



God's Vineyard and the Wicked Tenants

Key idea:

The parable of God's vineyard and the wicked tenants displays the patience and mercy of God, the wickedness of the leaders of Israel, and God's vindication of Jesus.

Key text:

Mark 12:1-12

He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ⁶ "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷ "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Haven't you read this scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; ¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" ¹² Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Key points:

1. Mark 12 presents five stories of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. This corresponds with five stories of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders in Galilee that are recorded in Mark 2:1-3:6. These may be seen in the table below:

Galilee	Jerusalem
Jesus forgives the paralytics sins (2:1-10)	Jesus' authority/The Parable of the Tenants (11:27-12:12)
Jesus and the "sinners" (2:13-17)	Paying Taxes to Caesar (12:13-17)
Questions about fasting (2:18-22)	Marriage at the resurrection (12:18-27)
Picking grain on the Sabbath (2:23-27)	The Greatest Commandment? (12:28-34)
Healing on the Sabbath (3:1-6)	Whose Son is the Christ? (12:35-40)

2. Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard that initially seems to be the same story told in Isaiah 5 about Israel as an unfruitful vineyard. However, Jesus changes the story to focus on wicked tenants who will not give the owner his rightful share of the produce.
3. In the parable, the owner sends many servants to collect his share of the crop, but the tenants mistreat and kill the servants. The owner then sends his beloved son, but they kill the son as well.
 - a. The owner represents God, the owner of the vineyard of His people.
 - b. The servants represent the prophets, who were called servants of the Lord, and who Israel consistently rejected and killed.
 - c. The beloved son represents Jesus, the Son of God Whom the Father loves.
 - d. The tenants are the leaders of Israel, who act like their fathers in rejecting God's messengers, including John the Baptist, and who are going to reject and kill God's Son.
4. The owner finally judges the wicked tenants, puts them to death, and gives the vineyard to others. This was foreseen in Psalm 118 where the stone rejected by the builders becomes the cornerstone of a new temple.
5. The leaders fully understand this parable and are furious and want to arrest Jesus, but they can't do this yet because they are afraid of the crowd which is amazed at His teaching.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. Why does Mark include 5 conflict stories from Galilee and 5 from Jerusalem (see the table above)? What is this meant to convey to me as I read the Gospel?

3. How is Jesus' parable similar to the song of the vineyard from Isaiah 5? How is it different? How does the song in Isaiah 5 help me to understand Jesus' parable better?
4. What is my initial reaction to the owner sending so many servants after the tenants have abused or even killed the ones who came before? What is this detail meant to convey to me regarding God's long-suffering, patience, and love?
5. What is my thought regarding the owner sending his son to the wicked tenants? Does this seem wise? What does it tell me about God and the Gospel?
6. How is this parable similar to the parable of the prodigal son? How is it different?
7. When I consider the prophets of the Old Testament, were any of them successful in getting Israel to listen and change? What does this tell me about Israel? What does it tell me about true success in speaking the Word of God?
8. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 at the end of the parable. Peter also quotes this in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:4-8. What does this text teach me about the Father's vindication of Jesus? What does it teach me about the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant?
9. How has humanity as a whole responded to God's revelation and Word? How have we been like the wicked tenants?
10. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously declared "God is dead - we killed Him!" He also stated that God's mercy is what killed Him. How should a Christian respond to these ideas? How do I see people trying to kill God? What is the result of this quest? What happens if we trample underfoot God's mercy in sending Christ?
11. Who can I reach out to this week to share the Good News of God's grace?