

The Parable of the Good Vineyard Owner and His Son

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[0 : 01] Oh, good evening. It's good to see all of you. I gotta say, this is an interesting text for Palm Sunday. Traditionally in Palm Sunday, you preach the triumphal entry. We're going into the parable of the tenants. That's what it's usually called, but I think this is the wrong title for the parable because it puts too much emphasis on the tenants. I think the emphasis is actually supposed to be on the vineyard owner and his son. So you could actually call this parable the parable of the vineyard owner and his son or the good vineyard owner and his son. But before we get into this parable, let's keep the backdrop in mind. Let's remember what's been going on in the gospel of Mark over the past couple of weeks. In Mark 11, Jesus entered into Jerusalem finally, and this was his triumphal entry on a donkey. And then the next day, he goes into the temple and he essentially shuts it down in this act of prophetic protest. He drives people out. He flips over tables.

And this whole system was corrupt. And he had to stop it. He called the temple a den of robbers. You have to realize the temple was the center of everything in Jewish spiritual life. So his protest that took place during the time of the year when people were making an extensive journey to Jerusalem, to go and worship in the temple, to go and make sacrifices, to go and prepare for the Passover festival, to remember how God had redeemed them, how God had brought them out of slavery and to eat from Egypt and into the promised land. And so this accusation that the temple is a den of robbers, it's no small thing. Jesus is essentially saying during a season where people are focused and trying to seek God, he's saying to them, this system needs to stop right now. It's not working right now.

It actually has to change. It's the way that it's been corrupted, it's actually impeding your ability to have a relationship with the Father. So recapping, this is what Jesus' itinerary looks like so far. Day one, get a donkey, go into Jerusalem. Check. Day two, shut down the heartbeat of the city by flipping over some tables. Check. And so our text today, it takes place on the third day in Jerusalem. This is Jesus' third day in his last week. And just before the parable is told, Jesus has an encounter with the religious leaders again. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. And remember, we've known since Mark 3, 6, that these very religious leaders are out to destroy Jesus. They're plotting ways to have him killed.

And in this confrontation, they want to know, Jesus, what authority do you have to do these things? I think it's a fair question. How can Jesus justify treating the temple like it's his? Why does he act like it's his house, like he has the right to do these things? And so Jesus, in his very Jesus-y way, asks a question in response. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? And so the leaders, they find themselves stuck because they know. If they say from heaven, then Jesus will say, well, why didn't you listen to John? But they're afraid to say from man because they fear the people, because the people believe John was a prophet. And so they say, we do not know.

[3 : 33] And Jesus responds, well, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. And just when you think, well, that's that, Mark writes in 12, 1, and Jesus began to speak to them in parables. It's like Jesus says, I won't tell you by what authority I do these things, but I will tell you a story about authority. And it might be about me. It might not, but it might be, but it might not.

But really, so this is the backdrop. Day three of Jesus's last week, issues with the temple loom in people's minds, and questions about Jesus's authority are at hand. And then he tells a parable. And Jesus, he brilliantly sets the stage. He says, there's this guy, and he owns a vineyard, and he started it. He's this kind of entrepreneurial type guy. He planted it. He cared for it. He invested into it. He poured his life into it. And this guy, he loves his vineyard. He gave it all it needed.

He put a fence around it for protection. He dug a pit so he could build a wine press. He even built a tower for this vineyard. And this guy, he sets up the vineyard, but then he heads off to another country.

So like any responsible entrepreneur, he hires people to take care of his vineyard while he's gone. When I was a kid, I had this prized possession. It wasn't quite a vineyard, but it was almost as awesome. It was a magnet. And it wasn't just any magnet. This was a magnet out of a speaker, like a big, you know, those old school speakers. Like this big, you know, like a manly magnet.

[5 : 15] And it's weird, I know, but this magnet is great. You might even say, like, I treated it like it was a precious jewel. You know, I took it everywhere with me. I had it in my pocket. Because you never know when you might need a high power magnet. But you know what? My favorite use of this magnet was actually at dinner time. You see, whenever my sister would stop paying attention to, say, her cutlery, such as a fork, and also to me, her little brother, all I would have to do is get my magnet like 30 centimeters from her fork. And it would just be like, zzzz. And I'd have her fork. I'd be like, ha ha.

You know, I love that magnet. I love it so much that I took my Legos and I built this kind of fortress for it. And the magnet went in the center. And it was on display in my room.

And I even put Lego man around it to guard it at night. I love this magnet. This guy, he loved his vineyard almost as much as I love my magnet.

He did everything he could to take care of this vineyard. And so when the season came, like any good investor, he sent some of his workers, some of his servants, to go get some of the yield, to get some of the fruit. This is where the story starts to get dicey. The tenants turn on him. They beat up his servant. They knock him around a little bit and send him back empty handed.

And you gotta think, okay, maybe the owner's thinking, well, maybe there's some strange miscommunication going on here. You know, and so he sends another servant. But this servant comes back having been punched in the head and just totally shamed. But this owner, he won't give up. He sends another servant. And it keeps escalating. And this time, the servant's killed. And this pattern happens over and over. Some servants they beat up and some they kill. And so these tenants, they're staging a coup.

[7 : 20] They're overtaking his beloved vineyard and they're refusing to give to him what is rightfully his. They're scorning his authority. They want his vineyard for their benefit. It's this escalating situation.

It's ludicrous, if you think about it. It's ludicrous. And not the awesome 90s rapper kind. Now, in this culture, in this culture, to the people hearing this parable, they would be thinking, this is an insult to the owner. This constant abuse and harm of his servants is an insult to his very person. And I think, yeah, we get that. Like, this is an insulting thing that's happening. But we have to remember, this is an honor-based culture. The owner would be expected. He would actually be honor-bound to do something about this. If he didn't do something about this, this would bring shame upon his name and his entire family. And what's interesting, in this story, there's no commentary on any of the owner's emotions. We don't hear about any anger or frustration or sorrow. But I think it's easily assumed. I mean, how couldn't this guy be upset? I mean, if you think what's about, what's happening to his servants, to his people, how could he not be upset? I can relate. Well, sort of. You know that high-powered speaker magnet. That year, I had a birthday party and had a bunch of my little, you know, like, seven-year-old friends over. And I was seven, too, so it wasn't creepy. And it was a great time.

Great time. Great party. Great party. I remember showing them my magnet. And it was awesome. We went around the house just kind of, like, putting it on the couch to see, like, what kind of metal would come out. And great time. Go to bed. Great party. Wake up in the morning. Go to the fortress of the magnet.

And the magnet is not there. It was gone. Nowhere to be found. So I get my mom. I'm like, mom, I can't find my magnet. And she looks around the house. We turn it upside down. It's nowhere. One of my scoundrel friends robbed me. I couldn't believe it. I was just like, injustice! And I just swore vengeance, you know, on whoever took my beloved magnet. I just, I couldn't fathom that one of my friends would take my magnet on my birthday. A few weeks later, a few weeks later, I was at a friend's house. Michael Ferguson. Didn't even change, I didn't even change his name. Michael Ferguson.

And we're playing in his room. And I see on his shelf my magnet. So I was like, yo, Michael, what's that on your shelf? And Michael has this like really round head. Do you remember the TV show Rugrats? Like that kid with the, like, because he was a ginger too. So like, round head, big eyes, like big smile, and like always happy. And here's the magnet. Face is just like, like sheepish. I was like, dude. That's how seven-year-olds talk. Like, did you, did you take my magnet? And he said, I stole it.

[10:29] I just remember my response. I was like, what? What? Like, I couldn't get past that word. What? I had to, I couldn't wrap my head around it. I had to decide, like, how am I going to respond to my friend-turned-thief? What was I going to do with this injustice?

This is the question the parable is driving at us. What is the owner of the vineyard going to do with the injustice? What will he do with the insult and the injury inflicted upon his servants, but ultimately inflicted upon him? And I think that's what this parable should be stirring up in us at this point. What is the owner going to do about this? And as this tension builds, we get this really cool dialogue in verses six and seven. And I think our ears are supposed to perk up because it's the key to the parable. In verse six, Jesus says, the owner, he still has one more option.

He has one other person he can send, a beloved son. Finally, or it could be translated, lastly, he sent his son to these rebellious tenants. This is what the owner's going to do about the injustice? He's going to send his son? Like, part of me just cringes. What? No, like, no, don't send your beloved son to these people. But then we get to hear his reasoning. He says, they will respect my son.

They will respect my son. A son in this culture was immensely important. The son not only represented the father, the son was the father's pride and joy, the heir of all that the father had ever strived for, and the symbol of the father's future. The son in every way was the fullness of a father. And that's what's a little bit, that's what's so confusing about why he sends his son. I think we have to pause. Like, doesn't the owner see this recurring pattern happening? You know, you're sending the servants and they're getting killed. You know, what sort of father sends his son?

Is he a fool? You know, the owner, he could rightfully send authorities. He could muster up an army. He could execute these rebellious tenants. He probably could, and in our opinion, should have done something about this several servants ago. But he doesn't. Yet that doesn't mean that he overlooks injustice.

[13:14] It shows us. It shows us that he's patient. That he's forbearing. He's long-suffering. But he's not foolish.

He doesn't treat his enemies the way they deserve. He doesn't repay violence with violence. Yeah, the humiliation and the suffering, that is undoubtedly fresh in his mind. But he decides to send his beloved son. Alone, unarmed, without an entourage, the son goes to the vineyard to vicious men who are waiting for him. The owner sends his highest representative, hoping their hearts will change, that their actions will correct in light of his presence, in light of the fact that here is my son. Respond to him as you would to me. The owner is trying, I think, to mend the relationship by sending his son. And this reflects God's heart. The owner sees this pattern of rebellion. He's not unaware, yet he offers them another chance still. And it may seem foolish. But in our world, grace often looks foolish. Then we go from the perspective of the owner to the perspective of the tenants. In verse 7, these tenants say, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. They see the beloved son coming, and they think to themselves, easy target. And we get their motives. The inheritance will be ours. They don't want to be tenants. They want to be owners. They want to be heirs. And in their words, we hear greed, a desire for unjust gain, scheming and wickedness, a plot to murder. And it echoes the way the Proverbs talk about the wicked.

[15:26] Especially chapter 1. Listen to just some of verses 10 through 19. Sinners say, Come with us. Let us lie and wait for blood.

Let us ambush the innocent without reason. We shall find all precious goods. We shall fill our houses with plunder. Throw in your lot among us.

We will all have one purse. Doesn't this sound exactly like the tenants? These rebellious tenants, they believe that they will gain the inheritance by killing the son.

And so they kill him. And they kill him shamefully. It says that they cast his body out of the vineyard. This would be like walking upon a dead body on a sidewalk in our culture, and no one does anything about it and just leaves it there.

I mean, it's that shocking. It's that shameful. And then Jesus ends with this question. What will the owner of the vineyard do? And this is the question we've been asking, and now it is amplified.

[16:36] Because the owner has shown grace upon grace upon grace. He hasn't treated evil tenants the way they deserve. But now, now they have scorned this incredible act of graciousness.

They've killed his beloved son. And according to the proverb, it's to their destruction and to their demise. It continues.

And then Jesus answers the question he asked in verse 9.

He says, And so this is a parable of stark contrast.

In it, we see the revelation of God's heart in the owner of the vineyard. He wants to set things right. He takes great measures to do so. He's gracious, and he offers this grace.

[17:57] He doesn't treat people who've rejected him the way they deserve. Because his desire is that they wouldn't perish. He pursues the tenants, even at the cost of his servants, and even at the cost of his own son.

He's willing to absorb the rebellion and disrespect, the insult and the harm, hoping, just hoping that they will respond rightly to grace.

And then in stark contrast to God's heart, the parable is a revelation of humanity's heart in the tenants. The tenants, they just want to benefit themselves at the expense of others.

They're set against the owner. They're rebels. They want a universe without the owner, but with all of its benefits. It's just the sin of the Garden of Eden all over again, humanity desiring to be God.

And it's a heart-wrenching story. A story about the death of a beloved son, an owner who offered grace after grace to undeserving people, until finally he had to come with justice and judgment.

[19:11] And you think, wow, I mean, what a doozy of a parable. If you're there and the religious leaders are hearing this, and then Jesus doesn't even give them a chance to catch their breath.

He brings this zinger of a scripture to make his point, to drive it home. He quotes Psalm 118, and he asks, have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing, and it's marvelous in our eyes. We have to ask, why this scripture? What's this doing here?

First, it's helpful to know what a cornerstone is. A cornerstone is a structural stone, and it was key to the foundation of any building. And it was really important in a building project to have the right stone.

If the cornerstone wasn't quite right, if it was compromised, then the whole building would be compromised. And so great care was taken to select the right stone. So the fact that in the psalm, the rejected stone becomes the cornerstone, it signifies a massive oversight.

[20:23] It's a massive oversight. Second, it's helpful to know that Psalm 118 is a celebration psalm. It's written to celebrate the construction of the temple again, the second temple, after Israel returns from exile.

But it's mostly written from the perspective of one person, from a king, from a king who's been rejected, and he sees himself as the rejected cornerstone that's now being accepted, that he's now being vindicated and received by the people.

And remember the triumphal entry just a couple days before in the Gospels? They say, Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. This comes out of Psalm 118.

They saw Jesus and said, this is the king coming to visit us. So how does the psalm connect to the parable? Let's just step back into the context of Jesus again for a second.

It's helpful to know in his day that the temple was being reconstructed again for the third time. And the construction, it wasn't finished. And so the leaders that he's talking to are in a very real way builders of the temple.

[21:33] And this, well, this would not have been the first story that they've ever heard about a vineyard. Isaiah sings a song about a vineyard in Isaiah 5.

And it's amazing the parallels. The vocabulary is almost verbatim. The vineyard has a wine press. It has a wall. It has a temple. And so when the hearers of this parable hear the word vineyard, they would think vineyard equals the people of God.

Vineyard equals Israel because that's what Isaiah's song was about. And so then the tenants, the tenants would be people who are supposed to care for God's vineyard, the leaders entrusted to Israel.

So tenants equals religious leaders standing before Jesus. And the parable tells us that God loved his vineyard. He loved his people. He tried to give it everything they need to thrive. But there's become this wall. The leaders have become a separation between God and the people. They're getting in the way. They're failing because they're seeking unjust gain.

[22 : 41] We see this in their abuse of the temple with the money lenders and all of that. The place that is supposed to be about the presence of God under their leadership has become a den of robbers.

So by quoting the psalm, Jesus is essentially saying, when the tenants killed the son, that's the same as rejecting the cornerstone.

In other words, the son is the cornerstone. He is the true king. And in his rejection, their project crumbles and in his death, judgment is coming. And so the psalm adds extra weight to the accusation of the parable.

It's like Jesus was saying, you're building this temple, but you're rejecting the one thing it needs. You're missing the whole point of the temple anyways, which is the presence of God and the son of God is standing in your midst.

You're plotting against me, but you're actually plotting against God. You're mishandling what you've been entrusted. And this is a time of grace.

[23 : 49] The judgment will come. These are some intense moments. This is an intense scene in the gospel.

And what's so fascinating to me is that for the first time in the gospel, people understand the parable. Jesus doesn't have to explain it to them.

Mark verse 12, they perceive that he had told the parable against them. They get it. The religious leaders, they get it. They get that this is an accusation against them.

They get that they're being accused of being wicked tenants, accused of being irresponsible, greedy, conniving, and murderous. If they really hear the parable, then they get that the servants represent the prophets and that they're being accused of being like their fathers who murdered the prophets.

And they're also being warned that Jesus is the last chance. And if they reject him and if they kill him, judgment will be coming for them and there will be no more grace.

[25 : 00] That's it, Jesus is saying. I am the last shot, the last opportunity at getting right with God before he comes with justice and judgment. So you look at an intense scene like this and you step back and you think, how do we find our place in this story?

I mean, we have the advantage of seeing the whole picture, right? We know that Jesus was ultimately rejected by these very people that they orchestrated a way to get him crucified.

We know that Jesus, even though he was rejected, ultimately was risen. And was vindicated. And that although the temple fell, God has a temple.

It's his people. It's the people who believe in Jesus. But this parable, we don't want to jump ahead of it. We want to let it disrupt us.

The parable, it should make us uncomfortable. So what's your place in this parable? Do you identify with the tenants? They wanted their own way.

[26 : 11] They wanted the place of the owner. They wanted to dig in and kick out God. They didn't want the owner, but they expected all the benefits of his land. It's irrational.

But this sort of attitude, it's so prevalent in our day. So many people don't want God. They don't think they need the forgiveness and grace that Jesus so freely offers, but they simultaneously expect a life full of happiness, a life with longevity, success, without problems, and add to that a happy family, perfect health, justice in the city, peace in the world.

Yeah, they'd be good to go. In other words, you're saying, I want a perfectly blessed life without the inconvenience of God. In this parable, it challenges that notion.

You may want it all, or as the words of the parable, you may desire the inheritance. Ultimately, everything is God's. Even your life, it's his.

You cannot have the benefits without the benefactor. You cannot have the benefits without the benefactor. Because ultimately, they're all his.

[27 : 22] And any good you have in your life, the scriptures say, is because God makes the sun shine and the rain fall on the good and the wicked alike.

God is compassionate towards his enemies. The parable makes this clear. A time of grace precedes judgment. But do not mistake, please, do not mistake God's patience, his forbearance, his long suffering towards you as a license to continue ignoring him.

And don't just assume that because your life is going fairly well and because you're a pretty decent person that you're right with God without his son. Outside of Jesus, this parable is clear.

We're rebels against God. So accept God's grace while you can. Be reconciled to him. Because the parable tells us if you reject grace, all that remains is judgment.

Or do you identify with the religious leaders? They rejected the cornerstone. They focused on building religious structures but completely missed Jesus.

[28 : 37] They got so caught up with religious forms that they missed their intended purpose. They were clinging to these old traditions that there was no room for the movement of God.

And this just reflects the proclivity of our own hearts. We can get so caught up in the things we think we have to do for God that we end up missing God.

We can get so caught up in our life aspirations that we don't let God tell us that we're completely missing Jesus in it. We can get so set in our course that we don't let God redirect our ways because we tend to think that we know better than God.

We know how to direct our lives better than he does. The beauty of the parable though, the beauty of the parable, it gives you room to respond. You don't have to respond like these tenants or the religious leaders.

What would it look like if you responded differently? The son comes. Asking for what's rightly his, how would you respond? First, I think you would have to recognize the position you now find yourself in.

[29 : 50] You've rebelled against the owner. You've killed his servants. He could have you justly put in prison. He could execute you. And so you would have to admit, you would have to confess that you have gravely mistreated him.

That you laid claim to something that was never yours to begin with. But you would also have to ask for forgiveness and for mercy. Because even if you gave the fruit to the son, you're only giving to him what was always his.

The son could have you removed from the vineyard still. He could have you executed still. The son has the right to take everything away from you, even your life. You need his forgiveness and mercy. And only he can offer it. It cannot be coerced. But that's precisely what the son came to do. Even in our constant rebellion, even in our rejection of God, God offers yet another chance to be reconciled to him.

He sent Jesus to offer us grace. He did not repay violence for violence, but he came to restore us to a right relationship with God. He came to call us out of a life of selfishness and of betrayal to a life of integrity and reconciliation with God.

[31 : 09] when my friend, old Michael Ferguson, admitted to stealing my magnet. He said it bluntly, I stole it.

But then he asked me if I wanted it back. And it was odd. I got so caught off guard. I was so shocked that he admitted his fault that before I knew it, I just blurted out, no, you can keep it.

Then we went on being friends. I think it's this way with God. When we surrender to the Son, when we admit that we have rebelled against God, we still gain the inheritance.

Because Jesus says, whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The tenants, they want the inheritance, they set themselves against the owner, they're destroyed.

The religious leaders want to retain the status quo, they crucify the Son of God. They want to gain it all, but it was to their destruction. But if we lose our lives for Jesus' sake, Jesus receives us as sons and daughters, as heirs.

[32 : 24] He makes us children of God, and the inheritance is beyond what we can fathom. The inheritance is eternal life and unending love, complete love that can never be explored to its depths, love that satisfies and fills, takes away every crack of our souls, love that no longer sees us for all of our faults, but love that embraces us as children.

We follow Jesus and we gain an inheritance. how could you reject that? How could you reject that grace?

Don't fall on the cornerstone. That is how the New Testament uses this passage elsewhere. People will stumble over the stone. Don't stumble over grace.

Because the text is clear, if you refuse the grace that is offered now, only justice and judgment remain. That does not bode well for rebellious humans.

Come to Jesus. Fall down at the feet of Jesus while the time of grace is here. Whatever has to crumble in your life, whatever has to be taken away, whatever has to be reclaimed by God, whatever has to be completely removed, so be it.

[33 : 57] Let it crumble. Cling to the cornerstone. Let the foundation be Christ. Because in Him is our true life.

And in Him is an inheritance that will not fade. Amen? Amen?