

Ridiculous Patience: Parable of the Vineyard

Jesus' Last Days (Mark): Part 7

Mark 12:1-12 (Mt.21:33-46, Lk.20:9-19) 11/14/2020

Why does Jesus tell such a farfetched story? The answer will help you in times when you're afraid God is losing patience with you.

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Mark 12:1 He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ⁶ "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷ "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Haven't you read this scripture: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; ¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" ¹² Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Introduction: Listen or Go Deaf

Most people wish God would speak to them more—more often, more clearly, more intimately—they want to hear from God more than they do. Most people wish that, and most people, when God does speak, don't listen. They don't listen, and then they wonder why God doesn't speak to them more.

Has anyone close to you ever complained that you don't listen to them? What would happen if God said to you, "From now on, every time you fail to listen to them, you'll permanently lose 10% of your hearing"? So if it happens 10 times, you're completely deaf. How carefully would you listen?

Thankfully, God hasn't said that when it comes to listening to your spouse. But he has said something close to that when it comes to listening to him. This was in ch.4, where Jesus said, "The reason I speak in parables is to punish the people who aren't listening by making them go deaf." Parables hide the truth from all but the most intensive listeners.¹

Deafening Parables

So when we get to verse 1 of ch.12 and it says, "**He then began to speak to them in parables,**" you should hear dark, ominous music playing in the background. Jesus is bringing judgment on these people by reverting to parables. Why? What just happened? After Jesus ransacked the Temple, a contingent of Temple authorities came and demanded an explanation. "By what authority are you doing these things Jesus?" A fair question. And Jesus was happy to answer it, but only if it was an honest question.

So in order to establish that, he asks them something. Jesus said, "I'll tell you by what authority I'm doing it if you're answer one thing. And the only catch is this: *you have to give me a straight answer.*" Jesus begins and ends his question by saying, "**Answer me.**" Normally if someone asks a question you assume he wants you to answer, but here Jesus states it—twice.

Mark 11:29 ... Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John's baptism-- was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me!"

Why does he keep saying that? Because he wants a straight answer. "You can say yes, you can say no—whatever you think is true—the one thing I ask is just give me an honest, straight answer."

So what do they do? They try to do an impromptu focus group to figure out which answer will sound best. They can't think of a popular answer, so they say, "We don't know." The only thing Jesus required was a straight answer, but they won't give it.

¹ Back in ch.4, when Jesus first started speaking in parables, he said, "Here's why I'm using parables ..." and he quoted Isaiah 6. Isaiah 6 is where God called Isaiah and said, "Tell these people they are going to go deaf and blind."

Isaiah 6:9 He said, "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."

You're not listening to me, therefore I'm going to make you even blinder and deafer than you already are." That was God's judgment on the people in Isaiah 6, and Jesus said, "When I speak in parables, *that's* what I'm doing. I'm punishing the people who aren't eager to listen by putting the truth out of their reach altogether. Parables hide the truth from people with bad hearts because they aren't interested enough in the truth to do the work it takes to figure out the parable.

So why did God punish the people with spiritual blindness and deafness in Isaiah's time? What sin had they committed to deserve the Isaiah 6 punishment?

Their sin is described in the previous chapter, Isaiah 5. And that sin is described with a parable of a vineyard.

Isaiah 5:1 ... My loved one had a vineyard¹ on a fertile hillside. 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.

So God planted a vineyard and went way out of his way, spared no expense to do whatever possible to make that vineyard fruitful. But the vineyard ended up producing only bad fruit. So the owner said, "That's it—I'm going to destroy this vineyard."

And he does that by blinding and deafening the people even more than they already were." So now when the leaders of Israel show that they are refusing to listen to God's prophet, John the Baptist, Jesus says, "Let me tell you a story about a man who planted a vineyard ..." And he begins the parable exactly the same way as the Isaiah 5 one begins. That was a very well known parable, so everyone would immediately think of Isaiah 5 when Jesus started this way. It would be like if someone today said, "Let me tell you a story about a good Samaritan who sees a guy in a ditch ..." We would immediately think, "Oh, I know where this is going."

That's why the next verse says, "**He then began to speak to them in parables.**" In other words, they just lost the privilege of getting straight talk from Jesus. Jesus says, "You don't want to listen to God? Fine. I won't talk to you anymore in a way you can understand." From now on, he's going to hide the truth in parables, so people like us can get it, but people who aren't willing to work hard at it get nothing.

Now, before we look at the parable, let me ask you this—when they asked about Jesus' authority, why did Jesus bring up John the Baptist instead of some other proof—like his miracles? "When I heal the sick and feed the multitudes and raise the dead—is that from heaven or from men?" To me, that would seem like the more powerful proof; why focus on John?

Because when God speaks, he speaks loudest and clearest through his prophets. The #1 measure of whether you are listening to God is how intently you listen to his prophets. And the way you listen to the prophets determines whether or not God will keep speaking to you. It would be one thing for them to ignore the miracles, but to ignore John, the greatest of the prophets—that's the most egregious failure to listen to God. So here come the parables.

Ridiculous Rebellion and Perplexing Patience

Wait—what? #1—The Tenants

1 ... "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower.

Jesus starts out this parable almost exactly like the parable in Isaiah 5, where the vineyard is Israel, and God ends up destroying the vineyard because of their failure to produce fruit—the fruit of righteousness and justice.² Now Jesus starts a parable that begins just like Isaiah 5, everyone thinks, "Oh, I know where this is going," but then Jesus throws a curveball.

1 ... Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey.

He says that and everyone says, "Wait—what? There were no renters in the original parable—it was all about the vineyard." Anytime you're studying a parable and you get to a part that makes you say, "Wait, what?" you've found one of the main points of the parable. The focus of this parable is not the vineyard, but the renters.

The owner sets up what amount to a sharecropper arrangement with these farmers. This was very common—the sharecroppers have full control of the vineyard, full responsibility for it, and they are required to pay rent in the form of a percentage of the crop. The rich people owned land and made investments like this, and poor peasants worked the farms and vineyards. And when the time came (normally about four years after planting)³ he sent a servant to collect.⁴

Absurdly Harsh Treatment of the Servants

5 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

² The parable in Isaiah 5 was very well-known and frequently quoted. Everyone knew it. And it starts with a guy planning a vineyard, building a watchtower and putting in the winepress. It would be like if I said, "Let me tell you a story about a good Samaritan who came across a guy in a ditch ..." Immediately you would say, "Oh, I know exactly where this is going." In fact, the details about the watchtower and planting and the wall—none of that plays any role in the rest of the parable. The only purpose of all that is to make sure everyone's thinking Isaiah 5.

³ NIGTC

⁴ The word "harvest" isn't in the Greek. Literally, it's just "in season." When the season or time arrived, he sent his servant.

There's our second "Wait, what?" moment. Usually when a renter can't pay the rent, they're all apologetic about it. "So sorry—please be patient, we'll get you the money." But to just say, "We're not paying!" and then they beat up the rent collector? That's pretty extreme—and bizarre.

Jewish Officials Can Relate

Jesus is speaking to the rich, ruling elite in Israel, so these are men who would naturally relate to the landowner. And they would be irritated by tenants who refused to pay their rent.

So this servant comes back emptyhanded, holding his ribs, covered in bruises. What would a normal owner do in a situation like that? I'm sure those big shots Jesus is talking to have a few ideas. I'm guessing it would involve either putting those tenants in jail or in the hospital—one of the two. But how does the owner in the story respond?

Farfetched Story

4 Then he sent another servant to them

Okay, there's our "Wait, what?" moment #3. He doesn't send law enforcement, he doesn't go and punish them—not even a strongly worded letter from his lawyer? He just gives them another chance? Nice guy.

So what's going to happen? Maybe they'll be moved by his patience and mercy, and they will pay what they owe. Nope.

4 ... they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully.

This guy comes back with teeth missing, black eyes, concussion. And it's not enough to torture him—they have to humiliate him. They shamed him somehow—maybe shaved his beard off or sent him back without any pants or who knows what.

This is such, in-your-face defiance. And it's honestly getting to be kind of a far-fetched story. It's hard to imagine any sharecropper tenants would behave this way. And it's even harder to imagine the landowner would respond the way he does. Look at what he does after they beat and humiliate the second servant.

5 He sent still another

Now honestly, as Joe Biden would say, "Come on." Who would do that? Now you start to wonder about the landowner's sanity. What does he think is going to happen when he sends a third servant? What does happen?

5 ... and that one they killed.

Whoa. That's quite the escalation. They just went from risking losing their livelihood to committing a capital crime--murder. So now what?

5 He sent many others

One thing I've learned about writing fiction is that for a story to work, it has to be believable. If it gets too farfetched, you lose the reader. One famous novelist said the difference between real life and fiction is fiction has to make sense. Jesus has pushed this story outside the bounds of believability. Even after they tortured two servants and murdered the last one, he keeps sending servants?

5 He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

He keeps on sending them and they keep on beating and killing them. The owner keeps that up until he runs out of servants.

6 ... "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved.

That's all he has left—just one son.⁵ That's all he's got left in his household. And at this point you're saying, "Tell me he isn't going to send his only son, the only hope of his name surviving, his only heir—the son he dearly loves. Surely he won't send him to these murderers, right?"

6 ... He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

That's optimistic, to put it mildly. He takes a calculated risk thinking not even these rebellious tenants would be so stupid as to mistreat the owner's son. Is he right? Will they respect the son?

7 "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him.'

They're going to murder the son. Why? Are they suicidal? He gives their reasoning in v.7.

7 "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'

What? You think you're going to end up with the inheritance? After all you've done, including murdering the owner's only son, you think you're going to somehow end up getting the vineyard? That might be the most ridiculous moment of this whole ridiculous story. No one would be so stupid as to think, "Oh, if I just murder the man's son, then he'll give me the inheritance" I mean, has it ever crossed your mind that if you just killed someone in your boss's family maybe you could get a promotion? No sane person would think that way.

Interpretation of the Parable

Rejection of the Prophets

So why did Jesus make up this ridiculous parable? Because it's a true story. In this case, reality is stranger than fiction. It's the story of the history of Israel. The parable depicts exactly what happened when God kept sending his servants to his people Israel.

Jeremiah 7:25 From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. 26 But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.'

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you

God's Perplexing Patience

Jesus takes the story of what everyone knows happened in Israel's history and puts it into the form of a story that illustrates two things. First, it shows the rebellion of God's people with such depraved insanity that it surpasses human comprehension. Second, it shows that the patience of God defies human imagination, even to the point where, from our perspective, it looks like he's out of his mind. And yet the only difference between the owner in the story and God is that God is even more patient than the guy in the story. That's the purpose of the parable—to bring out in stark relief the extremes of human rebellion and the incomprehensible patience of God.

This isn't the only place in the Bible where God's patience is depicted in ways that boggle the human mind. How about the book of Hosea, where God tells his prophet to marry a prostitute and keep taking her back after she goes off after other men to illustrate what God is like?

How patient has God been with you? Nevermind his thousands of years of patience with Israel, let's just narrow it down to our own lives. Pick any sin you struggle with—temper, worry, anxiety, gossip, lust,

⁵ And the word translated **whom he loved** is used often in Scripture to refer to an only son, which is how it seems to be used here.

lack of self-control, fear of man, laziness, apathy. How patient has God been? How many times have you vowed to change, but it only lasted a week? Or ten minutes? How many times have you known for a fact in your mind that something was wrong, and you just did it anyway?

I don't ask that to get you to beat yourself up over sins you've repented of. There's no value in that. My purpose is to call to your mind the non-believable, unrealistic, farfetched patience of God—patience that would never make it past a fiction editor. Even when the most patient people you know lost patience with you, God stayed with you.

The greatest disappointment of my life is discovering how slow the sanctification process turned out to be. I remember when I went off to college thinking, *Man, after 4 years in Bible college, I'm going to be a different person. My family will hardly recognize me. My pride will be gone, and I'll be so loving and meek and humble and gracious.* Now here I am 30 years later still not to the point where I expected to be by age 21. And for all these 30 years God has just been patiently waiting, watching from heaven, day after day, 30 years, waiting for me to make these miniscule steps of progress.

If you have a concept of God as being irritable, easily angered, always disappointed in you; nothing could be farther from what God's Word tells us about God. He is slow to anger, abounding in love, it takes forever for him to become irritated, but his mercy is on a hair trigger.

Man's Insane Rebellion

But in the face of that impossible to believe patience stands the insanity of human rebellion. In v.8 the parable jumps from the past to the future.

Rejection of Jesus

8 So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

They hadn't killed God's Son yet, but they were about to. They've been planning it, watching for an opportunity.

Why did they kill Jesus? Because they wanted his inheritance. They wanted what rightfully belonged to Jesus (control of his kingdom), so they tried to throw him out of the vineyard. And people haven't stopped trying to do that. In the story it was the people entrusted with leadership in the kingdom of God, but part of that kingdom is each individual life. People are forever trying to throw Jesus out so they can govern their own lives. They want to be autonomous—like CHAZ. Remember CHAZ—the Capital Hill Autonomous Zone in Seattle where rioters took over several blocks and claimed to be an autonomous country? “We're autonomous—our own independent country. Oh, but would you mind bringing us some porta potties?” They were autonomous, except for the fact that they used the United States' electricity, water, sewer, food chain, sanitation, and everything else. They even borrowed barriers from the United States to set up their border wall. They were autonomous like your kids are autonomous when they set up a tent in your backyard. People who try to throw God out of their lives are just like the founding fathers of CHAZ. They declare independence from God and then turn around and breathe his air, walk around on his planet, and depend on what he provides every moment for their existence.

Contempt for God's Patience

As the parable unfolds you just find yourself asking, “Why on earth are these tenants behaving that way?” And, of course, the purpose of the parable is for that question to rebound back on ourselves. Why do we persist in rebellion against God? Why do we commit the same sins over and over and over?

In some cases it's because we mistake God's patience for apathy. These tenants seemed to think, “Well, the owner hasn't done anything so far; he's not going to do anything. Maybe he doesn't care.” They're banking on his apathy. They think he's a harmless absentee landlord who is easily betrayed and cheated with no real consequence. There's a word for that—contempt.

Romans 2:4 Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath.

Raise your hand if God is being patient with you. What would it mean for you to show contempt for that patience? When God is being patient with you, one of two things is happening. Either you are being drawn closer and closer to repentance, or his wrath is being stored up more and more. When we sin, and we don't seem to suffer any big consequence, and that makes us lose our fear of God because it seems like nothing is happening. But something is happening. Steeper and steeper consequences are being piled up.

Running South to Get North

And it's insanity. In the story, the owner says, "They will respect my son." You think of the movies where the son of the cartel boss is considered untouchable. You mess with him and you've got all out war. Does it work? Do they show him at least a little more respect because he's the son? No, in fact, they treat him the worst of all.

8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

They not only murder him, but they give him the worst indignity—they just throw his body over the wall to be eaten by buzzards. And it's not just that they do that in spite of the fact that he's the son—they treat him worse because he's the son.

7 "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'

They want the son's inheritance. They want to own the vineyard.

The reason the Jewish authorities put Jesus to death was because of envy. They wanted what belonged to Jesus. They make the very common error of mistaking stewardship for ownership. Jesus was the rightful ruler of the people of God, and that's the position they wanted. And in their insanity, they thought they could get it by killing Jesus. As if God would say, "Oh, I was going to give my kingdom to the Messiah, but since you killed him, I'll just give it to you instead."

That's the insanity of sin. Time after time we think, "I want that," and so we do things that guarantee we won't get it. We want happiness so we do things that will guarantee misery (like run after drunkenness or illicit sex or dishonesty or overeating). We want honor in the eyes of men, so we do dishonorable things, like lie or cheat or boast. We want to be free from the pangs of conscience, so we bury our sin and hide our guilt and refuse to confess and repent. We want to get somewhere so we run the opposite direction thinking that will get us there. Every time you want to go north, sin will tell you, "Run south and you'll get there." And we fall for it time after time.

Sin never works—ever. It never gives you more good than bad. It tastes good in the mouth but it's always gravel in the stomach.

The Son

Unique

So the owner is God, the vineyard is the people,⁶ the tenants are the leaders of Israel, and the servants are the prophets. That would be easy enough for anyone listening to the parable. But what about

⁶ Matthew tells us it's the kingdom of God (Mt.21:43).

the son? The context here is that Jesus is telling this parable in response to them rejecting him, so it's fairly clear that Jesus is the son in the parable.

If you ever run into someone who tries to tell you Jesus didn't consider himself to be anything special, take them to this parable, where Jesus portrays all the greatest prophets of history as servants, but portrays himself as God's only son.

That phrase, **son whom he loved**, has appeared twice before in the gospel of Mark. Both times it was God the Father speaking from heaven about Jesus—once at his baptism and the other at the transfiguration.⁷ Jesus is identifying himself as the unique son of God, far above all the prophets.

The Final Messenger

And in the story, the son is the last one that gets sent before the owner comes. Jesus is mercifully telling them, "I'm your last chance. If you don't listen to me, the next visitor you're going to get will be the owner of the vineyard, and he'll be coming to destroy you." God used to send prophet after prophet—those days are over.

Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Jesus is God's last Word. If you reject him, what happens?

The Punishment

9 "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

He Will Kill Them

That's kind of a startling detail in the story. Strong language. Jesus isn't pulling punches at this point. Basically he just say, "God's going to kill you."⁸ If you think the God of wrath is an OT idea, think again.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 He will punish those who do ... not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

And we have every right and responsibility to go to any human being in the world and demand that they respect the Son of God. We never have to be shy about that. The most obvious fact in the world—if the God sends his Son, you'd better respect him.

Give it to Others

At first reading, this story Jesus tells seems to have a pretty dark ending. The servants get killed, the son gets killed, then the tenants are all killed. By the end of the story, everyone is dead. But that's not actually how it ends. It ends with an incredibly provocative statement about the vineyard being given to others.

9 "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

⁷ See 1:11, 9:7.

⁸ He uses an especially strong word as well. Instead of the normal word for "kill" (ἀποκτείνω or [κατα]κρίνω.) Jesus uses a term that's normally translated *to destroy* (ἀπολέσει).

Jesus has been dropping hints all through Mark about a new Israel, with a new 12 tribes headed by the 12 Apostles.

Matthew 21:43 Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (*ethne*) who will produce its fruit.

And by the time Paul wrote Colossians about 30 years later, that was already being fulfilled.

Colossians 1:6 ... All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.

Stewardship

We are here to bear fruit for God. We don't want to make the same mistake as the chief priests and elders and start thinking that we are owners instead of tenants.⁹ Your gifts, abilities, talents, resources, money, time—it's all a stewardship, and God expects a return on his investment—a harvest of spiritual fruit (which is righteousness—righteousness in your life and in other people's lives). So we need to ask ourselves, "Am I producing a harvest of righteousness? Or am I like a squatter on God's vineyard, enjoying his resources without producing any harvest?"

Listening

And as long as we're asking ourselves questions, we can ask this one: am I listening to the prophets? None of us participated in throwing Jeremiah into a cistern or sawing Isaiah in half. But aren't we effectively doing the same thing if we let Isaiah and Jeremiah sit and gather dust on the shelf while we try to use our own human wisdom to navigate life?

The Stone

There's one more loose end we need to deal with. At the end of Jesus' story, the son is dead. All the other times Jesus predicted his death, he mentioned the resurrection. It's actually no different here, but instead of including that part in the parable, Jesus says it another way. He tells the parable to show the staggering patience of God and the insane rebellion and guilt of Israel's leaders. But if you want the rest of the story about what happens with Jesus, he gives that with a quotation of Scripture.

Haven't You Read?

10 Haven't you read this scripture: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

That's a quotation from psalm 118. When Jesus says, "Haven't you read," it implies that if they had so much as read that psalm, they should know not to make the mistake they are making.¹⁰ But how? How

⁹ It's interesting that Jesus would depict the situation between God and men like a sharecropper scenario, where the owner of the vineyard leaves the vineyard in the hands of the renters and goes away to another country. There is a very real sense in which that's what God has done with us. He has left some thing in our hands to such a degree that things will go well or fall apart, in large measure, based on what we do or don't do. The balance of understanding how the sovereignty of God and his control over all things fits in with human free will and responsibility is always a mystery. And it's easy to err by overemphasizing one side and underemphasizing the other. This parable keeps us from underemphasizing the human responsibility part. If you slip into a kind of determinism that says, "If I fail to do my job, God will step in and see to it that it gets done another way," passages like this will push against that.

¹⁰ This is a quotation from Psalm 118—the same psalm the people were singing at his triumphal entry a few days earlier. They were singing psalm 118:26 **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.** And here Jesus says, "Have you ever read the rest of that psalm? Back up just 4 verses. **Psalm 118:22 The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; 23 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.** Of course, they had read it. They had memorized it and sang it routinely. Psalm 118 was one of the songs of ascent that was sung on the approach to Jerusalem for Passover. The point is they didn't read

would reading Psalm 118 make them know not to reject Jesus? Does the mere fact that Jesus was rejected prove that he's the Messiah? No. They had rejected plenty of other men claiming to be the Messiah, and they were right to reject those men. 99% of the stones the builders reject deserve to be rejected.

Here's what they should have understood from reading psalm 118—when man makes a judgment about someone, and God makes a different judgment, God wins.¹¹ Again, the question of whether Jesus has God's approval is already established. John the Baptist settled that. So even if all the builders—the whole Sanhedrin, the biggest of the bigshots in Israel, the Bible experts—even if they all reject him, God's judgment is the one that stands. Humans are capable of opposition, but not obstruction.

That's an important message, because most people think they are the Supreme Court in the case against Jesus. Whatever they think about Jesus is reality. Not so. You can't just make up your own ideas about Jesus. You might remember that old song, "I fought the law and the law won." That's almost inevitable when you fight the law; it's 100% inevitable when you disagree with God. You try to toss him aside—God makes him the most important stone in the whole building.

Don't Overtrust the Builders

That's why we need to be careful about putting too much faith in the builders. This is a *very* important principle. Listen to the prophets of God—read your Bible. And if the authorities say something that you can't see in there, don't accept it. It doesn't matter if it's your pastor, the world's leading theologian, 25 different commentaries, John MacArthur, John Piper, denominational officials, or everyone in the whole, wide world. If you can't see it in Scripture, don't accept it. Now, if reliable authorities all agree that you're wrong, you want to be as humble as you can possibly be and search tenaciously for where you might have made an error. And if you respect those authorities, then beg them to show you where you're making your mistake. Throw all pride out the window and listen to them. Try your hardest to see what they are showing you. But until you can actually see it in the Bible, don't accept it.

God does not allow you to abdicate your responsibility to listen to his prophets yourself. You can't just pass that responsibility on to your pastor or favorite preacher or anyone else.

I have a friend who was an evangelical all his life who recently left evangelicalism and joined the Eastern Orthodox Church. He did that because he was so overwhelmed with all the denominations and differing interpretation of the Bible, and didn't know who was right or who to believe. And in the Eastern Orthodox, you don't have to figure any of that out. Whatever the authorities say is the way it is, period. It makes it so much easier—you don't have to bother interpreting Scripture. Just go with whatever they say.

It's interesting—he takes the same approach with politics. I've tried to debate with him, and I'll lay out a whole argument, and he'll just say, "But the NY Times says ..." or "Dr. Fauci says ..."—he'll always appeal to some authority, and no matter how strong my argument might be, he won't consider it because I don't have the credentials of those authorities. Some people err in being rebellious against authority, but other people err in following blindly. Both are deadly errors. It's not a big deal in politics, but it's not an option God offers us in religion, because sometimes the builders all get it wrong. And if you go along with them, you find that the very thing you rejected ends up being the capstone, and stone that comes and crushes those who rejected it.

The Lord Has Done This

11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

it with eyes to understand its implication.

¹¹ Commentators differ on what the original statement in Ps.118 referred to. Some say Abraham or David, others the nation of Israel. It seems to me most likely that it refers to the king in the psalm, who was in desperate straits with the enemy's foot on his neck, but then God sprang into action and gave him glorious victory.

Jesus became the supreme ruler of the universe with just one vote being cast. Donald Trump is the most powerful man in the free world, and yet he's totally dependent upon millions of people voting for him. If he doesn't get enough support in the election, he loses all that power and there's nothing he can do about it. King Jesus didn't have to campaign. In fact, the builders all voted him out, but he still ended up on top, thanks to God the Father who always casts the deciding vote.

Marvelous in Our Eyes

11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Allowing his son to be rejected and killed, raising him from the dead and exalting him—revealing him only to the lowly and not to the proud—it's marvelous in our eyes. It was marvelous and delightful in Jesus' eyes. It filled him with joy.

Luke 10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Their Response: Arrest Jesus

12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them.

And at some point in the story it dawns on them, *Wait a second—these idiot tenants are supposed to be us!* So what do they do?

12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him

Jesus paints this horrific picture of the evil tenants, and the Jewish leaders immediately begin to fulfill the exact behavior Jesus just prophesied in the parable! "When Jesus told a story about horrible tenants who say, 'Come, let's kill him,' that was directed at us! How dare he! Come, let's kill him!"

This is such a perfect example of what it means to see and not see, and to hear and not hear. They see and hear enough to know the parable is against them, but they don't see and hear enough to get it. Because if they got it, they would be crushed with guilt over their insane rebellion, they would be terrified at how much punishment they deserved, and they would fall on their knees and beg the owner of the vineyard for mercy. Instead they want to kill Jesus.

Conclusion: Who Do You Want to Be?

One final thought. In this parable, Jesus indicts these men for killing the prophets. Did they kill prophets? No. They worked hard to honor the prophets. They even decorated the graves of the great prophets.

Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

They say, "We're not them. And Jesus says, "Yes you are. If you have the same heart as them, then in God's eyes, he lumps you together with them."

I find that fascinating because it means in one very real sense, you can be anyone in history you want to be. What if God said, "I've decided to streamline Judgment Day. So instead of judging each person individually, I'm just going to do it in groups. So all you have to do is pick a name from the Bible. (Someone besides Jesus.) Whoever you pick, you'll get the same rewards and punishments as that person.

Not only that, but from now on I will think and feel about you the same way I think and feel about whichever person you picked.” If you could attach yourself to anyone in the Bible, who would it be?

You can be lumped in with the great heroes of the faith in God’s sight, or you can be lumped in with some of the worst people in history even though you don’t do the things they did. It all depends on the attitudes of your heart and whether you listen when God speaks through his prophets.

Summary

Jesus reverts to parables because they weren’t listening. The parable highlights the extremes of their rebellion and God’s patience. The kingdom will be given to others to steward. When man’s assessment is different from God’s, God wins. Don’t over-trust the builders.

Matthew 21:33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

Matthew 21: ⁴²Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? ⁴³"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (*ethne*) who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." ⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Mark 12:1-12 ¹He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ²At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ⁶"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷"But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Mark 12:1-10 Haven't you read this scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; ¹¹the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

¹²Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Luke 20:9 He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. ¹⁰At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. ¹²He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. ¹³"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ¹⁵So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

Luke 20:16 When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" ¹⁷Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"? ¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." ¹⁹The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.