

The Parable of The Tenants  
Mark 11:27-12:12  
Key Verse: 12:1b

“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.”

In chapters 11-13 of Mark's gospel, Jesus teaches that he is Lord. Jesus is Lord! In a previous passage, the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple, passing judgment on corrupted religious leaders, and restoring the temple's purpose as a house of prayer for all nations. In today's passage, the religious leaders reacted strongly by questioning Jesus' authority. Wise Jesus evaded their trap and told them the best historical poem in all literature, the parable of the tenants. Jesus reminds them that God is the sovereign Ruler of history, and people are stewards of God's world. Jesus also tells from Scripture that he is the Lord, because God raised him from the dead. Is this Jesus your Lord? Is he the Lord of your family, fellowship, finances, and future? Are you giving him the fruit that he deserves? Let's think about this as we study today, and let's accept Jesus as Lord deeply in our hearts.

I. Jesus' authority comes from God (27-33).

Look at verses 27-28. “They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’” Of course, Jesus knew that the religious leaders were upset that he had cleansed the temple. His act had exposed their profane treatment of God's holy dwelling; this called into question their credibility. So they became quite upset, feeling that their authority over people had been shaken, and that this would impact them socially and economically. As could be expected, they began to fight back. Yet Jesus was not daunted at all. The next morning, Jesus entered the temple and walked around freely in his Father's house. Jesus lived before God and served God in the temple. As we see in Mark chapters 12-13, Jesus taught the truth of God to his disciples and to all other people from early morning to late night. Jesus restored the true function of the temple as the place to meet the holy God through his word, and to pray for all nations.

While Jesus was serving God in the temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came up to him. Jesus had already predicted that these men would condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles (Mk 8:31). Here, the “chief priests” are primarily the high priest and his family members. According to the historian Josephus, from the time of Roman occupation, the high priest was appointed by Rome. The high priest's authority to rule was based on the military power of Rome and was upheld through political compromise. The high priest would also have received superior instruction in the law of Moses. He and his family were “in charge” of the temple. To their way of looking at things, Jesus had no authority to cleanse the temple because he had no official position in their religious hierarchy and no formal religious training.

How did Jesus respond? Look at verses 29-30. “Jesus replied, ‘I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!’” Jesus paid no attention to the threats of the religious leaders. Jesus did not feel compelled to justify his action according to their concocted standard. Instead, Jesus appealed directly to the spiritual authority that comes from God. This authority had been revealed through the ministry of John the Baptist. John's coming was an obvious fulfillment of Scripture according to Isaiah; everyone in Israel knew this. Moreover, John's ministry had been blessed by God abundantly. This John the Baptist had testified about Jesus that he is the Christ. Therefore, Jesus pressed the religious leaders to acknowledge what God had made plain through John's ministry.

We learn here that Jesus' authority was spiritual and it came from God. Jesus' authority was rooted in his relationship with God, and was verified by God's own testimony through his servant and his word. Jesus did not depend on human authority or any human institution. Jesus' authority came from God. As an extension of this truth, we gospel workers need only Jesus' authority to do the work of God. After his death and resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt 28:18-19). This was all the authority they needed to make disciples of all nations. God's authority was at work in the apostles' ministry and the proof was the manifest power of the Holy Spirit and the changed lives of people. This is what matters to God and it is most important to us as well. When Jesus sends us in his authority, this is all we need to do the work of God. Most of us UBF leaders are laymen. We don't have seminary degrees. But

we have received the gospel of Jesus by grace, and the command to make disciples of all nations. As we obey this command, God works through the Holy Spirit to change people's lives. Shepherd Paul and Marsha Teodori are a lay shepherd family. Paul majored in music and Marsha is a nurse. Nevertheless, the power of the Holy Spirit has been at work in the the Loop Ministry through them. The evidence of this is the fruit of changed lives among the people they serve, such as Christian, Whitney, Kara, Christine, Matt and Kevin.

This is true in other churches as well. For example, in southwestern Chicago there is the Lawndale Community Christian Church. This church began when Wayne Gordon, a white Christian man, went to Farragut High School, in a largely African American neighborhood, as a teacher and football coach in the mid 1970's. He started a voluntary prayer meeting among his players; about fifteen young men met regularly. They experienced the power of God in concrete ways. Their lives began to change. One day they came all together to their coach and said, "Coach we want you to be our pastor." Pastor Gordon states that in this way, he was ordained to be a pastor. It was on the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit through his Bible teaching and prayer; nothing more. God has blessed Pastor Gordon's ministry over the past 32 years. Now the church has over a thousand members and greatly impacts the whole Lawndale community. When Jesus sends us out in his name, in obedience to his command, we have full authority to do the work of God.

The religious leaders had a hard time answering Jesus. If they said, "From heaven," they should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and repent all their sins against him over the past three years. On the other hand, if they said, "From men," they would lose credibility with ordinary people. They discussed this among themselves to try to find a solution. They were not concerned about the truth but only about maintaining their positions. In fact, they were sheer hypocrites. When Jesus exposed them, they did not repent; they said, "We don't know." They were like people who see the clear scientific evidence that sexual immorality is directly connected to some disease, yet say, "Well, we really don't know." They were like people who know in their hearts that God exists and that he is the Sovereign Ruler of all things, but they say, "Well, we really don't know." This escape may work temporarily, but one day we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Then the truth will be revealed as it is. No one will say, "We don't know." Jesus totally disarmed the religious leaders and did not have to answer them. However, Jesus fully answered their question by means of a parable.

## II. The parable of the tenants (12:1-12).

Verse 1a says, "He then began to speak to them in parables." Jesus did not confront them directly; Jesus began to speak in parables. In this way, Jesus could avoid inciting their emotions before they had a chance to hear the full message he wanted to give to them. In fact, Jesus would summarize God's history and share the full gospel with them too. Jesus had great wisdom as well as great courage.

Look at verse 1b. "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." Jesus' main point in this part is to explain the basis of the relationship between God and his chosen people Israel (9; 5:1-7), and more broadly between God and all mankind (Gen 2). God is the owner of the vineyard. He is the one who planted it and provided all things for it to flourish and produce fruit. His people are tenant farmers. They have the great privilege of working in God's vineyard. The owner does not stand over them, pressing them to do this and that. Rather, the owner goes away and gives them the freedom to manage the vineyard. They are free to use all their wisdom and creativity to make the vineyard fruitful. This is nothing but the grace of God. Therefore, we must be thankful to God. Sometimes life seems to be one suffering after another and the continuation of hard labor. Nevertheless, we must thank God always for his basic grace. For every breath we take, we must thank God. For a glass of cold and fresh water, we must thank God. For the privilege of living in the United States, we must thank God. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Look at verses 2-3. "At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed." When the gracious owner sent his servant to collect fruit, the tenants reacted irrationally. They arrested him and charged him with trespassing and violating their human rights. They put him in jail in a corner of the vineyard. Then they began to beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Probably they kicked him in the buttocks as he limped out of the vineyard.

How had the tenants become like this? To be frank, their act was an act of grave disrespect toward the owner; indeed, it was an act of rebellion. They might have made many excuses by claiming that the servant was too rude, or that it was too early for the owner to expect fruit. But at the bottom of their hearts, they wanted to keep the fruit for themselves. They did not want to give any of the fruit back to the owner. Man's basic duty is to give some of the fruit back to God. God's first word to man was, "Be fruitful and increase in number." This is not because God needs the fruit, but because God wants us to have a right relationship with him. Giving some of the fruit back to God is the practical way of showing respect to God and thanking God, who is the Creator of all things. When Noah came out of the ark, after surviving the flood, the first thing he did was to offer a sacrifice to God from the clean animals he had with him. This pleased God and God was happy to pour out a covenant blessing on Noah. When we give some of the fruit to God, God is pleased to bless us all the more. On the other hand, when people do not give fruit to God, they become unthankful, disrespectful, and offensive to God. They even become irrational and violent toward God's servants.

How did the owner respond? We might expect him to destroy them at once. Martin Luther said that if he were God he would destroy the world once a day because of man's sin. Yet look at verses 4-5. "Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed." The owner sent more servants to the tenants. We can notice two things here.

First, there is the great patience of the owner. Whenever one of his servants was mistreated, the owner felt the pain and humiliation in his own heart. When his servants were killed, he grieved deeply for them. Yet, he continued to send them one by one, team by team, until he had sent them all. God is patient with sinners. God forebears our sins and mistakes and persists in reaching out to us through his word and his servants. God does this in the hope that we may someday repent. 2 Peter 3:9b says, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." How should we respond to God's patience? We should thank God and repent humbly (Ro 2:4).

Second, the tenants are getting worse and worse. They misunderstood the owner's patience as weakness. This made them all the more bold to express their rebellion. They began to treat the servants shamefully. To our shock, they ended up as murderers. We learn here that sin spreads progressively in a person or community until it brings forth death (Jam 1:15).

Look at verse 6. This teaches us the heart of the owner. It says, "He had one left to send, a son whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" The owner was willing to send his son, whom he loved, to the tenants. This tells us that love motivated him in patient endurance and sacrifice. The owner was not just a landlord to the tenants. The owner loved the tenants. He loved them enough to risk his son's life to restore his relationship with them. And what did he want from them? He wanted their respect. What God really wants from man is to respect him as God. This is really amazing. The Almighty Creator God who made all things wants us to respect him from our hearts. Of course, God will still be God without our respect. But it is amazing to see that he really wants us to respect him in an intimate love relationship. As for us, we are made in the image of God. To be true human beings we must respect God as God and honor God from our hearts. Then we can be healthy and happy and enjoy God's world in joy and peace. The relationship of love and respect characterizes marriage in God. The Bible tells us that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives are to respect their husbands as they respect the Lord. What God wanted was a deep love relationship with the tenants; not a legalistic contract relationship.

Here we must deeply acknowledge and accept the love of God for us. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God loves us so much that he sacrifice his lovely, holy, perfect Son, Jesus Christ for us. When we simply accept this love in our hearts, God forgives all our sins and plants the love of God in us. We can live forever in the love of God and grow to the full measure in the image of God as his precious children. We can live for his glorious mission and have absolute meaning of life. We can be a blessing to others. Let's simply accept the love of God in Jesus Christ by faith.

How did the tenants respond? Look at verses 7-8. "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard." The tenants did not recognize the owner's patience and love. They were spiritually blind and lived in an illusion that if they killed the son they would gain the inheritance. They were under Satan's deception. When men do not thank

God and respect God as God, Satan comes into their hearts. Finally they become the enemies of God. They killed the Son of God. Thus they procured God's judgment. Although God's patience is great, there will come a day of reckoning. It is inevitable.

Look at verse 9. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Contrary to the tenants' illusion, the owner did not give them the inheritance. Rather, he came and killed them all and gave the vineyard to others. God's judgment is sure. God never stops being God. Historically, in A.D. 70, the Roman General Titus invaded Jerusalem. In the slaughter that followed, more than one million Jewish people were killed. Another 100,000 were dragged into slavery. Jerusalem was burned to the ground and the temple was completely destroyed. This was the end of the Jewish nation as a geographic entity for nearly 2,000 years. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the wind of the Holy Spirit blew into the Christian church. As Peter declares, God made the Christian church a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1Pe 2:9). The blessings and privileges promised to Abraham have come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Gal 3:14). But we Christians must take warning from Israel's history. God has given us these privileges that we might give him fruit. This is why we pray constantly to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Not only would God's judgment prevail, but Jesus would rise again. Look at verses 10-11. "Haven't you read this scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus and killed him. They treated him like a useless stone to be rejected in making their building. However, God took rejected Jesus and made him the capstone, the crowning glory of the building. God did this when he raised Jesus from the dead and made him the apex of his redemptive history. In Jesus, God's purpose to make a kingdom of priests and a holy nation was fulfilled. In Jesus, God's world salvation purpose was fulfilled. Jesus is the glory of Israel.

Verse 11 says, "The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes." God bore the sin of mankind with patience and love for many centuries. Finally God sent Jesus to die and rise again as Savior and Lord. Through Jesus God's reign is restored in his creation. To those who believe in him Jesus is the rock of salvation. To those who do not, he is the rock that makes them fall. God had made Jesus King of kings and the Lord of lords.

In this passage we have learned of God's grace, longsuffering patience and love for mankind. Jesus came as the best expression of God's love. Let's accept this Jesus as Savior and Lord from our hearts. Let's show our respect by making our lives and ministries and campuses and nation most fruitful for his glory.