

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 12:1-12 “Murder in the Vineyard”

Intro. Suppose there is a wealthy man in Virginia who wants to do something about the many who can't find a job in today's economy. Quite a few are even homeless. Suppose he paid millions of dollars to build a large, new grocery store. He stocks it fully. Then he goes out and looks for homeless people & others who need a job. The more qualified are placed in management, and others are assigned the other jobs. He informed them that they can work for him, not just as employees, but in a partnership, where all the workers would get a share of the profits. All they had to do was work at the store, manage it well, & give him half of the profits. After picking his workers and signing the contract with them, he goes off to California, a long way off.

A few months after the store opened, he expected to receive his first check from the profits, but nothing came. So he sent one of his employees to remind them of their obligation. They just laughed at him, and ran him out of the store. They wanted all the profits for themselves. Well the owner heard about this, but from the goodness of his heart he decided to give them another chance. When no check arrived the next month, he sent a business associate to them, requesting the owner's share of the profits. This time they beat him up, giving warning of what would happen to anyone the owner sends to them. By now the owner is quite concerned, but he thought that surely with enough encouragement, they would do the right thing. So he sent another business associate to them, but this time, they take him into a back room of the store & murder him. They continue to hold on to all of the profits. We might expect that the owner would have had enough by now, but the next month he sent his only son to collect what they owe. When his son arrived, they said to themselves, “This is the owner's heir. Let's kill him, too, & the store will be ours to keep.” So several guys forced him into a truck. They took him outside the city & murdered him.

Now what should be done to those who are running & working in the store? Is there any person here today who would condemn the owner for pressing charges against those people, & holding them fully accountable for what they had done? Surely he would get others to run his store!

You know that God has given you life, and a beautiful world in which to live. Most of us have been given opportunities to develop skills, get an education, and do something productive with our lives. You have grown up in a country where the Gospel is preached, & the Word of God is available, & frequently taught. Now let me ask you a question. What have you given back to God? Are you serving Him by being a blessing to others? Are you thanking Him, & giving Him glory? Are you leading others to Him? Are you giving Him a worthy portion of the material wealth that He has blessed you with?

God expects us to be fruitful, and yet in the story Jesus told here in chapter 12, we see that many in Israel were not, especially the leaders. At the end of chapter 11 they demanded by what authority He drove out the businessmen from the temple. He had already shown His authority numerous times by His miracles & powerful teaching. Yet they refused to believe. The very people who were supposed to know God the best, rejected the very Son of God whom God had sent. So by means of this parable Jesus warned them what would happen if they did not repent, & become fruitful to God.

Now in this parable we see a series of pictures about God. We can learn some things about the nature of God in this parable, & how we should respond to Him. Knowing God is so important. The first thing we see is:

I. GOD IS GOOD TO MAN

We see this illustrated in the goodness of the landowner. Note the preparation of the vineyard in v.1, “A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower.”¹ We see that the owner of the Vineyard had done so much to provide a good, fruitful Vineyard. The grape vines were planted & prepared to provide a fruitful harvest. A hedge was grown around the vineyard to help protect it. The winepress was constructed. It generally consisted of two excavations dug into the earth and lined with stonework, or hewn out in a cliff. The upper cavity, wide and shallow, served as a receptacle for the grapes. Here they were crushed by the feet of the grape-treaders. Through a pipe the juice would run into the lower, narrow and deep compartment. Afterward it was put into jar. Even a tower was built. A watchman had to be stationed in such a tower to warn of any danger from thieves or destructive animals. A vineyard with all these fittings was ready for profitable occupation. Now even though the tenants had not invested anything in the vineyard, they were given the opportunity to work it, and make a nice living off of it, as long as they gave the owner a share of the fruit.

Now what does this symbolize? First, it shows:

A. God Is Good to Israel – Psa. 73:1 says, “Truly, God is good to Israel.” He chose them from among the nations to be His people. He saved them from Egyptian bondage by mighty miracles. He gave them His perfect Law for their own good. He gave them a good and fruitful land. He raised up great leaders and sent them prophets. God furnished Israel with all that was needed for fruitful, happy service. No nation under heaven ever received so many notable and distinguishing privileges as Israel.

But isn't it also true that:

B. God Is Good to Us! - Think of the goodness of God toward man. We enjoy many material blessings. We have a beautiful, wonderful world to live in. With a little work, the land can be very fruitful, and we have abundance of food. Many of the foods that He has created are delicious! He has also created marriage and all the blessings of marriage and family.

We also have been blessed with many spiritual blessings. He gave His Son to die for our sins, that we might have eternal life. He has done so much to make it possible for us to be spiritually fruitful. For example, God has given us His Bible, the Holy Spirit, gifted leaders (Eph. 4:11-12), and local churches. You and I were not born in a heathen country, but in America, which has been a Christian nation. Even to this day a significant portion of our population is Christian.

Now why is God so good to us? After all, we do not deserve His goodness? One reason is that it is just His nature to be good. But there is another reason. Romans 2:4 says, “The goodness of God leads you to repentance.” Clearly, God expects us to respond to His goodness.

How have you responded to the goodness of God, & His calls to bear fruit unto Him? Our story illustrates the fact that most people seem to ignore the fact of God's goodness. They do not worship Him and give thanks to Him on Sunday. They do not call Him Lord, yielding their lives to

¹ The picture is based upon Isaiah's lovely apologue (Isaiah 5:1; cf. Ps. 80:8-16), which was, no doubt, familiar to the learned officials.

Him. How do you feel about the workers? You have to have a hard heart to breathe God's air, and eat the food He has provided, and walk around and enjoy life with the health that He has given you, and not in return, believe in His Son Jesus, and serve Him with fruitfulness.

Have you repented of your sin, and given your heart & life to Him? Are you serving Him, and giving back to Him? Are you following His example, and being good to others.

Another truth about God we see from our story is this:

II. GOD COMMUNICATES TO MAN

The Bible says that God had not left Himself without a witness. He is not silent, but He has revealed Himself, and He has spoken to man through creation, & especially through His prophets & His Son. They called the people to faith & obedience to God. They told them what God expects from them in response to His goodness. For one thing, He expects us to be fruitful for Him. Jesus said in John 15:8, "Herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit."

Notice how this is illustrated in our story. When the tenants failed to give the owner his share of the fruit, we read in vv.2-5, "Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some." The messengers in this story, who were sent to collect the owner's share of the crop, symbolize the prophets that God sent to Israel (vv. 2-5). The landowner even attempted to communicate with them through his son, a clear reference to God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the apex of His revelation to man was His Son Jesus. He sent Him into our world about 2,000 years ago. Clearly the Son is superior to prophets, who are servants only. And notice that the Son was the last person that was sent. God's final witness to man came in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He was the last effort of the Owner, the last arrow in the quiver of Almighty Love. Don't believe those who say that Mohammad was the last prophet. Don't believe those who say that Jesus Christ was not sufficient, but that He had to raise up Joseph Smith as His last prophet. Jesus makes it clear that Jesus, the Son of God, is God's final revelation to man (Heb. 1:1-3).

Isn't that an important truth? If you reject Jesus, there is no other one who can save you from your sin. If you reject Jesus, there is nothing left but judgment. Acts 4:12 says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Heb. 2:3 says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Yet we see here in our story one of the ways God communicates to man. He gives warning. Here Jesus exposes the plot of the leaders to put Him to death. They are like the men who saw the owner's son coming, and plotted to kill him that they might seize the vineyard for themselves. In just 3 days they would carry out their plot, but Jesus exposes their plans and warns of the consequences if they carry out their murderous plot. Even at that late hour He was warning & giving opportunity to repent.

Here we see that God reaches out to man. I do not believe that God is still sending prophets today, because He has given us His written Word, the Bible. It contains a record of His message through the prophets and apostles. It is a complete & sufficient revelation of His character, His

works, His expectations, & His way of salvation. Today, God calls & sends preachers, not to give any new or additional truth, but to preach the biblical truths that He has already revealed. I have no doubt but that God called me to preach, gave me the ability to preach, and God is calling you today to believe in Him, and live for Him through preachers like me.

So God has spoken, and He is speaking in various ways. Are you listening to Him? Are you giving heed to Him? Or are you like the men in our story, rejecting or ignoring what His servants are saying on His behalf?

Another truth about God we see from our story is this:

III. GOD IS PATIENT WITH MAN

This story reveals to us the patience of God because it also reveals the rebellious nature of man. The landowner sent a servant to collect what was due. What did they do? They beat him, and sent him on his way.

In the present parable it far surpasses what the average person's reaction would have been when the first servant returns from his errand. He not only carries with him no grapes or wine, but in addition shows the evidences of the physical abuse he has received. Nevertheless, the owner does not immediately fly into a rage and punish the offenders, as we would have expected. No, he simply sends another servant, giving the sharecroppers another chance to do their duty. And when that one is killed, the owner sends others. Finally, he even sends his own son, whom he dearly loves. He kept sending messenger after messenger, giving them opportunity to repent, and do what was right. Yet they kept on refusing to give heed to their message & warning.

Clearly, the owner symbolizes God's patience with Israel! He patiently bore with rebellious Israel, sending prophet after prophet, giving them opportunity after opportunity to repent. Yet many prophets were beaten, imprisoned, or even murdered. Yet God kept sending more prophets. He kept giving them more opportunities to repent.

We see other examples of His patience with man throughout Scripture. He gave the people in Noah's day 120 *years* to repent. In Rev. 2:21 we see that He gave notoriously corrupt "Jezebel" time to repent. In these last days He is still patient with a rebellious humanity. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." When I look at the world today, I marvel at the patience of God! Yet 1 Cor. 13:7 says, love "hopes all things." Love keeps hoping for the best. God's love causes Him to be patient with sinners, giving them a 2nd, 3rd, or even a 4th opportunity to repent, & make things right.

God is indeed patient, but there is a limit to His patience. He may have a long fuse, but at some point the fuse will reach its end. So don't presume upon the patience of God. If He is calling upon you to be saved, don't put it off. You do not know what will happen tomorrow. If He is calling upon you to live for Him, and be fruitful, don't put it off.

So lest you presume upon the patience of God, let's take a look at another truth about God that we see in our story:

IV. GOD IS SEVERE WHEN HE JUDGES

Romans 11:22 says, "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God." Too many want to believe in the goodness and love of God. But they don't want to hear about the judgment

and severity of God. They refuse to believe that God can be both good & severe in judgment. But the severity of God is just as real as the love of God.

Though God is good & patient, there is a limit to His goodness & patience. That limit was reached when the leaders even rejected & murdered Jesus. Why did they murder Jesus? The answer is given in the last of v.7, “Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” Jesus was encroaching on their leadership, and the privileges that came with it. They were beside themselves with envy when just a few days before the crowds praised Him, and honored Him as their king. They didn’t want Jesus interfering with their lives. And there are many today who reject Jesus, because they don’t want Him interfering with their lives. They want to hold on to all that they have, and give God none of it.

So our story illustrates the severity of God toward those who reject His Son, & rebel against His claim upon their lives. Notice what v.9 says, “Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do?” What would you do to those men? In Matthew’s account of this story, he adds an important detail. He reports that the people answered the question of v.9 the same way Jesus did, “He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.” Because of their own sense of fairness, they gave the only right answer that could be given in such a situation. We expect that a landowner would take severe action against such rebellious tenants.

What do you expect God to do for those who reject His witness and His goodness? Do you think that God will just do nothing? Yet somehow, people expect God to respond to such rebellion in a different way. Perhaps the end of v.1 gives a reason. People seem to think that God is like someone who is off in a far country. He is too far removed from people to do anything about their sin.

Yet even though God is removed from our sight, He is not too far off to judge sin & rebellion. So notice with me how God judged the unbelief & rebellion of the Jewish leaders, & their nation:

A. The Nation Was Destroyed – Jesus said in v.9, “He will come and destroy the vinedressers....” This is exactly what happened to the nation of Israel. We can see the fulfillment of this just 40 years later when General Titus & his Roman army destroyed that city and killed about a million Jews. He took the survivors into captivity. Part of their beautiful land was turned over to others, and the rest was left desolate.

God’s judgment also included the fact that:

B. The Spiritual Blessings Passed to Others – Jesus also warned that the Owner would “give the vineyard to others.” In Matthew’s account of this story, Jesus specifically warned, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (21:43). Why? Because they had not lived up to their obligations. So, in the place of the old covenant people, there would arise “a nation producing its fruit,” a church international, gathered from both Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 21:41; 28:19; Acts 13:46). The parable, accordingly, is not an abstraction. It pictures reality. If anything could have enraged the rulers more than the parable itself, the distinct declaration of the transference of Israel’s prerogatives to more worthy tenants would do so. In fact, in Luke’s account, they said in response to Jesus, “Certainly not!” (20:16).

There is a lesson here. Blessing implies responsibility. The only way to keep God’s gifts is to use them for His glory. What happened to Israel can happen to America. We have been blessed far above the other nations in most respects. There is clear evidence of the dominance of our

Christian heritage in our historical documents & institutions. There was a time when church & Bible preaching dominated the culture. As God has blessed us, we have blessed others by sending thousands of missionaries to the nations. But our government has turned from God. Our culture has turned from God & His righteous law. Many of our churches have turned from God & His Word. What do you think God is going to do if we as a nation continue to reject the rule of God over us? We will face the judgment of God, and He will raise up another nation who will give Him His due.

What about you? Could I appeal to you and your own sense of fairness? What more could God do for you? He has given you His Bible, His Son, and a preacher to give you His message. He has been good to you in many ways. What more could God do to get you to believe in His Son, and follow Him? When man rejects God's offer of pardon, there is nothing else for God to do but to bring judgment upon such a person. In light of the severity of God's judgment, you should do what John the Baptist suggested, and "flee from the wrath to come" (Luke 3:7).

So we have seen that God is severe in judgment, especially after a person or nation has exhausted His patience. In spite of their rebellion, He never lost control of the situation. So a final truth about God that is revealed in our text is this:

V. GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Even though God is often opposed and rebelled against, He is still on the throne. His purposes will not be defeated. Notice what Jesus says in vv.10-11, "Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" He quoted from a familiar messianic prophecy. With confidence Jesus bears witness that their rejection & murder of Him would not bring defeat but ultimate victory. So Jesus suddenly switches the figure of speech here. He says, "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Just as the vine-dressers rejected the Son, even so the builders rejected what would become the chief cornerstone! Nothing took God by surprise.

So even though Jesus foretells His death, He also foretells His triumph after death. Because He conquered death, He became the Head of the Church, which has grown through the ages to some one billion people, from just about every nation.

We even see that God was sovereign in permitting the death of Jesus, for there was a saving purpose for His death. But He loved you so much that He went to die on a cruel cross for your sins.

Conclusion: God has borne witness to you by His Word, & by this gospel preacher. We have seen that God is good & patient, but also severe in judgment. How will you respond to His goodness? Will you give Him your heart? Will you live a fruitful life?

Think about this. The Bible pictures Jesus as a lamb. He died on the cross as a sacrificial lamb, to save you from your sin. But it also pictures Jesus as a lion. Now how do you want to meet Jesus? Do you want to meet Jesus as a lamb, or as a lion? A man is a fool who will know that God has been good to him, and reject the witness of God, and take his chances and go out into eternity without believing in Christ. Will you trust Him today, and live a fruitful life for Him? Or will you walk out of this service clinging to your own life, and claiming all that God has given you for yourself?

McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 3/25/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Compare sources for the parallel accounts in [Matthew 21:33-45](#) & Luke 20:9-19.