

EVICTION NOTICE

Mark 12:1-12

In 2013 we became landlords and have been blessed with a really great tenant. She is a sister in the Lord, she pays on time and takes care of the property inside and out. When I read the following stories I appreciated our tenant all the more!

One landlord writes: “I had a tenant pour concrete down the drains. There was no repair possible. It was literally more cost-effective to demolish, salvage what we could and rebuild. It even got into the sewer system and we had to settle with the city for damaging their infrastructure. Biggest nightmare ever.”

Another person shared: “My father was a landlord. He went to collect rent that was way overdue one night and the tenants were really drunk and beat him up, hit him in the head with a 2 by 4 with a nail in it. He lost his eye.”

Finally, one landlord’s brother wrote: “My brother rented out one of his three houses. Well, we heard through the grape vine that the police kicked in their door to arrest them over the weekend, but they weren’t home. After contacting the sheriff’s department, he learned that said tenants had skipped the state fleeing prosecution. *When we went to clean it out, we found they had gutted it.* They’d knocked out interior walls on each floor.... They’d pulled all the copper wiring out of the walls.... They had extension cords running up the stairs from the several outlets they’d wired into the breaker box. The ceiling fans were gone. The bathroom sink was gone. The copper water lines were gone. They even pulled down the kitchen cabinets that’d been newly installed before renting to them and according to one of the guys across the street... they’d sold the kitchen cabinets three months after moving in.”

I’ve heard that no matter how hard you try and vet prospective tenants, you may still end up having problems.

Even God had tenant problems!

He sent Jesus to deal with them.

Following the cleansing of the Temple (11:15-19), the chief priests, scribes and elders went on the attack against Jesus. Earlier, Jesus foretold that these three groups would reject Him (8:31). Mark recorded several of their attempts to trap and discredit Jesus (11:27-12:28) all of which failed.

In the midst, Mark recorded a parable Jesus told against His enemies. The setting of the parable was a vineyard; a well known Old Testament image for Israel and her relation to God (e.g. Psalm 80:8–18; Isa. 27:2–6; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 19:10–14; Hosea 10:1). Jesus may have had Isaiah 5:1-7 in mind when He composed His parable.

Isaiah 5:1–7 (ESV)

¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?

When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

The Lord was looking for a loving relationship with His people. Instead, they produced the wild grapes of bloodshed and abuse. God disciplines those He loves; He disciplined Israel and Judah at the hands of their enemies. But God never gives up on those He loves. God was incredibly, extravagantly patient with His chosen people and their leaders sending prophet after prophet to woo them back into a loving relationship with Himself. But there comes a time and place when the patience of God gives way to His discipline and that day had come as Jesus' parable revealed.

We will first read the passage in its entirety and then think through it piece by piece.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS (MARK 12:1-12)

Mark 12:1–12 (ESV)

¹ 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.

As we think through the parable, let's remember that a parable is a teaching story; an extended metaphor. Parables communicate one main idea. Though preachers do it all the time, we should not search for meaning in each and every detail of the parable. Remember, a parable is a story and stories have settings and characters and action. All of these together convey the one main idea of the parable. As we think through this parable we're asking ourselves, "What is the main idea Jesus is teaching through this parable?"

THE VINEYARD (12:1)

Mark 12:1 (ESV)

¹ 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.

According to ancient papyri much of the upper Jordan valley and the Galilee were held in large estates leased to tenant farmers by absentee landowners. Jesus' audience would have been familiar with the setting of this parable.

The landowner represents God the Father. The vineyard represents the nation of Israel. The tenants represent the religious leaders of Israel; the chief priests, scribes and elders (12:12).

THE LANDOWNER AND TENANTS (12:2-5)

Mark 12:2-5 (ESV)

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.

If you were the landowner, how many servants would you have sent after the first one came back bloodied and empty handed?

In composing the parable this way, what was Jesus emphasizing about the landowner? His extravagant (irresponsible ?) patience!

In contrast what was He emphasizing about the tenants? Their ruthless defiance.

We can assume some, if not all, would have connected the abused servants with the Old Testament prophets sent by God. Many of those prophets were mistreated and some were murdered (e.g. the prophet Uriah - Jer. 26:20-23; the prophet Zechariah - 2 Chron. 24:20-22 and Jewish tradition that the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah and Amos were all martyred). John the Baptist was the most recent in that long line of ill-treated prophets.

The landowner manifested extravagant patience while his tenants showed ruthless defiance. This was an accurate portrayal of God's relationship down through history with Israel and even with pagan peoples.

It is often said by critics that the God of the Old Testament cannot be the God of the New because the God of the Old is angry and vengeful. But critics are ignorant of the extravagant patience God has shown toward wicked mankind.

In the years preceding the Flood the "...wickedness of man was great in the earth, and ...every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Yet God stayed His hand for 120 years and sent Noah to be a "herald of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). But the people rejected God's Word and perished.

How many years did God give the inhabitants of Canaan to repent before He sent the twelve tribes of Israel to take possession of the land? 400 years (Gen. 15:12-16)! In the early years they had the godly witness of both Abraham and Melchizedek. During the last forty years they had access to the tribes of Israel camped to the south. They had the hard evidence of the Red Sea crossing and the fact that God had miraculously sustained 3 million people with livestock in the desert for 40 years! They could have sent emissaries to learn about the God of the Israelites. If they had responded in faith to the evidence they had like Rahab, God would have shown them mercy and compassion as He did to Rahab and her household (Josh. 2). Instead, they hardened their hearts and suffered the consequences.

And in the case of Israel, God sent prophet after prophet to call His people back into covenant faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant. He did this for decades and centuries, but the rulers and religious leaders persecuted and murdered His servants, the prophets.

Finally, the landowner, God, sent His Son...

THE BELOVED SON (12:6-8)

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.

In Jesus' parable the landowner makes one final and ultimate attempt with his tenants; he sends his son in hopes the tenants will show him respect. But the tenants misinterpret the son's presence to mean that the landowner has died. Killing the son will leave the vineyard ownerless and obtainable. Far from showing respect, they not only murder him, but show him outrageous disdain by dumping his corpse outside the vineyard, denying him a proper burial.

As the parable reaches its climax, we realize Jesus is yet again predicting His murder and He clearly places the responsibility for His death on the chief priests, scribes and elders (8:31).

THE END OF THE TENANTS (12:9-12)

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.

With the murder of his son, the landowner’s patience comes to an end and he finally destroys those tenants and gives the vineyards to others.

So what is the main idea of this parable? What is it that Jesus was saying to the chief priests, scribes and elders through this parable? I believe Jesus was declaring to His enemies that:

“In rejecting and murdering Me you will exhaust the patience of God and bring upon yourselves His judgment.”

The idea here is that with the murder of Messiah, the Son of God, they will cross a threshold from which there is no return. Their rejection and murder will bring down upon them the certain judgment of God; they will be removed from spiritual leadership over Israel. I believe this was fulfilled in the 70 A.D. destruction of the Temple and Levitical Judaism.

Jesus didn’t specify to whom the “vineyard” would be given. I believe Jesus most probably had in mind the Apostles and elders who will become the spiritual leaders of the new people of God, the Church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles. His quote about the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone is speaking about a new building being built (Ps. 118:22).

The stone is Jesus.

The ones who rejected the stone are the chief priests, scribes and elders.

The building in which Jesus is the cornerstone is the Church (Eph. 2:20). So in the end, the rejection of Messiah by the Jewish religious leaders will be divinely reversed when Jesus is made the cornerstone of God’s new temple, the Church.

There is a sobering truth to ponder from this passage; there is a limit to God’s patience. When the 120 years were up, the waters came and destroyed all mankind save eight.

When the 400 years were up, the cities of Canaan fell to the Israelites.

In 722 B.C. God’s patience with the northern kingdom of Israel came to end; she received no more prophets. She fell to the swords of the Assyrian army.

God’s patience with the southern kingdom of Judah extended another 120 years; He sent more prophets. But stubborn defiance exhausted His patience and brought down God’s punishment through the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

God’s patience is something for which to be grateful, not something to be tested. How many “prophets” will God have to send to you before you will trust Him and give your life to Him? How many proofs will God have to give you before you’ll finally believe His

Word? How many ways must God show you how much He loves you before you will love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? How many people must God put in your path before you will see that He is reaching out to you?

God loves you more than you and I can possibly comprehend. Jesus' determined journey to the cross was for the purpose of saving us from an eternity separated from God. God wants a relationship with you now and for all eternity. Humble yourself, acknowledge your sin, accept the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf and receive the Holy Spirit into your life. God is waiting for you.