

God's Unstoppable Plan

- Mark 12:1-12
- Remember parables? We last saw a major parable by Mark in chapter 4, and this is the only other one in his gospel. Parable means to “cast alongside,” and it serves the purpose of teaching a spiritual principle through a familiar story. Let’s look at the text under three main points today: the story, the application then, and the application now.
- **The Story (verses 1-19)** In this case, the story is as commonplace as it could be in first century Israel. A landowner plants a vineyard, puts a fence or a wall around it to set it apart, digs a pit for the winepress, and builds a tower. This was not like planting a field of beans, which provide a quick yield. A vineyard was an investment of up to 3-5 years before there would be grapes that could produce wine. To protect the investment, the landowner would build a watchtower in the vineyard to protect his crop, especially during harvest. The tower was also a place of refuge for those who work the land. The tower was the safest place in the vineyard. David wrote, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (strong tower).” -Psalm 18:2
- This is not an allegory, so we cannot stretch the symbolism, but it seems clear that the landowner in this story is God. He owns the field, and he is the builder. It is his vineyard, and the tenants are hired by him to tend to it for him. Jesus talked a lot about stewards, and that’s what these tenants were: stewards who were charged by the owner to care for the land, and by doing so, they would be able to use and sell some of the fruit as payment for their work. But they were not the owners. Everything seems to be fine until it is time for a harvest. The owner sends a servant to his vineyard to get some of the fruit, and the tenants beat him and sent him back empty-handed. What?
- Imagine Green Eggs and Sam gets so successful that Sammy has to expand into other parts of the county. He buys land in northern Alamance, you know, “God’s country,” or so he thinks, and builds a farm there, complete with cattle and chickens and hogs. And he hires a couple of guys to run it for him. He will pay them an agreed-upon portion of the profits. And they will give him all the rest. But the very first month after the farm starts producing milk, eggs, and bacon, he sends one of his employees from the home farm up to collect...you know, the old-fashioned way. No Venmo for Sammy, no sir, he enjoys the personal touch. His favorite employee will be able to say howdy to the boys up north, get a good look at how things are going, and bring back some breakfast food and some cash. But all he comes back with is a busted lip and a black eye. No milk, no eggs, no bacon, no greenbacks. What’s Sammy going to do then?
- Well, in the story, the landowner sends another servant, and this one is struck on the head and shamed by the tenants. Then he sends a third servant, who never made it back. They kill him. The landowner shows incredible patience, and sends the rest of his servants, and some are beaten and others are killed. That’s when the story turns. The owner of the vineyard has only one other that he can send: “a beloved son.” Finally, he sends his son, saying to himself, “They will respect my son.” The tenants see the son coming and they conspire to commit murder, saying, “Come, let us kill him.” Just like certain brothers once saw Joseph coming, and said, “Come, let us kill him.” The

perversity of sin is on display here, isn't it, how it twists the morals and the minds and the hearts of men and women, because they say to each other, "If we kill him, the son and the heir, then the land will be ours!" They had already stolen the produce that belonged to the owner of the vineyard, and they had already killed and wounded men who were in the service of the landowner, but that was not enough. They wanted to take the place of the landowner and his son. They wanted it all. So, they took the son and killed him and threw him outside of the vineyard. Remember, this is a parable, and we think of Hebrews 13:12, "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate..."

- **The application then (verse 9)**

- Jesus asks the question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" Then he gives the answer. He makes it clear that the tenants in this story are the religious leaders he is talking to, who are acting as though they are the owners of the vineyard. Notice in the parable that the owner does not come and destroy the land. He does not take vengeance on the vineyard, but on those who were supposed to be tending to it. This was not a blanket judgment on the Jews, but on the leaders of the Jews. This is not a story, as some have tried to make it become, about an uprising by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, the working class against the owners. No, the defiant rebels in this story are the tenants who have set themselves against the rightful owner. And the climax of the story is when the rightful owner decides to send his son to the vineyard to confront the tenants. What owner would send his son to such a murderous group of thugs who had already beaten or killed every other person he had sent? **It is a picture, isn't it, of the unceasing love of God and His unstoppable plan!** James Edwards writes that the servants had been sent to appeal to the integrity of the tenants, but the son appeals to the right of law. "The son goes as the representative of the father, to the father's property, to claim the father's due." He goes as the last and final word of the father. And Jesus takes the chief priests and the elders he's talking to back to the baptism of John, again, when he describes the son in the parable as "a beloved son." God said to Jesus at his baptism, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased." The beloved son is sent to the vineyard that belongs to his father, and "They take him and killed him." Edwards again, "What is the history of Israel if not rebellion against God? What is the sum total of human history if not the attempt to rid the universe of God?"
- Just to put an even finer point on the parable, Jesus asks them and us, again, "Have you not read this Scripture?" He knows they have, as Psalm 118, which is where this verse first resided, was as familiar to the Jews of that day as John 3:16 is to believers today. They knew this was a messianic Psalm that points to the successor to King David who would assume the throne forever. But what they did NOT know or believe was that the man standing before them was that King. That this traveling Rabbi who had the audacity to cleanse the temple was the stone that the builders rejected and would become the cornerstone. They certainly did not believe that this man was the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets, and that they who had rejected him would be rejected themselves and Gentiles who believed would be accepted! "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." The next verse in Psalm 118 is, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." There is no rejoicing to be found in the chief priests and the elders. Jesus then says to them, in Matthew's account of this story,

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to the people producing its fruits.” (Matthew 21:43)

- Amazing! Jesus tells them clearly who he is. He tells them clearly who they are. And he tells them clearly what they are about to do to him, and what will be the result. The stone that was rejected will become the cornerstone. They will lose everything while trying to hold onto what was not theirs to begin with. Though they had eyes to see, they were blind. Though they had ears to hear, they were deaf.
- **The application now (verses 10-12)**
- Branches were broken off so that we would be grafted in. That’s what Paul tells us in Romans 11, along with a warning that we must not be arrogant toward the natural branches, the Jews. They were cut off who did not believe, and if we do not persevere in faith, we too will be cut off. Praise be to the merciful God who has made a way for us to know him! Praise to him for his ineffable grace, his unstoppable plan!
- That plan continues today with his church. God continues to send messengers, servants, into his vineyard. Pastors, teachers, and elders are sent to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Those teachers include women who labor in the word and teach their sisters how to live for Christ. God also send messengers to us through friends who speak to us in an ironman meeting or over a cup of coffee around our dining room table. It’s part of God’s plan because he loves us and is working through these messengers to sanctify us. Do we welcome those messengers? Or do we seek to silence the voice of God in them? How did the religious leaders respond to this obvious message from the Lord?
- Verse 12: “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.” They responded with hatred. They hated the one who told them the truth and wanted to get rid of him. In a word, they were too proud to be corrected.
- Listen to these words of wisdom from Solomon: “The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” (Proverbs 15:31-33)
- Robert and his pilot friend Wesley went for a flying trip from Indianapolis to Muncie, Indiana, in June 1998. During the flight, his pilot had a heart attack and slumped over the controls. He was dead. The Cessna 172 single-engine plane began to nosedive and Robert grabbed the controls. He got on the radio and pleaded for help. Nearby were two pilots who heard the call. Mount Comfort was the closest airport, and the two pilots gave Robert a series of instructions, climbing, steering, and the scariest part, landing. The two-experienced pilots circled the runway three times before this somewhat frantic and totally inexperienced pilot was ready to attempt the landing. Emergency vehicles were called out for what seemed like an approaching disaster. Witnesses said the plane’s nose nudged the center line and bounced a few times before the tail hit the ground. The Cessna ended up in a patch of grass next to the runway. Amazingly, Robert was not injured. He said later, “I listened intently and followed every single instruction as carefully as I could. My life depended on it.”
- Prayer