

Introduction

1. When we see the American flag, we see more than just a piece of colored cloth. It causes us to think about freedom, courage, devotion, sacrifice, and the ultimate sacrifice of life that some have given.
2. In the Bible when we read about a vineyard, we should think of more than just a place to grow grapes.
3. In Isa 5:1-7 God used the image of a vineyard to describe His people.
 - a. The owner of the vineyard was God Himself.
 - b. The vineyard is described as “the vines [God] delighted in,” and is identified as “the nation of Israel,” God’s chosen people (Isa 5:7).
 - c. God cared for His vineyard/people lavishly and looked expectantly to His vineyard/people to produce a crop of good grapes of justice and righteousness in their life with Him.
 - d. Unfortunately, His people produced only bad fruit of “bloodshed” and “cries of distress” (Isa 5:7).
4. In today’s passage Jesus took up this parable from Isaiah and applied it to the Jewish leaders who doubted His authority and plotted to take His life.
5. **Read Mk 12:1-12.**

A. The Parable (1-8)

1. In the context of Mark’s narrative, remember that Jesus had just been confronted by the Jewish leaders in the temple as they questioned His authority for clearing the money-changers and merchants from the temple and for His teaching there (cf, Mk 11:27-33).
 - a. Warren Wiersbe observes, “Before they had opportunity to escape, He told them a parable that revealed *where their sins were leading them*. They had already permitted John the Baptist to be killed, but soon they would ask for the crucifixion of God’s Son!” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 138)
 - b. Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders by telling them a poignant parable and then asking them two penetrating questions.
 - c. In regard to the content of the parable, James Brooks notes that “. . . absentee landlords of huge estates and landless tenant farmers were quite common in Galilee in Jesus’ day” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 189). It would have been a parable the people understood from experience.
 - d. Jesus was not the first to use parables, earthly stories with heavenly meanings, as a way to teach and confront. God spoke through His prophets in the Old Testament using parables.
2. Jesus used the vineyard motif, first used by Isaiah, as the basis of His parable in this passage.
 - a. Isaiah 5 is a prophetic poem about God’s vineyard which may have been delivered to Judah during the fall Feast of Tabernacles or perhaps at a wedding where the finest wine was served first.
 - b. What is a motif in general?
 - 1) A motif is a symbol used to remind us of something else.
 - 2) It can be an object, a place, or a statement that recalls an important idea or event.
 - 3) When certain symbols, images, or places appear in the Bible, they call to mind other events/ideas.
 - a) The exodus motif points to God’s redemption (e.g., Exodus; Babylon; Jesus’ death/resurrection).
 - b) The mountain motif points to encounters with God (Mt Sinai/Moses & Elijah, Mt Zion/David, Mt of Transfiguration/Jesus).
 - c) The vineyard motif appears many places in scripture as a teaching about Israel and her relationship with God.
 - c. So where does the vineyard motif appear in scripture?
 - 1) Vineyards are mentioned in 28 of the 39 OT books. They were very common.
 - 2) However, not every mention of a vineyard in the OT is done as a motif/symbol of Israel.
 - 3) The vineyard appears in at least three OT passages (cf., Isa 5:1-7; Jer 12:10; Ezk 19:10-14) and two NT passages (cf., Parable of the Vineyard Workers in Mt 20:1-16; Parable of the Tenants in Mk 12:1-12, Mt 21:33-46, and Lk 20:9-19).
 - d. Jesus used the vineyard motif in this passage to confront the Jewish leaders regarding their lack of belief in His authority as the Son of God.

3. What are the specific symbols from the vineyard motif used by Jesus in this parable?
 - a. Landowner is God the Father.
 - b. Vineyard is Israel, God's people.
 - c. Wall, pit, and tower are symbols of God's protection of and provision for His people.
 - d. Farmers/tenants are Israel's leaders (i.e., chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders).
 - e. Servants are God's prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist, who were rejected, mistreated, and even killed by the Jews.
 - f. The son/heir, of course, is Jesus.
4. Wiersbe provides good context for the background of this parable when he writes, "According to Leviticus 19:23-25, a farmer would not use the fruit until the fifth year In order to retain his legal rights to the property, the owner had to receive produce from the tenants, even if it was only some of the vegetables that grew between the rows of trees or vines. This explains why the tenants refused to give him anything: They wanted to claim the vineyard for themselves. It also explains why the owner continued to send agents to them; it was purely a question of authority or ownership it was in the fourth year that the beloved Son was sent. This is the year when the fruit was devoted to the Lord (Lev. 19:24), and it makes the sending of the Son even more meaningful. If the tenants could do away with the heir, they would have a clear claim to the property . . ." (Wiersbe, 138-9).
5. First, God showed His patience and grace to His people by sending many faithful servants, His prophets, to call His people back to faith and fruitful productivity.
 - a. The servants who are beaten and killed by the tenants in this parable represent these prophets.
 - b. The writer of Hebrews recorded the fates of many prophetic servants at the hands of the people when he wrote, ". . . others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground" (Heb 11:35-38).
 - c. We know that Jeremiah was beaten and placed in stocks (cf, Jer 20:2), threatened with death (cf, Jer 26:16), and eventually imprisoned in a dry cistern (cf, Jer 38:6). According to tradition, Isaiah was sawed in half with a wooden saw by wicked King Manasseh. Zechariah was stoned to death in the temple (cf, 2 Chron 24:21).
6. Finally, with the greatest patience and grace, God sent His "son, whom he loved" (Gk., *uion agapeton*).
 - a. God had sent many servants and forerunners, but now He sent His unique and only heir—Jesus.
 - b. The wording here is reminiscent of that used both at the baptism of Jesus (cf, Mk 1:11) and at Jesus' transfiguration (cf, Mk 9:7)—"whom I love."
 - c. Daniel Akin says that this action by God, ". . . testifies to the amazing grace of a God who would send His only Son to reconcile rebellious sinners who commit horrible crimes, do not seek God, and have no fear of God. I understand Jesus is talking at this moment to the religious leaders of Israel, and yet, I must confess, I see all of us in this crowd as well" (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 268).
 - d. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16 KJV).
 - e. Akin further observes, "Three days later we would see all of this unfold in what the religious leaders of Israel did to God's Son. Throwing the landlord's son out may allude to Jesus' crucifixion outside the city walls. They would murder Him, an astonishing offense" (Akin, 269).

B. The Question, Answer, and A Further Question (9-10)

1. The Question (9a)
 - a. After telling the parable, Jesus asked the Jewish leaders, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do?"
 - b. Normally, Jesus did not answer His own questions, but here He does in Mark's account.
 - c. The answer was already clear in the hearers' minds. Jesus stated the only and obvious answer.
 - d. Wiersbe observes, "The leaders answered the question first and thereby condemned themselves (Matt. 21:41), and then Jesus repeated their answer as a solemn verdict from the Judge" (Wiersbe, 139).

- e. William Lane adds, “The fact that in Isa. 5 the vineyard itself is at fault, while in Jesus’ parable it is only the defiant tenant-farmers, indicates that he directed his words specifically to the leaders of the people, and not to the people themselves. Within the scope of the parable the inevitable consequence of the rejection of the son was decisive, catastrophic judgment. This points to the critical significance of the rejection of John and of Jesus which is so prominently in view in Ch. 11:27-12:12, for what is involved is the rejection of God” (William Lane, *Mark*, 419).
2. The Answer (9b)
- Jesus answered his question by saying, “He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”
 - In the context of this parable, God will destroy the faithless Jewish leaders and give the vineyard of His kingdom to others who will care for it and appreciate it.
 - Brooks states “The ‘others’ to whom the vineyard was given were, of course, the Gentile church. The church is the inheritor of the position formerly held by Israel, the recipient of many of the promises originally made to Israel. It is the new Israel, the true Israel” (Brooks, 191).
 - This was important, good news not only for the Gentile church in Rome, which was Mark’s audience, but also for us.
3. A Further Question (10)
- Jesus raised a further question for the Jewish leaders’ reflection by quoting Ps 118:22-23: “The stone the builders rejected has become the corner stone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”
 - Wiersbe notes that Jesus “. . . quoted what they knew was a messianic prophecy, Psalm 118:22-23. We met this same psalm at His Triumphal Entry (Mark 11:9-10). ‘The Stone’ was a well-known symbol for the Messiah (Ex. 17:6; Dan. 2:34; Zech. 4:7; Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Peter 2:6-8). The Servant-Judge announced a double verdict: They had not only rejected the Son, but they had also refused the Stone! There could be only one consequence—judgment (Matt. 22:1-14)” (Wiersbe, 139).
 - Believe me, the Jewish leaders understood Jesus’ point, and they did not like it one bit!

C. The Response (12)

- The Jewish leaders knew that they were the object of Jesus’ parable, but they were still “afraid of the crowd” as they had been earlier (cf, Mk 11:32).
- They gave Jesus no answer and went away to plot and plan for another day when they could do away with this troublesome rabbi.

D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

- What does this parable mean for us? It is a reminder of:
 - Our Privilege – God gives us a tremendous privilege to be called as His people.
 - How has God blessed mankind in general, your country, your church, YOU?
 - Do you take the privilege of God’s blessing for granted? Do you expect them, or do you regularly express gratefulness for God’s blessings?
 - Our Responsibility – Whether we are a leader or a follower, each of us has a responsibility to be a fruitful and productive member of God’s kingdom.
 - Our Sin – Even “Christians,” sometimes choose selfishly rather than sacrificially when it comes to God’s kingdom.
 - We often seek our way over God’s way.
 - How have we been guilty of killing the prophets and crucifying Christ?
 - Divine Patience – God is gracious and gives many chances for His people to mend their ways and follow Him.
 - Divine Judgment – In the end God will reveal those who are His true followers and those who are not. We must not presume on God’s grace.

f. Divine Expectations – God has high expectations of you and me as members of His kingdom today.

1) We must respond to God’s love for us in Christ Jesus and be working members of His kingdom producing a harvest of justice and righteousness in our world today.

2) What crop are you producing in the vineyard of your life? in the vineyard of your church?

3) God continues to lavish His love on you and me and on His church. What fruit are we producing to His glory?

2. As I reflected on this parable, the words of 2 Chron 7:14 came clearly into my mind: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”