

God Sent His Son and We Killed Him

Mark 12:1-12

Introduction: 1) In the Holy Scriptures there are a number of biblical truths that we need to keep together so that we do not run the risk of distorting them, of understanding them out of balance. For example we best understand the reality and the beauty of heaven against the backdrop of the horrors of hell. We see mercy more wonderfully when contrasted with the severity of judgment. Grace will be better loved and appreciated when we see it in contrast with wrath.

2) The importance of keeping certain things together is especially important when it comes to two central moments in the life of Jesus Christ: His incarnation and His crucifixion.

- Christmas must always be celebrated in light of Easter.
- Bethlehem must never be viewed in separation from Jerusalem.
- The cradle in a stable providing a resting place for a little baby must always be viewed in tandem with a bloody man hanging on a cross at Calvary.

3) In our text, an extended and developed parable, often referred to as “the parable of the wicked tenants,” Jesus tells a story that entails judgment and mercy, grace and wrath, Christmas and Easter. He tells us a story that’s meaning can scarcely be doubted: “God sent His Son and we killed Him.” There was a murder in the vineyard and we know who committed the crime.

4) Jesus has recently entered Jerusalem to the shouts and applause of the people (11:1-11). A couple of days later He enraged the religious leaders by cleansing the temple (11:15-19). The tension and conflicted grew worse as He embarrassed them in a public showdown over the source of John the Baptist’s ministry and His own (11:27-33).

5) Now He will inflame their hatred to an even greater degree with a parable that will expose their evil hearts and intended goal revealed all the way back in 3:6, “to destroy Him.” (cf. 11:18; 14:1-2).

6) The story that Jesus tells is really an allegorical parable, and the identity of the central characters is not in question. It is drawn from a very familiar Old Testament passage: Isaiah 5:1-7.

The Man who plants the vineyard → God the Father.

The vineyard → Israel (cf. Isaiah 5:1-7).

The tenants → The religious leaders of Israel.

The servants → Faithful prophets.

The beloved Son → Jesus.

This parable also appears in the other synoptic (Matt 21:33-36; Luke 20:9-19).

Transition: With this context and background set, what spiritual truths arise from this parable for our spiritual reflection and nourishment, truths that demand our careful attention.

I. God is incredibly patient, even when sinners resist His gracious wooing. 12:1-5

- * Once more Jesus speaks to the people, and in particular, the religious leaders (cf. 11:27) in parables, what has often been described as “an earthly story or analogy with a heavenly meaning.” This is the only major parable outside of Mark 4 in this gospel. It is a type of “judgment parable,” or “prophetic parable,” and it allows us to see the Christ event from God’s perspective. It resembles the clever trap Nathan set for King David in 2 Samuel 12:1-15. Like David, the religious leaders will snare themselves.

- * The parable is a story of Israel's relationship to the Son of God. It is a reminder of the incredible patience of a God who, as 2 Peter 3:9 teaches, "Is patient toward [us], not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."
- * The story itself would have been familiar to those listening reflecting the world of wealthy absentee landlords and tenant farmers. It described the kind of thing that happened all the time in Galilee in that day. It is the turn at the end that will entrap the religious leaders and infuriate them to a fever pitch. Why? Because they would readily have identified with the landowners until Jesus turned the tables and identified them as the wicked tenants! Verse 12 makes it clear they understood His meaning. Like David they knew their guilt. Unlike David, they did not repent.

Transition: What, in particular, is highlighted about our God in verses 1-5?

1) God has given us many gifts. 12:1

- Psalm 73:1 says, "Truly God is good to Israel."
- God planted a nation called Israel as a special and elect vineyard. He cared for her and provided for her, and put in place leaders to protect her, keep her safe, and enable her to prosper and bear fruit for His glory and her good. Yet as Isaiah 5:2 informs us, the Old Testament source of this parable, "he [God] looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit" (*NIV*).
- In spite of the fact He planted her, put in place protective fencing and a tower, she did not produce good things, but bad. He went to great expense on behalf of the vineyard and had every right to expect a bountiful harvest. However, the vineyard failed in its assignment.

2) God has sent us many faithful messengers. 12:2-5

- The landowner had made an agreement with the tenant farmers whom he believed could be trusted and would be reliable caretakers of his vineyard. They would work the vineyards, benefit from the produce, and pay a percentage of the harvest to him as rent.
- In order for a land owner to retain his legal rights to his property, he had to receive produce from his tenants. However, as C. H. Dodd said, the tenants “pay their rent in blows” (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 93).
- Verses 2-3: harvest time has arrived and so the landowner sends a servant to collect what rightly belongs to him. They 1) beat him and 2) sent him away empty handed.
- Verse 4: he sends another, a 2nd servant, and he is treated even worse. They 1) struck him on the head and 2) treated him “shamefully.” The word means to insult or dishonor. Eugene Peterson with a colorful paraphrase says, “That one they tarred and feathered.” (*The Message*).
- Verse 5: The gracious and longsuffering landowner sends yet a 3rd servant and the response of the tenants escalates: they kill him. And on and on it would go with many others. Some they would beat and some they killed.
- These faithful servants represent the faithful prophets sent by the Lord time and time again (cf. Jer. 7:25-26; 25:4-7). Hebrews 1:1 reminds us that “Long ago, at

many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.”

Hebrews 11:35-38 sadly records the reception many of them received:

“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

- Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jer. 20:2).
- - Isaiah, tradition says, was the prophet sawn in two.
- - A prophet names Zechariah, was stoned to death in the court of the temple (2 Chron. 24:21).
- - Neh. 9:26 says, “Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you...”
- - And in recent days, John the Baptist had been beheaded.
- Jesus, Himself, will address this tragic reality in Matt 23 and His “Woes Sermon” against the Scribes and Pharisees. Note in particular vs. 34-35, “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.”

Transition: God's gracious patience was extended repeatedly, but rebellious sinners like you and me resisted His wooing. We took His good things and turned them into god things thereby making them bad things. We took what was His and in rebellion said it was ours!

II. **When the Father sent His Son, He sent the One He loves and we should honor. 12:6-8**

- * The parable takes a remarkable turn in v. 6. It continues the theme of the amazing patience and longsuffering of God with humanity. It also testifies to the amazing grace of a God who would send His only Son to reconcile rebellious sinners who, as Romans 3:9-20 teaches us:
 - 1) Do not seek God.
 - 2) Do nothing good before God.
 - 3) Have tongues that deceive and are full of curses and bitterness.
 - 4) Whose feet are swift to shed blood.
 - 5) The way of peace they do not know.
 - 6) And, who have no fear of God before their eyes.
- * I understand Jesus is talking at this moment to the religious leaders of Israel and yet, I must confess, I see all of us in this crowd as well. As Kent Hughes says, "Every Christian is in view." (vol. 2, 95).
 - 1) The Father sent His Son as an act of grace. 12:6
 - The landowner now becomes a father. In one final attempt (lit. "last of all", unique to Mark) to receive from the tenants what is rightly his, he sends on a mission (*apostellin*) "a beloved son." Certainly he says, "They will respect my son."

- The phrase “beloved Son” (*huiion agapeton*), is filled with biblical and theological significance. It was idiomatic for “an only son.” A. T. Robertson was most certainly correct when he says, “Jesus evidently had in mind the language of the Father to him at his baptism (Mk 1:11)” [*Word Pictures*, vol. 1, 365]. We hear this term of endearment also in Mk 9:7 at His transfiguration.
- It recalls the language of Genesis 22:2 when God says to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love ...”
- It draws us to that most wonderful verse in the Bible, John 3:16.
- It even echoes that wonderful messianic prophecy we love to quote at Christmas: Isaiah 9:6-7, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” [Take note of this last line. We will hear its echo at the end of our text.]
- The son’s mission was in many ways the same as the servants who went ahead of him and yet, James Edwards notes several significant differences between the servants and the Son that should not go unnoticed.

<u>Servants</u>	<u>Son</u>
Many	Unique
Hirelings	Heir
Forerunners	The last One

- If verses 1-5 convey the hope of God for His people, v. 6 conveys the lovingkindness (*hesed*) of God for His people.

Transition: The Father sent his Son as an act of grace.

2) Sinners murdered His Son in an act of insanity. 12:7-8

- In the parable, seeing the son may have led the tenants to wrongly conclude that the landowner was dead. They foolishly, and with evil intent, surmised that if they assassinate the son, then they could claim his property as their own. It would have been a bold act on their part, but it is certainly a plausible scenario. The phrase “Come, let us kill him, is the same used by Joseph’s brothers in Gen. 37:20.
- I appreciate David Garland’s insight: “Covetousness makes humans want what they should not have. It makes them think that this desire should be fulfilled at all cost. Other persons become things to exploit, and our desires become our gods....Do humans think that by erasing God from their lives they can take control of their earthly and eternal destinies? Apparently so...[Here] is the utter foolishness of sinful rebellion against God” (*Mark*, NIVAC, 456 and 459).
- Three days later, we would see all of this unfold in what the religious leaders of Israel did to God’s Son. Throwing him out may allude to his crucifixion outside the city walls of holy Jerusalem. They would murder Him and not even give him a decent and honorable burial, an incredible offense in that day or any day. In God sending His Son we are reminded of Christmas, the Incarnation, the gift of

God and His amazing love. In the killing of the Son we are reminded of Easter, the crucifixion, the grace of God and His incredible sacrifice. John 1:11 rings in our ears, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

- Charles Spurgeon said, “If you reject Him, He answers you with tears. If you wound Him, He bleeds out cleansing, if you kill Him, he dies to redeem. If you bury Him, He rises again to bring us resurrection. Jesus is love manifest.”
- But, he then adds, “Let us see for a minute who this Messenger is. *He is one greatly beloved of His Father* and in Himself *He is of surpassing excellence*. The Lord Jesus Christ is so inconceivably glorious that I tremble at any attempt to describe His Glory. Assuredly, He is very God of very God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and yet He deigned to take upon Himself a human form! He was born an infant into our weakness and He lived as a carpenter to share our toil... He took upon Himself the form of a Servant and yet in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily! He is the Prince of the kings of the earth and yet He took a towel and washed His disciples’ feet... Because of His Godhead you must not dare to harden your hearts. He is God’s Well-Beloved and if you are wise, He will be yours. Do not turn your back on Him whom all the angels worship! Beware, lest you reject One whom God loves so well, for He will take it as an insult to Himself—He that despises the Anointed of God has blasphemed God Himself! You put your finger into the very eye of God when you slight His Son! In grieving the Christ you vex the very heart of God—therefore do not do it. I beseech you, then, by the love which God bears to His Son, to listen to this matchless Messenger of mercy who would persuade you to repent (#1951).

- To reject the Son is to reject the One who sent Him. It is nothing less than an act of spiritual insanity.

III. Even though people believe they can escape it, God's judgment will certainly come.

12:9-12

- Romans 11:22 says, "Note then the kindness and the severity of God." To slight and reject the Son is to invite the "wrath of the Lamb" into your life. Again the great London preacher Charles Spurgeon says it so well, "Remember, once more, that if you do not hear the well-beloved Son of God, you have refused your last hope. *He is God's ultimatum.* Nothing remains when Christ is refused. No one else can be sent. Heaven, itself, contains no further messenger. If Christ is rejected, hope is rejected!... I should like every person here that is unconverted to remember that there is no other Gospel and no more Sacrifice for sin. I have heard talk of "a larger hope" than the Gospel sets before us—it is a fable, with nothing in Scripture to warrant it! Rejecting Christ, you have rejected all—you have shut against yourself the one door of hope! Christ, who knows better than all pretenders, declares that "He that believes not shall be damned." There remains nothing but damnation for those who believe not in Jesus!"
 - The one rejected and murdered will be vindicated, and how we now respond to this radical change of events could not be more important.
- 1) Our response to the Son will be decisive for our eternal destiny. 12:9
- In our text Jesus provides the answer to his parable, one the religious leaders would be forced to concede as well. In the process they condemned themselves and they

condemn us as well. The owner (*kurios*) will come and destroy those who refuse his son!

- Historically God judged the religious leaders and the nation for their rejection of His Son. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation of Israel was brought to ruins. Today that same judgment falls on all who have “trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace!” (Heb 10:29).
- It is indeed “a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

2) The rejection of the Son results in a glorious reversal that is marvelous. 12:10-12

- Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22-23 changing the metaphor from a vineyard to a building. Interestingly, it is the same Psalm shouted by the people at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem in 11:9-10 (cf. Ps. 118:25-26). It is clearly Messianic. He knows who He is and why He has come! The parable and His commentary make this abundantly clear!
- The stone rejected would become a well-known symbol for the Messiah and an explanation for why the Jewish people rejected Jesus (Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6-8).

They rejected the stone and cast it aside as worthless and of no value. God, however, in a marvelous reversal, takes what man rejects and makes it the cornerstone (lit. “the head of the corner”), the key stone, the most important stone to the whole building structure that would insure its stability and symmetry. It refers to the capstone of a column, keystone in an arch, or foundation cornerstone.

- Jesus' rejection, humiliation and crucifixion is an apparent tragedy, but God will use it all for a greater purpose that can only be described as 1) "the Lord's doing" (*HCSB*, "This came from the Lord") and 2) something "marvelous [wonderful] in our eyes."
- Sadly the religious leaders are blind to all of this. Knowing he told the parable against them, they were "conniving to seize Him." With premeditated malice, they move ahead with their sinister plan to murder the Son sent by God. What Herod the Great failed to do to the infant boy born in Bethlehem to Joseph and Mary, these religious elites will accomplish outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Like the demons who recognize Jesus as a threat to their very existence (1:24), they refuse to submit to His Lordship and plot in vain how they might destroy Him. Verse 12 is a disappointing summation of their response. [Read] As Paul would later explain, all of this is foolishness and a stumbling block to them. For us, however, it is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:18-25).
- Calvin was right: "whatever may be the contrivances of men, God has at the same time declared, that in setting up the kingdom of Christ, His power will be victorious (vol. XVII, 34).
- This parable is so clear: God will win even when, for a fleeting moment, it seems He has lost. An empty tomb proves it is so. Redemptive history reaches a glorious climatic victory in this beloved Son, this rejected stone.

Conclusion: *In the Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis, Queen Lucy says to Lord Digory, "In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world" (p. 161, *Chronicles of Narnia*, Collector's Edition). To this we might add, "In our world there was also a

cross and hanging on it was someone greater and more wonderful than our whole world.” It was the Lord’s doing. And it is marvelous in our eyes!