

## **The Parable of the Tenants** **Mark 11:27-12:12**

Have you ever been in situation where someone unexpectedly takes charge? What gave them the right? Jesus is taking charge as if he is in a position to do so. He explains why this is the case. The parable of the tenants is a story of judgment, but in God's economy, judgment means life for the world. Judgment ends in great salvation, tragedy unfolds into comedy, a ruined vineyard becomes productive again and the castaway stone becomes the head of the corner. It is marvelous in our eyes!

**The Authority of Judgment** Jesus comes back into the temple he had cleansed, and the chief priests, scribes and elders ask him just who he thinks he is (v28). They don't address his teaching (11:17), but focus on his person. The goal is to get him to say something that can then be used to slander and accuse him. Jesus won't take the bait and instead goes on offense: "I will ask you.... Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me!" (vv29-30). He demands a response to an obvious question, one they are afraid to answer. Every one of us still must answer this question in one form or another—who is Jesus? John's baptism was a call to repentance, forgiveness and preparation for the greater one, the Messiah, whom he identified as Jesus (1:4-8). If they admit John is legit, then Jesus is also and they have their answer. They could deny John, but they're too cowardly because the people believe he is a prophet (v32). So they lie: "We do not know" (v33). Like so many religious people, organized or disorganized, they have no interest in truth. Jesus shows us how to avoid foolish arguments. He silences them by showing they're not willing in principle to confess the truth. They don't lack information, but resist transformation. We don't have an intellectual problem knowing God; we cling to our sins.

**The Patience of Judgment** This parable is an allegory. The comparison to a vineyard is not new which is why it isn't lost on anyone (v12). Isaiah writes about God's vineyard with a hedge, tower, and wine vat. It yielded wild grapes instead of grapes, so he would break down the wall and let it be trampled (5:1-7). The Babylonians destroyed the temple in 586 BC and took Israel into exile. God is the owner of the vineyard, Israel the vineyard, the religious leaders the tenants, the prophets the servants, and Jesus is the son. God owns the whole earth but in particular He entrusted Israel to its leaders. They were supposed to steward the vine to make it fruitful and healthy (v2; cf. Ps. 104:15; Jn. 15). But the leaders beat, rejected, knocked on the head, and killed many of the servants sent to collect fruit (vv3-5). Finally he sent his son and they thought by killing him, they'd gain his inheritance (vv6-8). We tend to think of judgment as something coming suddenly, like God has us on a hair-trigger. This parable demonstrates the long patience of God, sending prophet after prophet to Israel over hundreds of years. This is the story of the Old Testament, God's grace abounding over and over again, bearing with Israel and sending prophets to help and warn (Jer 7:25-26. 2 Chron. 36:15-16, Neh. 9:26). This is how God is day after day with us, not indifferent, but "patient toward you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

**The Grace of Judgment** God's judgment is gracious in two ways. First, it wakes us up. God is patient at the right time and brings judgment at the right time. Notice we are talking about God's judgment in history. We need the wake-up call of hard circumstances. Very few people convert while sipping Mai Tais at their third beach home in the Caribbean. On a parenting level, we should want our children to deal with the consequences of their sin (Prov. 23:13; 13:24). The same applies in civil society (Eccl. 8:11). God gets our attention. He disciplines those he loves (Heb. 12:6). He also stops the wicked. He raises up kings and takes them down (Dan. 2:21). Second, God's judgment brought salvation to the world. He sent his son to that vineyard and died for the thieves and murderers (Lk. 23:34). Judgment fell on Jesus. When all hope was lost, when the vineyard was completely ruined, he sent in new workers and restored it. The vine grew beyond Israel and is being tended all over the world. Marvelously, rejected Jesus has become the cornerstone.

## NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

**Today's Passage: Mark 12:1-12** *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.*

1. This parable is called an allegory where things in the story represent things in real life. The nation of Israel was God's vineyard. What did God want to get from it, and what happened instead (verses 2-6)?
2. Jesus tells this us this story to teach us about God's patience. How has God shown you patience?
3. In this parable, who do you think is the son? Jesus quotes Psalm 118 in verse 11, saying the rejected stone has become the cornerstone. If the church is God's building, who is the cornerstone, the most important stone that supports all the rest?
4. Draw a picture of a vineyard with healthy vines growing, a nice wall, a pit for a winepress, and big tower with a guy at the top looking through binoculars for animals that jump the wall and eat the grapes.

### **Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:**

*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?"—Mark 12:10-11*