, the judgment for ultimate folly.

The judgment for ultimate folly. Here's the folly, friends, then and now. The folly of rejecting the owner's son. The folly of rejecting the one that came, the son of God, to this world, taking care of his father's business, that's the ultimate folly.

Look at the plans of the owner. Because the tenants had broken the covenant, the owner would come with severe judgment that would include the destruction of the tenants and entrusting the stewardship of the vineyard to others.

[29 : 34] Look at verse 9. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others who would bring forth the fruits thereof.

Notice Jesus' challenge and warning. Of course, the others speaks about a Jew and Gentile body known as the church today that has both the privilege of stewardship and the responsibilities that go along with it.

We're part of that body, those others. Jesus' challenge and warning in verses 10 and 11. The story ended and a very clear challenge was given.

His audience included the religious leaders, chapter 11, verse 27, who were on the verge of rejecting Jesus. Indeed, the fig tree Israel was barren.

The fruit of the vineyard was bad. Judgment had come. He will destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

[30 : 46] But notice the lesson that Jesus quotes the scripture that ultimately is fulfilled in him found in Psalm 118 verses 22 to 23.

The stone that the builders but first he prefaces it. Have you not read the scripture, you religious leaders, you doctors of theology, all of you? Haven't you read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

this was the Lord's doing and it was marvelous, marvelous, marvelous in our eyes, huh? Just as Israel despised and rejected and little esteemed in the world according to this text in Psalm 118

would rise in the esteem of the ancient world.

So the son was despised and rejected but we be given the place of chief honor recognized as worthy, rejected and crucified on Friday but raised and exalted friends on Sunday.

Lifted up was he to die. It is finished was his cry Friday. Now in heaven exalted high. What's the refrain?

[32 : 06] Hallelujah what a savior. Huh? Those to whom the work had been entrusted today, you and me, must be careful not to repeat the folly of those to whom it was initially entrusted.

How do we avoid such folly? By believing God's servants and God's son as we hear them in the scriptures. Huh?

As we hear God's word preached and taught today. Don't reject it. But hear it and embrace it and receive it. The story, friends, was a warning to those in Jesus' day who were in line of those who rejected God with the message, the message brought forth by the prophets.

The message was to bring forth fruit worthy of their calling, fruit consistent with being in covenant with the very God of heaven. And so today you and I sort of cringe when we read the story, don't we?

We see the failure of those entrusted with kingdom privilege and responsibility. How could they, we say? We see the collision course that they're on and we feel for them, we cringe for them, they're headed toward destruction.

[33 : 26] But are we not also people with privilege and responsibility? Are we not of the spiritual circumcision of those who worship God by the Spirit and put no confidence in the flesh?

While there's a clear warning here to the religious of Jesus' day, do not similar warnings apply to those of us who've been entrusted with kingdom responsibilities? They do. Are we also not expected to bear fruit of righteousness and worship and witness in the world?

What do you do with the sun? not what the religious leaders did to him. They had rejected this stone, this main stone in the buildings and the builders would search that day for a stone that was just right in order so that things could line up so that with similarity and symmetry in the building and this one stone would be the cornerstone, the capstone for that?

That was Jesus. Jesus. He must not be rejected. Whether we're talking about in our homes or in a work setting or in a university setting, Jesus is Lord.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Must be our proclamation regardless of the place that you and I plant our feet.

[34 : 54] God will come again. And we must not strip the guts of the message. But it must be clear, Christ has died.

Christ is risen. Christ will come again. So what do we do with the Son? We give him what's due him. the psalmist instructs us in Psalm 2 verses 10 through 12. Listen. And now therefore, O kings and all, be wise.

Be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice. It's a call, friends, to sobriety with trembling.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are those who take refuge in him. Here's the deal. Be wise.

[35 : 59] Be warned. Be submissive. Be reverent. And be blessed. And be blessed. Jesus' disciples live and love and worship and labor as those who really believe that he's the main stone in the economy of God.

We live and labor and love and worship and serve under that reality, under the banner that Jesus is Lord. And our conduct befits those with that kind of understanding.

Be warned. Just as the religious of Jesus' day was exposed and warned, so may it be today and may we respond as we need to.

Who's Jesus? The rejected Son, who is the main person in God's economy, and because he still matters.

disciples are to honor and to serve and to promote him as such. Let's pray. Great God that you are, we do bless you today.

[37 : 22] May we be gripped with the reality of who you are, and though there be those who reject and scoff and scorn, may those of us who are called by your name, be faithful to hear, be faithful to believe, be faithful to work, witness, and labor for the sake of your name.

In this world is our prayer. In Christ's name, amen. Well, Jesus is ordained.

Amen.