

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 12:1-12

Topic

The vinedressers that lease the Lord's vineyard prove to be wicked men who violently oppose Him

Title

"The Days of Wine & Posers"

Introduction

Some years ago, Pam bought me a coffee plant. I thought it was such a great gift idea that we had a plant sent to friends in Mission Viejo CA who enjoy both coffee and gardening.

I promptly killed my plant. I figured the same fate was in store for the plant we gifted. To my surprise, about 3 years later, I received a picture of the plant thriving. It was now a tall coffee bush, and it was bearing coffee cherries.

Our friends brought us some of the crop and together we began to process them by removing the beans. I learned how to soak them, and sun-dry them. I kept our friends informed with pictures and videos texts.

I eventually roasted the beans, resulting in the best *worst* cup of coffee I'd ever had.

Although not very tasty, it had been super fun going through the process, and especially sharing it with friends.

In our Bible passage, Jesus is going to compare the spiritual leadership of the nation of Israel first to wicked vinedressers, and then to builders who lacked wisdom.

In our discussion of the details, we might miss an important point. In both of the endeavors - in the vineyard, and in the building - there was to be joy from sharing a relationship with God.

Jesus intends for us to understand that He wanted to enjoy *walking* with them in the vineyard, and *working* with them on the building; and that He intended the enjoyment to be mutual.

Enjoying Jesus in our walk, and in our work, will be our application as I organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Think Of Your Walk With Jesus As A Vineyard Where You Enjoy Cultivating Fellowship With Him, and #2 Think Of Your Work For Jesus As A Building Where You Enjoy Constructing On His Foundation.

#1 Think Of Your Walk With Jesus As A Vineyard
Where You Enjoy Cultivating Fellowship With Him

(v1-9)

The Parable of the Vineyard seems sort of stand-alone to us, but that was not the case for a first century Jewish hearer. Jesus' audience would have immediately thought of the fifth chapter of the Book of Isaiah.

Let me read to you what they had most likely memorized.

Isa 5:1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill.

Isa 5:2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.

Isa 5:3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.

Isa 5:4 What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?

Isa 5:5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

Isa 5:6 I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it."

Isa 5:7 **For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel**, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

The Lord says, plainly, that Israel is the vineyard. Trouble was, they were not walking with Him.

The prophet Jeremiah records their behaviors. He says that, among other things, they were oppressing the poor and widows, and that they were worshipping idols in the Temple.

On account of the failure of the people of Judah to walk with the Lord, God would "lay waste" the vineyard. After many warnings, He would allow them to be overrun, and taken captive, by the nation of Babylon.

As Jesus tells the Parable of the Vineyard, the leaders perceive He is speaking about them. Like the leadership during the time of Isaiah, they had failed to walk with God. Apart from genuine repentance, they, too, were headed for destruction.

Once you understand the background, the parable itself is pretty straightforward.

Mar 12:1 Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

This is the only parable Mark records, though there were others. He edited his comments to make certain points.

We do well to edit our comments about Jesus, submitting them to the Holy Spirit, so that we say just what is helpful and needed - no more, no less.

The construction of the vineyard, and the leasing of it, was all standard stuff in their culture. It establishes that the owner had done everything possible to insure the success of the endeavor.

Don't overlook that this was a mutual project. The vinedressers had a lot of work to do, for sure; but the owner had also put in lots of effort. Together they would produce, and enjoy, the fruit and it's by-products.

Mar 12:2 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers.

The owner would receive either grapes or wine, at a prearranged rate, as payment from the lessors.

Mar 12:3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

This is where the parable goes extreme. This type of response was unheard of. It was shocking, immoral, and, of course, criminal.

The vinedressers treated the servant, and by extension the owner, as if **he** were the criminal. They acted as though he were trespassing on *their* property, and as if they had the right to do him harm.

Think of that. God saw the religious leaders who were hassling Jesus as men who had expelled Him from His own nation. They were men prone to violence, e.g., oppressing the poor and the widows, and heaping religious burdens on the average person that they were not willing to help them bear.

Not everyone who claims to know the Lord is saved. There is coming a time in the future, at the end of the seven-year Tribulation, when a grip of people will think they have been serving God, but to whom Jesus will say, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..." (Matthew 25:41).

I'm not suggesting anyone here, who professes Jesus, is headed for Hell. I am suggesting that it is all too possible for us to think we are right on track, right on target, right on time, in our walk with the Lord, but it's a poor self-evaluation. What we need is a Spirit-evaluation.

The psalmist approached the Lord and said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart..." (139:23). "Search" is a word used of deep exploration, not merely a surface examination. Who am I below the surface, beneath the exterior? God knows, and can show me.

Back to our parable... If you were the owner of the vineyard, how would you respond to the return of your servant, empty-handed and beaten?

Mount up, gird your swords, *there be vinedressers to kill.*

Yet that's not what happened.

Mar 12:4 Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated.

The particulars are not that important, except to note that the violence escalated. This second servant suffered a massive head wound from stones being hurled at him.

If you were the owner of the vineyard, how would you respond to the return of your second servant, empty-handed and wounded?

To paraphrase Inigo Montoya, "Hello, I am the owner of the vineyard. You wounded my servant. Prepare to die."

Yet that isn't how the owner responded.

Mar 12:5 And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some.

Before we talk about the owner, what about these servants? Seeing what happened each and every time, they nevertheless went as they were sent, faithful to their master at any cost.

The servants in the parable represent the prophets that God sent to Israel time-and-time again. Most were mistreated, and many were killed.

Jesus would lament over Jerusalem, saying,

Luk 13:34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!** How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!

The first martyr of the church, Stephen, would say to the Jews,

Act 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And **they killed those who foretold** the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

We quoted Isaiah. He is said to have been sawn in half, lengthwise, while inside a hollowed-out log.

I know what you're thinking; "*Good thing I'm not a prophet.*"

No, but you *are* a disciple, and as His disciple, your life is not your own. Serving the Lord might cost you everything.

Annually, around the globe, according to certain sources, over 100,000 believers are martyred every year. That's about one every five minutes.

I hope those statistics are greatly inflated. Nevertheless you see that biblical Christianity is an all-in proposition. You belong to the Lord as His servant.

The owner was crazy-longsuffering, way past anything you'd expect. You might even suggest he was wrong for letting these guys get away with it.

This touches, ever so slightly, on the criticism most nonbelievers have of God, that He allows evil to not only exist, but to prosper. They think He ought to do something.

They don't understand that when He does what He's ultimately going to do, they, too, will be lost for eternity, having rejected Jesus. His crazy-longsuffering **waits for them.**

The owner of the vineyard had one last move.

Mar 12:6 Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Mar 12:7 But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'

Mar 12:8 So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

Something obvious struck me. Jesus was speaking to them about Himself, and about His mission, and about what they were going to do to Him. I wonder at the tone of His voice, and the expression on His face. I wonder if Jesus wept through these words:

- Wept for Himself, because of the sheer horror of what awaited Him at their hands, and at the hands of the Romans.

- But also wept for them - knowing what was coming afterwards, in judgment, both temporal and eternal.

Finally the owner must act in justice and not with mercy:

Mar 12:9 "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.

That is precisely what happened when Titus led the assault on Jerusalem around 70AD, destroying the Temple, resulting in the dispersing of the Jews around the world for the subsequent two thousand years.

God has made unconditional promises to Israel that they will enjoy a physical kingdom on this earth. Jesus came offering the kingdom, but when He was rejected, it was postponed. He will establish it in the future, at His Second Coming.

God is not through with His beloved vineyard. We see, since 1948, Israel a nation again - the miraculous fulfillment of many prophecies.

We also read the future history of the Jews, in books like Daniel and the Revelation. Jesus will return to Jerusalem, set up His Kingdom, with Israel as the center of the Millennial earth.

Jesus said, after the son was killed, that the owner would "give the vineyard to others." Who are the others?

The apostle Paul said, at the end of the Book of Acts,

Act 28:28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the **Gentiles**, and they will hear it!"

Gentiles have not replaced Jews as God's vineyard. Gentiles and Jews alike are being added to the church. The church is a mystery not revealed until the New Testament. The church will continue to grow until Jesus comes to resurrect the dead from this age, and to rapture living believers. Then He will pick-up His dealings with the Jews, as we read especially in the Revelation.

Don't lose, in all this, the fundamental understanding that God wanted to enjoy the fruit of His vineyard, and that He intended the enjoyment to be mutual.

The Lord portrays Himself as providing everything necessary for the success of the vinedressers. His expectation was of huge, healthy grapes, in abundance, that would continually produce a great vintage.

Wine, in the Bible, is often a symbol for joy, and especially for a shared joy.

It's so hard to try to make this point about shared joy, because of our preconceptions. As soon as I mention "wine," we mostly gravitate in our thinking to issues of whether or not a Christian can, or should, drink alcohol.

I'm more sensitive to the topic this week because I've been following an on-line forum of pastors that have exchanged over 200 posts back-and-forth in heated discussion about alcohol and the Christian.

I don't drink; I find in the Bible that drinking alcohol is a liberty, but I counsel that Christians must be uber-cautious exercising all their liberties, and that certainly applies to alcohol.

Having said that, getting back to my point - this whole vineyard metaphor says, "Enjoy walking with Jesus." Be refreshed; be joyous; cast your cares upon Him; let Him shoulder every burden.

Be not drunk with wine, but go on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Under His godly influence,

Eph 5:19 [speak] to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Eph 5:20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Eph 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Ask yourself today, "Do I enjoy walking with the Lord?" You should, in a greater way than when you get together with your very best friend over a refreshing beverage or meal.

#2 Think Of Your Work For Jesus As A Building Where You Enjoy Constructing On His Foundation

(v10-12)

I'm not a big fan of buying things that require assembly. I don't really have a mind for constructing things. Beyond my own ineptitude, I have found over the years that more-and-more stuff that needs to be put together comes with instructions that are poorly translated into English.

Since so many products come from China, the translation is being called Chinglish. Here is an example. It's for a remote controlled car:

Please parent must read:

- *Inside contain small spare parts, and please not to put the entrance inside, and the in order to prevent result in the asphyxiation.*
- *For avoid dangerous, the absoluteness can't give not the full and 3 years old child swim to play.*
- *Please not in the road to wait the dangerous place to swim to play.*
- *Unless the normal usage, refresh battery in the car, may result in damaged, become angry, leak the liquid.*

As we return to our text, Jesus tells the religious leaders that they are poor builders. In their case, the instructions were clear. But they did not recognize the cornerstone of their building, and instead cast it aside.

Mar 12:10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.

Mar 12:11 THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"

This is a direct quote from Psalm 118:22-23. It was a popular psalm around Passover. The Jews thought it mostly meant that, even though their nation was rejected by the Gentiles, one day they would be established as the cornerstone of all the nations, when their kingdom was established, and their King on His throne.

They thus thought of the psalm as Messianic, but not as applying to their own rejection of the Messiah, Who was the true cornerstone.

The analogy drew from ancient construction practices. Builders typically rejected stones until they found one perfectly straight that could serve as the cornerstone, which was critical to the symmetry and stability of the entire building.

Here He claimed to be **the** cornerstone, or we might say, the foundation, for what God wanted built. Because Jesus didn't 'fit' what the Jewish leaders were looking for, He was rejected.

"This was the Lord's doing" refers to Jesus remaining the cornerstone even though rejected. As I mentioned earlier, and as we often mention, God has a plan for Israel, and His plan is intact and on track.

"It is marvelous in our eyes." Do you marvel at God's plan for humanity? We should. He created a free being, who chose badly, plunging both creature and creation into catastrophe.

But He immediately spoke of how He would resolve the crisis, and redeem and restore all things. As we read the Bible, we see this drama of redemption and restoration unfold, culminating with the first coming of Jesus, and then His Second Coming, and then the creation of a new earth and new heavens.

In seven thousand years of human history, no one has come up with an explanation for the human condition that can rival the truth of God's revealed Word. There are religions and philosophies and psychologies and ideologies galore. Most of them are absurd at best, or the doctrines of demons at worst.

Biblical Christianity alone can claim the inner transformation of the heart of a man, and the ultimate glorification of that man, to dwell with God in eternity.

I studied philosophy and psychology at a high level. I'm not claiming to be smart, only that I was exposed to the very best men had to offer, by the very best secular professors.

I could tell, even as a nonbeliever, that the explanations of men fell far short. They could not pierce between the soul and the spirit, and get to the heart of the problem.

God can, and He did, for me, in 1979. I saw myself; I saw my sin; I met my Savior, and was born-again, born from above, born spiritually.

Mar 12:12 And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away.

Marvel superheroes have brought us adamantium and vibranium as the hardest materials known to man. **A heart in rebellion against God is the hardest substance in the universe.** God incarnate, filled with God the Holy Spirit, with a long resume of miraculous acts, speaking the living Word of God, did not penetrate these men.

Jesus is, and will be, the cornerstone of a revived Israel, after His Second Coming. Mean time, He is the cornerstone - the foundation - of the church. The apostle Paul wrote,

Eph 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Eph 2:20 having been built on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,**

The first century apostle's and prophets laid the foundation. The Christians who follow them are called upon to build upon the foundation. In First Corinthians 3:10-11 we read,

1Co 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let **each one take heed how he builds on it.**

1Co 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Rather than launch into a discussion about working *for* the Lord, the point we are emphasizing is the mutual joy we can derive from working *with* Jesus.

The work itself can be brutal; we spoke of martyrdom as a real possibility for any believer.

But even in martyrdom, we read stories of the saints experiencing an unspeakable joy as Jesus was with them.

It seems harder to have this joy in the mundane than in martyrdom. And when what we thought we were building with the Lord seems to collapse, we are anything but joyous.

Have you experienced a collapse? Has your life imploded? Are you clearing-out rubble even now?

Your Father in Heaven, and the Lord, Jesus Christ, understand what you're experiencing. Look at what they were building, for Israel. See how it was ruined by sin.

But see, too, how it is being redeemed; how all will be restored.

Don't lose the joy of the presence of God, whether your work for the Lord is prospering, or seems to be perishing.

There is joy in working together with Him, and in believing that all things will work together for the good, for those who love Him.