

The Vineyard
Mark 12

Genesis 37 1-29

Acts 4: 1-12

Responsive. Genesis 22 1-8

This morning we are going to begin in Chapter 12. So let us turn there this morning and read to verse 12. So here we find another Parable teaching by Jesus, but this one varies from the previous ones. As we were reading through this, this morning did you catch it? There is a slight, but very distinct difference here, in all of the previous parables that we have read so far in the book of Mark they were confusing and not understood, even by Jesus closest disciples. After Jesus told the parable of the sower in chapter 4 he said "He who has ears to hear, let them hear" but then we see that his disciples asked him to explain the parable to them which he did, and then followed it by a few other parables, which they did not understand but later would explain it to them.

So there has this pattern, of parable, confusion, explanation. And as you go through these parables here, we see Jesus seemingly becoming frustrated with the disciples for being dull, and lacking understanding. Chapter 8 for example, after Jesus had just fed the multitude and go back into the boat to depart to the other side Jesus said to his disciples, verse 15." Take heed beware of the leaven of the pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, it is because we have no bread. But Jesus being aware of it said to them, Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up? They said to him, twelve Also when I broke up the seven for the four thousand, how any baskets full of fragments did you take up? And they said Seven, so he said to them, how is it you do not understand?

And in Chapter 7 we see another example of Jesus being a little frustrated with his disciples who do not understand his teaching, verse 14. " When he had called all the multitude to himself, he said to them, Hear me, everyone and understand. There is nothing that enters a man from the outside which can defile him, but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear! Then he had entered a house away from the crowd and his disciples asked him concerning the parable. So he said to them, Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from the outside cannot defile him? Because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods? What comes out of a man, that defiles a man, for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness, all these evil things come from within and defile a man.

A little side note here, This principle that Jesus taught here in this parable is the principle I have used with raising my own children in how to deal with this sinful world. When they were both younger, they would repeat everything they heard, not understanding the meaning behind the words so we would periodically catch them using some bad words. But instead of being shocked and reactionary like it would seem most parents are, trying to figure out how or why they would even know such a word, and come down hard on them for using it I explained it to them much like this parable of Jesus. In this world there are many things that you will encounter, many bad things, bad words, sinful actions and life styles. You can not control what the others around you are doing, but you can control yourself. Just because others use language, or do things that are sinful what matters is that you do not, do not concern yourself with them, but rather determine yourself to not fall into that trap.

' It is the principle of this parable, what you do, what you say, what comes out of you is what defiles you, so be careful to conduct yourself in such a way that you are not defiling yourself. We recently had this discussion in our family about the staining effect of Sin. Those of us who have been around the block and time or 2 know exactly what the staining effect of sin is. There are things, or moments in our life that arise and can be constant struggles in our christian walk. The effect of sin can carry with you throughout your entire life, yes, if you repent God is faithful to forgive but we are left with reminders, or even struggle with the past because of those sins. I think of the staining effect of sin is like the effect of smoking. Even though you may quit, and no longer smoke, or may no longer be enabled by a specific sin, it still will linger with you, the damage has already been done. That is why it is important to recognize temptations, sin in our lives, and things that lead us into sin and to flee from them. As I told my kids, you can not control the sinful world around you, but you can control your interaction with it, and you can guard yourself against it.

So as we see this morning in the example of these parables there is a common thread of misunderstanding, and Jesus even says that he has taught in parables for that very reason, so only those who it has been given to understand, only those who have ears to hear will be able to hear. And that brings us to the parable this morning in chapter 12, and how this one is different. Notice, it is not met with confusion, it is not met with even his disciples asking what does he mean by this? This parable is clear and understood by even the religious leaders in Jerusalem and they understood that it was a parable taught against them. We have seen a shift in Jesus teaching that Mark has been writing starting here in chapter 11. There has been a shift, from redemption, to judgment. If you remember the cursing of the fig tree, that was a miracle of judgment upon that tree, which is the first and only such miracle that we see recorded in the book of Mark. Then Jesus went into the temple and threw out the merchants and money changers and fore told of the destruction of the temple. And here we see this parable is a directed to the religious leaders in Jerusalem and is a rebuke against them for their handling of God's messengers.

And unlike Jesus other parable teachings which were hidden, and misunderstood, we can see in verse 12 that the sought to arrest him but they feared the multitude because they knew that he had spoken the parable against them. There was no need for further explanation to be understood, this was not just a lesson that Jesus was teaching so only, those who have been granted understanding may understand. This was plain, simple, straightforward that even the Jewish leaders understood that he was talking about them, and it was a rebuke against them. This parable is the story of the relationship between Israel and the Son of God depicted through the old testament practice of tenant farming.

This practice was quite common for a land owner to higher a middle man to manage his fields for him, so that he would not have to manage it himself and was free to come and go as he pleased. In this parable here, Jesus does what he has done with all of his parables, and that is to take something that is a comon experience, something that the people he is talking to would be familiar with and apply it to a larger message, with a deeper meaning. And applies it to Israel's history with the prophets and the handling of God's word in this rather clear and understandable way.

Isaiah used the same language and imagery of a vineyard in a prophesy of judgement against Israel as well, which is a theme used throughout the old testament and would have likely been very familiar to these men that Jesus was addressing here. Turn with my to Isaiah 5, starting in verse 1. And as we read through this, think about Jesus parable here of the vineyard and we will see that this is very much the same theme, a parable, of prophesy of judgement against israel.

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding his vineyard. My well beloved has a vineyard, on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a wine press in it. So he expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. And now O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? When then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard, I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned, and break down its wall and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it to waste, it shall not be pruned, or dug but there shall come up briars and thorns I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah is his pleasant plant. HE looked for justice, but behold, oppression, for righteousness but behold a cry for help.

Also in Jeremiah chapter 7, which clearly sounds very much like Jesus' parable against the leaders of Israel, verse 21 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, obey my voice, and I will be your God and you shall be my people. And walk in the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all my servants and prophets daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they did not obey me, or incline their ear but stiffened their neck, they did worse than their fathers.

So it is no surprise that these leaders that Jesus was addressing would be very offended by this, for he is calling them out on their lies, corruption, and mishandling of the temple and the word of God. Likening them to these evil managers who have been given the responsibility to care for God's people, his vineyard but instead they beat his messengers, take control of it themselves, and ultimately kill God's son, so just like in the parable, and what we read in Isaiah and Jeremiah, God no longer will send his messengers, but rather comes himself in wrath against these who have been put in charge and brings judgment and destruction upon them.

Notice that the landlord's vengeance is against the tenants, the managers, of the farm and not the entire vineyard. This is an important distinction to make so that we do not misunderstand this parable and apply this judgment to all of Israel, or to the Jewish people themselves, but rather it is intended for their leaders, particularly, the Sanhedrin. For it is they who have taken the things of God and used it for their own gain, glory, and purpose.

The climax of this parable comes in verse 6, when we see that the owner of the vineyard, having all of his servants he had sent either beaten or killed, sends his son, his heir whom he loved. Now as we read about this parable, one might think, why in the world would this owner send his son after all that had been done to his servants, but this shows the love of God toward his people does it not? This is what God has done is it not? Sent his only son, who was arrested, beaten, and ultimately killed by those who were the watch care keepers over the people of Israel?

So this parable is not only a lesson and warning in judgment against the leaders in Israel, but it is also prophetic, pointing to Jesus as the Messiah the heir, the son of God, who comes and dies, but not only that, it also tells of the coming judgment of God upon the earth, against all those who mishandle, and mistreat, and mismanage his vineyard, his people, his church. In this parable, the owner of the vineyard sends his son, who is his heir as a representative, with all the power and authority of the father, and he has come to collect that which is his father's. The sending of his Son here represents not only the legal claim over this vineyard, but also the compassion and care of the father who is willing to sacrifice his son in hopes to save his vineyard.

One commentary I read this week made a very interesting application of this parable, about the Sanhedrin and their violent reaction to Jesus. As we have seen that when the vineyard owner sends his servants they were killed and beaten, and now he sends his son which they kill. In Mark's account of this parable it is because he is the son that they plot to kill him, seeking to eliminate the heir making themselves the new owners of the land. No longer are they content with just the produce of the land, but seek to gain control of the land itself. We see this in verse 7, where it says, "Come let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." But this is not the only place in the Bible where someone seeks to take that which belongs to an heir through violence, the same thing was said about Joseph that we read in Genesis this morning. Come, let us kill him. The commentary I was reading this week mentioned that this desire to kill the heir, to steal the birthright is just like humanity trying to dispense with God, or even kill God. If there is no God, then mankind is god. Is that not basically the atheistic argument, our will, our mind, science and intellect is their God.

So they took him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard, Jesus here is echoing the prophets, the history of Israel is rebellion against God, and in fact if we were to look all through human history one thread we could find that runs all the way through is man's kind's attempt to be like god, or be god. This vineyard that Jesus was alluding to, was of course God's covenant, and the redemptive history that had been hijacked by these Sanhedrin, the misuse and abuse of the law, of the temple, the corruption of the promises and covenant that God gave Moses, all of these things that points to Jesus Christ, the Messiah who has come, and yet they rejected and denied him in favor of their corrupt temple worship. Verse 9, Jesus poses the question to them. "What should the owner of this vineyard do?" Then he answers, and says, he will destroy the vineyarders, the keepers, and give the vineyard to another.

Imagine if you were one of these Sanhedrin, believing that all of God's promises were for the nation of Israel and that you were the authority over all such things, and someone comes and says that you have mishandled what you have been given, so therefore it shall be taken to you and given to another. And not just another, but to the Gentiles, those who were considered to be unclean and unworthy of God. So it isn't hard to see why they would be seeking to destroy him. This parable here, concludes by a quote from Psalms 118: verse 22 and 23. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, this was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." This quote from Psalms shows something quite marvelous, and mysterious about the ways of God. That the human rejection of Jesus Christ, God's cornerstone whom through justification, and reconciliation is accomplished was not only foreseen by God, but it was used for his purpose and glory.

Just like in the parable of the sower, the seeds that fell on bad ground and did not bring forth any fruit did not frustrate God's purpose and plan, but instead it was all encompassing of his plan, for his glory. It is the same with the rejection of Jesus Christ, it did not frustrate the plan of God, but rather it was his plan and God used the rejection of Jesus for a greater purpose, that will, as the psalmist says, be marvelous in our eyes, for his rejection, and suffering, his death, burial and resurrection is the instrument that God uses to draw his children to himself. And we rejoice in his sovereign grace, and provision for sending his Son to die in our stead.

In closing this morning, I want to read the last paragraph of Edwards' commentary, for he has a wonderful summary that encapsulates this parable quite well. "The parable of the vineyard and tenants is permeated with a sense of God's indomitable providence. True, it looks as though the schemes of the rebel tenants will wreck the owner's vineyard, but they do not prevail, nor can they. Even the son fulfills his perilous mission on the assurance that the father's purpose is being accomplished through his death and seeming defeat. The father's vineyard is not dispossessed or destroyed, but rather the wicked tenants are judged and others more worthy are found to continue the vineyard. The parable thus echoes the same theme of the providence seen in the parable of the sower, in which even lousy farming conditions could not cancel or counteract the inevitable harvest of God. Once again the voice of Jesus is audible in the parable, supremely aware of his role in the father's economy. There is yet another reminder of this inevitable death, and yet at equally supreme confidence that his penultimate defeat will not only result in the father's ultimate purpose, but by the means by which it is accomplished. The parable's testimony to the sure purposes of God conveyed a profound sense of hope to Mark's beleaguered church in Rome, so ravaged by Nero's insane persecutions, as it is also in our day when the church is often caught in compromise and confusion and decline. The existence of the vineyard is assured not by the self-aggrandizement of the tenants, but by the self-sacrifice of the son.

Thank God for his grace, mercy and love, who sent his son to be beaten, and killed by those rebellious tenants, establishing a new covenant in his son, so that others could come in, and be a part of his vineyard, to be heirs with his son.