

A Gracious God in the Violent Vineyard

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Mark 12:1-12

Have you seen the movie *Saving Private Ryan*? The movie is a story during WWII when a family who sent four of their sons to war, lost three of them, and the general wanted to save the last remaining son. What a touching story of a mission **to save one man**. The movie has many moral lessons. I hate war, and you can see how horrible war is. But it also shows bravery and commitment to find Ryan. The messenger who was sent to save him (Ryan), did everything to send that boy back to his family. Wow...

Sacrifice a life to save another life. Where can we learn that kind of love and commitment to save someone?

The leadership of Jesus' day, the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Sadducees, and the High Priest are not happy about what Jesus did in the Temple. They are ready to get rid of him.

Next week Badveli Kevin will touch about the authority of Jesus. (Chapter 11:27-33) Who is this Jesus? How dare he challenge our authority?

In chapter 12, we find Jesus using parable. Last time we heard a parable was in chapter 4, the Seed and the Sower.

Hardened hearts? Blind? Don't want to see and hear?

In chapter 4:11-12 we read:

"To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

Parables are designed in a way to reveal something about the Kingdom of God. Believers would understand it but and outsiders (who chose to be outsiders) would not.

However, the Pharisees and the religious leaders of Israel would be able to understand this parable.

Jesus chose a familiar story from Isaiah.

Let me sing for my beloved

my love song concerning his vineyard:

**My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
² He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.
³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
⁵ And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down. (Isaiah 5:1-5 ESV)**

God is upset with His people who are not producing good grapes. They are producing wild grapes, which in Hebrew means rotten, stinking things.¹ We see here God's judgment.

Jesus uses the elements from the OT with a new touch. Because in the end Jesus is here for the salvation of humanity.

Let us examine this parable:

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. ² When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. ⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷ But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸ And they took him

and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture:

**“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;**

**¹¹ this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”**

¹² 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. (Mark 12:1-12ESV)

The story is very simple, direct, vicious, yet holds a beautiful imagery about the **attributes our God.**

The owner of the vineyard makes a huge capital investment. **He plants** a vineyard, **puts a fence** around it, digs a pit for the winepress and **builds a protective tower.** You see he cares for his **“investment.”**

He leases the vineyard to some **tenants** and then he leaves for a vacation (goes to another country).

He is a **generous** man. He is **trusting.** He **grants the complete care** of the vineyard to others while he is away in another country...

Also, he is **reasonable;** he does not have high expectations. He just expects to get some fruit.

“When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.” (Mark 12:2)

Now the story has a contrast. You expect that the tenants will respond in a **gracious way!**

On the contrary, they are dangerous and insulting. Each time the owner sends a servant to bring some of the fruit, they either beat him, struck him on his head (insult for those days), or kill him.

Again and again, the owner does not give up; he sends more servants. **“And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.” (Mark 12:5)**

We said this man is **generous, trusting, and reasonable**. And now I will add **forbearance**. He does not give up...

Now the audience got what is happening. The **tenants**, (the clergy of the day, the religious leadership) for centuries mistreated the **servants** (the prophets) who were sent by the **owner** (God).

The context of this story relates with OT reality. God spoke to his people through prophets:

Zechariah son of Jehoida was stoned (2 Chron. 24:20–22),
Uriah son of Shemaiah died by the sword (Jer. 26:20).

Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jer. 20:2),

Later apocryphal legends tell that Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel were killed. ²

The climax of the story is here. The owner (God) makes the most important decision: “The costly demonstration of unexpected love” as Dr Kenneth Bailey would put it.

“He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” (Mark 12:6 ESV)

-He sends his beloved son, not any son... the beloved SON.

We hear that statement when Jesus was **baptized** (Mark 1:11), and in **transfiguration** (9:7)

“The son’s mission is the same as that of the servants before him. The owner gives the tenants every opportunity to repent and to pay their rent—to give him the required fruits in due season”³

One expects a good ending. Unfortunately, the violence in the vineyard continues, and **they kill the son**.

Strange, they think they solved the problem by killing the son, the one person who would inherit the vineyard.

“They mistakenly assume that the owner is now dead and foolishly hope that killing the heir will give them sole ownership of the vineyard. After they

assassinate the son, they throw his body outside and leave him unburied. To refuse to bury a corpse was an incredible offense in the ancient world.”⁴

They think they can own the vineyard... “Money, land, inheritance, power, prestige, name, all mine, ... does it ring the bell?” ...humanity.

Do you remember how Joseph’s brothers did the same thing when they killed their brother? (Gen 37:20)

What will be the judgment?

⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. (Mark 12:9 ESV)

“Jesus was saying God will destroy the temple, the Jewish sacrificial system, the priesthood, the Sanhedrin, and all the rest-- the very heart of Judaism-- and keep the vineyard to the new owners.”⁵

Who are the new owners? It kept open, but what I can see that whoever believe in Jesus and follow Him will be the new owners, gentiles or Jews who will have faith in Jesus.

This is too much for the daily leadership to absorb. They are the chosen people, how dare the vineyard be given to others?

Then Jesus ends with further images from the OT, as he becomes the **cornerstone** which will be rejected. This new temple was not built by stones, but living stones, among which Jesus Himself is the **CORNERSTONE**:

“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:4-6)

What can we apply in our lives?

1. I want to be GENEROUS.

God is a generous God. God is a gracious God. Please see God's gracious heart. I need the same heart in my life. I need a gracious heart in giving my money, my time, my heart, my family... everything.

2. I want to be forbearing. (Patient, long-suffering, forgiving, merciful)

This parable reveals that God continually purses humanity, no matter how humanity rejects Him. From the worldly side, it seems foolishness to send over and over "servants" prophets, then His only beloved Son. Yet God is merciful and forbearing. His Wisdom is from above, not from below, earthly.

God endures our failures. Again and again, I see his **compassion** and **mercy** in carrying my sins and burdens. I don't want to misuse God's patience and love. There is a Judgment Day.

3. I will not resist His Son

How long you can resist his offer of love? How long you can beat, or kill his servants and his beloved son? We think we can get rid of God by ignoring His call. Every time we close our heart to the love of God, we are rejecting His Son, we are rejecting his love. We are "killing" one more time his Son.

Therefore, I will not resist his love towards me. If He wants fruit from my garden, which is His garden, it is just given to me temporally, I will give everything. I will give all my life all my fruits.

I will not resist HIM.

1. R.C. Sproul, *He Taught Them as One Who Had Authority* Mark, P 270
2. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 452
3. *ibid* 454
4. *ibid* 454
5. R.C. Sproul, *He Taught Them as One Who Had Authority* Mark, P272