



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

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Rejecting Jesus

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Let's open our Bibles to Mark, chapter 12. This is the last parable Mark records in his gospel. When you look at all the Gospels, Jesus taught using parables 46 times. When the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do you teach in parables?" he gave kind of a twofold answer to their question. The answer is actually back in Mark, chapter 4.

By the way, if you're new with us today, this is what we're doing. We're going through the gospel of Mark, verse by verse. Back in Mark, chapter 4, Jesus essentially said he uses parables as a mirror. Parables are meant to be mirrors for us to see ourselves. Kind of that divine method of self-reflection.

They're meant to help us understand ourselves better and to understand God better. A classic example of that kind of parable would be the parable of the prodigal son. We can find ourselves in that parable, but we can also find God in that parable and understand him in a greater way.

Jesus said there's a second reason why he used parables to teach. Not as a mirror, but as a veil. Jesus taught in parables to hide the truth from people whose hearts were stubborn and hardened toward him. For these people, the parables were not meant to be discerned. For these people, the parables were meant to be loud whispers of his divine judgment. A classic example of that kind of parable would be the wheat and the tares or the parable of the weeds. You see in there the judgment of Jesus very clearly.

Mark, chapter 12, is this second kind of parable. It's one of the most confrontational parables we see in the Gospels. For 1,000 or more years it has been a virtual battleground for a lot of complicated debate. We don't have the time here to look at all the nuances of that debate, but I would say to you that any attempt, especially by higher criticism, to dismiss the most obvious interpretation of this parable does not hold any weight. It doesn't hold up in the court of honest exegesis.

There is an interpretation for this parable, in spite of all the debate over the years, that's very obvious, pure, and reasonable for us to consider, and that's the path we're going to go down.

We're going to get into the parable, we're going to try to understand it as Jesus originally intended to be understood, and then we're going to apply it to our lives. So, with your Bibles open and ready at Mark, chapter 12, let's stand. These are the words of Jesus himself.

"And [Jesus] 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. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.

And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this Scripture: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?' 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." Let's pray.

Father in heaven, in the name of your Son, Jesus, we pray that you would bless the reading, hearing, and preaching of your Word today. I pray for those, God, in this room who are distracted by heavy hearts, people who are struggling, people who are on that long journey of healing.

I pray, God, that you would minister to their souls right now, that, through the words of our worship, our prayer, and your written Word, they would be overwhelmed with your comfort and your peace right now. God, I pray they would have a strong experience of knowing it is well because of your love and care.

God, we thank you that we were able to sit under the beautiful ministry and preaching of Billy Graham and thank you that we can look at his life and his message and rejoice. We pray for all of our middle schoolers and the leaders coming home from Winter Camp right now, God. I pray you would keep them safe on the roads. We pray, God, for our team coming home from India in these immediate hours, that you would keep them safe, healthy, and strong for the long trip home. We pray all these things in Christ's name, amen.

Well, if you've been with us, especially last Sunday, it's not difficult to see that this is a continuation of the end of Mark 11. At the end of Mark 11, Jesus is confronting the hypocrisy and refusal of the Jewish leaders to acknowledge his authority. That's how chapter 11 ended, with a full-on confrontation. Now, in chapter 12, we have a flat-out condemnation of these same leaders.

Let's walk through this parable and see what the intention is. In verse 1, we have a man who planted a vineyard. The man is God. He owns the vineyard. The vineyard stands for the nation of Israel or the people of God. We see that metaphor used all over the Old Testament, in Psalm 80, Isaiah, chapter 5, and Jeremiah, chapter 2.

In fact, Jesus even continues the symbolism by applying the idea of a vineyard to all who follow him. Do you remember? In John, chapter 15, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches, and my Father is the vinedresser or the gardener." We see this spiritual metaphor of a vineyard representing, in Scripture, the people of God.

He says, here in verse 1, that the man planted the vineyard and he put a fence around it. That was to keep out the animals. He put a tower in the vineyard. That was to guard against the thieves. There was a winepress. All of this clearly indicates the owner of the vineyard's confidence that this vineyard had everything it needed to bear good fruit.

Then, you see the tenants there at the end of verse 1. The tenants clearly are meant to represent the religious leaders of Israel to whom he's talking at this moment. He was talking to them in chapter 11 and he continues to talk to, teach, confront, and now condemn them in chapter 12.

In verse 2, you have servants of the vineyard owner. These servants he sent to the tenants stood for the Old Testament prophets of God, the prophets whom God would send to speak to his vineyard, his people Israel. When they were to speak to the people, they were to remind the people of his promises of blessing for their obedience as well as his promises of punishment for their disobedience. The fruit of the vineyard the owner wants the servants to bring back to him stands for and represents Israel's faith in God and God's people's obedience to God.

Then, in verses 3-5, we see this graphic description of the treatment and rejection of the owner's servants. You see, Israel had had a long-standing history of mistreating and even killing God's prophets. Now, in this parable, to the religious leaders this is clearly a judgment of how continual and callous their hearts were, even in Jesus' day.

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day continued in the path of their forefathers by being calloused to the servants whom God would send them. The biggest example up to this very point was John the Baptist, whom we talked a lot about at the beginning of the gospel.

Then, in verse 6 in the parable, it really turns on its head. The vineyard owner sends his beloved son, the ultimate servant of the vineyard owner. Clearly, this is a veiled messianic self-reference. Jesus clearly inserts himself right into his very own parable.

In verses 7 and 8, the parable tells us that the tenants kill the son and toss him out like a piece of rubbish. Up until this moment of this exact teaching moment, for six months Jesus has been telling his followers that the rulers of Jerusalem were going to kill him. Now, he tells the rulers themselves, "You're going to kill the Son."

In verse 9, the rejection of the son is the last straw that brings the owner's wrath to the tenants. Now, in verse 9, it says the owner of the vineyard will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. This could be a prophecy that Jesus is giving them of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which would be 40 years right after this moment.

Jerusalem would be destroyed in AD 70, but for sure, Jesus is talking about the destruction of the leaders of Israel by God's divine wrath. They will no longer be God's tenants of his vineyard. That is the simplest and most obvious of interpretations of this parable as we can read it.

Then, he says the vineyard is going to be given to others. This is where a lot of the debate really peaks. This could be a reference to the gospel going out the Gentiles and grafting them into the new Israel, where every tongue and every nation will now be God's people and part of God's vineyard, or maybe Jesus is referring to the apostles, pastors, and elders who would preach the Word and care for the church. We're not sure what Jesus is referring to here exactly when he says the vineyard will be given to others.

Then, in verses 10 and 11, Jesus ends the parable by quoting an Old Testament verse with which they would be very familiar. They were actually proud of it. It was Psalm 118. In its original context, in Psalm 118, Israel is referred to as God's cornerstone nation to bring about his plan of redemption to all nations. In that psalm, we see that Israel was rejected by all the neighboring pagan nations of the world. As they were building their own fame and might, they continually rejected Israel and Israel's God.

Yet now, in this parable, Jesus is taking that psalm and he's applying it to himself. The stone that is being rejected in the moment is Jesus himself. He is God's cornerstone of the nation of Israel, from which he would build his kingdom through the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. The ones who were rejected in the Old Testament as God's cornerstone nation are now rejecting the very cornerstone of God, their own Messiah, Jesus Christ.

What does that all mean to you and me? How do we take this home today? How do we take it with us tomorrow? We'll start out with some of the more obvious applications and then we'll get it to be a little more personal as we move along.

1. *God's shepherds are seriously accountable to God.* This first application really affects me the most. I mean, you can't get around that in this parable. God expects the good fruit of faithfulness and obedience of his people and he doesn't let the leaders of his people off the hook. In James, chapter 3, verse 1, we're warned that there's a much stricter judgment reserved for those who shepherd God's people.

So, the question is, what is it exactly that God holds his shepherds, the tenants of his vineyard, accountable for? Let me just give you some. There are more than these, but I think this is a good example of what God holds your pastors and elders, the leaders and shepherds of God's people, accountable for.

A. *Guiding God's people.* Just like the fence in the vineyard in the parable, the shepherds are to patiently provide God's loving direction that's set forth in his Word. God speaks to his people through his Word, and so God's shepherds and servants are to deliver God's Word accurately, faithfully, and boldly. God's Word keeps us safely on the straight and narrow path of his will, of his purpose, for our lives. So, like a giant fence around the vineyard of God, God's shepherds are to keep that fence standing tall and strong because it's that fence of his Word that keeps us in his will and on his path.

I have a great verse that talks about this first point. In 2 Timothy, chapter 4, this is what it says to God's shepherds: **"...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."**

So, for this first point of accountability, God's shepherds are to continually provide godly direction with the fences of God's Word to keep God's people from wandering off and going astray. We're to provide that Word to you heresy-free, opinion-free, and apology-free.

B. *Guarding God's people.* Like the tower in the vineyard in the parable, the shepherds are to provide God's loving protection against spiritual thieves wanting to steal the sheep away from the one true God.

In Titus, chapter 1, we read, **"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine..."** There's the direction we just talked about. **"...and also to rebuke those who contradict it."** There's the protection we're talking about right now. God's leaders, the shepherds of his people, the tenants of his vineyard, are to make sure no spiritual thieves come in and break down the fences and lead the people astray.

C. *Growing God's people.* Just like the winepress in the parable, the shepherds are to produce a godly reflection of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Timothy, chapter 4, to the shepherds, God says, **"...set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."**

In other words, God holds his shepherds accountable for the fruit of godly conduct and the fruit of love and righteousness. We are to grow the vineyard, God's people, in the areas of faithfulness and godliness. There is a serious accountability in that application I cannot overlook, and neither should you, for your shepherds and leaders.

2. *Continual disobedience makes the heart more calloused.* The parable says the owner sent many of his servants in verse 5. We don't know how many or how long, over what period of time, but the lesson and the warning is clear. The longer a person disobeys God the more stubborn the heart becomes toward God. The more opportunities and invitations a person has to repent and believe in Jesus and yet continually rejects those invitations the harder and more hateful the heart becomes toward Jesus.

In the case that this may be applying to some of you sitting here right now, if you're repeatedly rejecting God's authority in your life, if you continually live in disobedience and sin, you are, in essence, pouring spiritual hardener into your heart. You are, in essence, sealing your heart off from God's grace and sealing your heart into his coming wrath, judgment, and condemnation.

See, every time God sends one of his servants to you... His servants can come to you in the form of a friend asking you and telling you about Jesus. It could come in the form of a book someone gives to you and says, "You have to read this. It explains Jesus." God's servant also comes in the form of Bibles your mom, your grandma, your grandpa, and your friend have given you.

God's servants have come to you in the form of sermons you've heard in church or things you've seen on TV that all point to God inviting you. God's servant comes to you in the form of a cross every time you see one. I would say be careful you don't see yourself in this parable and ignore the hardness that's going on in your heart.

3. *God has done everything necessary to save us from ourselves.* See, God's love would not let him give up on us. He would send his Son. The cross of Jesus is the ultimate invitation of God for us to surrender to his love. That's what John 3:16 is about. "For God so loved the world [you and me] that he sent his only begotten Son that whosoever will believe in him shall not perish but will have everlasting life."

Ray Ortlund, one of my more recent favorite authors I've been discovering, does the church a great service in his little book called *The Gospel*. Just commenting on John 3:16, I'll paraphrase some of the things he says. I think they're a blessing, the way he says it. He says something like, "God didn't send another religion." Aren't we grateful for that? Like we need another religion in the world, right? "No, he took on flesh and blood and became one of us. He lived the worthy life we could never live and he died the guilty death that none of us want to die."

The good news of the gospel is that in his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus fulfills every demand of God in our place. He atoned for our guilt by living a perfectly holy, obedient life. He satisfied the wrath of God against us by suffering and dying on a cross in our place, and he conquered our death by his resurrection. He did all that as a substitute in our place.

See, what matters most about us to God is not the sins we've committed or not committed. Let me get that straight for you. What matters most to God is not necessarily the sins you have committed or the sins you haven't committed. What matters most to God about you and me is our trust and openness to Jesus verses our self-trust and defensiveness toward Jesus.

In verses 10 and 11, Jesus is Israel's rejected stone, but he's God's cornerstone. It says there in verse 11, "**...this was the Lord's doing...**" He sent Jesus, knowing full well that his own people would reject him. So, I love how Ray Ortlund summarizes. Just listen. He says something like, "This is the massive love of God: The Son leaving nothing of our need unfulfilled, opening up the mighty heart of God to the unworthy. But the only Son is our only entry point back to God, the only one given by God, the only one acceptable to God. There is no other. There's only one

door to God, and that door is Jesus, and everything we need to walk through that door is in Jesus."

That sounds a lot like Acts, chapter 4, verse 12, doesn't it? "**And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**" Wow! God has simplified everything for everyone. We don't have to be good enough. We don't have to have all the answers. God has all the answers. He provided everything we need in Jesus, his Son.

When you look at a cross, I want you to be reminded that that cross displays the most awesome exhibition of God's hatred for sin. When you look at a cross, the first thing that should come to mind is how much God must have hated sin, but also, when you look at a cross, what I want us to see at the same time is the undeniable proof of his willingness to forgive our sin, to pardon our sin. Full and free forgiveness is written on every drop of his Son's blood. Wow! He has done everything necessary to save us from ourselves.

4. *Rejecting Jesus has furious and final consequences.* Like the tenants in the parable, in our unregenerate state, before we were born again, some of us had convinced ourselves that we could get whatever we wanted, however we wanted it, if we could just keep God out of our lives. We were convinced that really, if we could just ignore God and this whole Jesus thing long enough and eliminate him out of our lives, we would end up with what we've always wanted. Some of us were even so arrogant to believe we could do that without consequences.

That's not the case for all of us, but for a lot of us, it was. Yet what we see from the words of Jesus here is that the rejection of Jesus leaves God no choice. The cross of Jesus is where all of God's perfect justice and love simultaneously intersect. See, God's holiness and justice demand that our sins be punished. You see, if God didn't punish sin, he would not be a holy God or a just God, and the Bible says that in the end, we will all stand before God, our Maker, completely uncovered.

We're going to be unable to hide the treason of our sin, the greatest treason, the rejection of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul describes that moment in graphic horror in Scripture. I just want you to listen to how Paul describes the moment of judgment upon those who reject the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

"The Lord Jesus, in that moment, will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of his might forever." (2 Thessalonians, chapter 1)

Is it any wonder that the same apostle who wrote those words writes these? "**Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?**" See, whether we want to believe it or not, what Jesus has revealed in this parable is that God himself will not ignore the rejection of his Son's death.

The saddest part of this whole parable is in verse 12. It's after he's done teaching it. It says, **"...they were seeking to arrest him..."** The second he stopped talking they were looking for a way to kill him. It was like there was absolutely no conviction. Their hearts had gotten to that point that we just talked about, where the very one who's talking to them is telling them what they're about to do is going to end in their destruction, and they don't even hear it.

Look what it says. They feared the people. They cared more about what the people would think. I would submit to you that that is a more common reason for not believing in Jesus than a whole bunch of this other stuff we hear about this. A lot of people don't reject Jesus because he's a bad person, he's done something wrong, or he's not holy or righteous, or any of that. They reject him because they absolutely fear what others are going to think of them.

They're going to stand in the judgment, and none of those people whose opinion they have worried about in this lifetime is going to matter or help them one iota in the judgment. **"...they perceived that he had told the parable against them."** Isn't that interesting? They were thinking, "I think he's talking about us!" But their hearts were hardened, and it says, **"...they left him and went away."** Many, I'm sure, went to their eternal death upon their death.

I want to say to those of you who are here who have never bowed the knee to Jesus, who have never submitted your heart and your life to him, that today you have another opportunity to believe. You have another chance today to repent and believe. He has sent his servant, his Word, and this preacher to remind you again of how much he loves you and that he has done everything for your forgiveness and salvation forever.

I would call you today to repent and to believe the gospel of Jesus. It is your greatest and your only door to God. I would say don't leave this room until you have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I know that with you there is no such thing as an accident. There's no such thing as a coincidence. You knew a million years ago whom you would have sitting in this room right now. God, you have made it clear that there is no mercy for those who will stand before you in the judgment without the blood of Jesus Christ covering over their sin.

Yet God, you have also made it clear that you have made it possible again, that you refuse to give up on us. I pray for those and any in this room... I pray that today would be the last day of their past and the first day of their eternal salvation. I pray, God, that today they would listen to your Word and believe it. In Jesus' name, amen.

There are some people standing up here who are very prepared, ready, and willing to help any of you in this room take that step. If you're ready to repent and believe, they want to give you something to go home with today. Listen. This is for you. This isn't for the person next to you. It's for you. This is God's invitation. He has done everything you need; now receive his Son as your Savior.

As we go, those of you who need to come and do business, just come up. Wait for one of these people if there's someone talking to them. They want to give you something to go home with and help you take that step. I hope you will. Bring your Bibles next Sunday. We'll be back here again. See you then.