

Mark 12:1-9 Tenant Farmer

II Samuel 12 records an event in the life of the prophet Nathan. By way of background to that event Scripture tells how King David saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a faithful soldier who was off at war. David desired her and invited her to his palace where they had an affair. As a follow-up to that affair David arranged for Uriah to be put in a position where he would be killed in battle so David could marry Bathsheba. Everything about that event was wrong in the eyes of God. II Samuel 12 records how God sent the prophet Nathan to David to pronounce judgment on the king. Read II Samuel 12:1-6. David realized, as any decent individual would, that this was wrong in every way. Nathan then said to David, according to verse 7. **“You are the man!”** Nathan used an interesting approach. He set up a scenario whereby David saw in others what he failed to see in himself.

Mark 12:1-8 records a parable Jesus told that used the same approach. The very fact that Mark recorded this parable is a testimony to its importance in his mind. Mark recorded very few of the parables, preferring instead to focus on His activities. When Mark did record a parable, it was because of its importance to the gospel message. Read Mark 12:1-8.

That parable would have been easily understood in Jesus day. It was not uncommon for a wealthy man to buy a piece of land and develop that land into a profitable farm. Once developed the owner would then rent it out to someone who could never afford a farm of his own. The renter would farm it and when the harvest came in, he would pay his rent with a portion of the harvest. For a family that had no chance of owning a farm on their own, this was a great deal and one many wished they had the opportunity to be a part of. To not pay one's rent when the harvest came in was unthinkable for any decent person.

Note some features of this parable. We know that the one who planted and owned the vineyard represented God. The vineyard represented Israel. Those to whom the vineyard was rented represented the Jewish leaders, who were responsible as stewards of God's possession to care for Israel. The servants that were beaten, tortured and even killed represented the various prophets that God sent to the nation. We also know that the Son represented Jesus Himself whom they would put to death just 2 days later.

Read Isaiah 5:1-7. There's an interesting parallel between Jesus' parable and the message of Isaiah. Almost identical wording is found in both showing that Jesus was quoting that passage so the Jewish leaders who were listening to it undoubtedly knew what He was referring to. The only significant difference is that the Isaiah passage was directed to the nation as a whole while this confrontation was primarily with the leadership, and they knew that.

In verse 1 Jesus described the land that the owner had developed. The big picture is that He had developed it perfectly for its purpose. Jesus said He put a wall around it, meaning He had built it so as to guard against wild animals that might invade and devour the crop. He added a pit, using the word that described a pit designed for harvesting the grapes. It was all set for a perfect

harvest. The renters had nothing to do except use it as it was intended and pay the required rent. Further, it had a watchtower. Watchtowers were 15-20 feet high and provided the farmer a place to guard his crop once it was ready for harvest to ensure that no one would be able to steal it. The tower also served as a storage place for the harvested crop.

Re-read Isaiah 5:2. The picture is that of a perfect place for them. God always provides His people with all they need, asking only that they use it properly and pay the appropriate rent.

We read next that renters were not content to live up to their agreement. Read Mark 12:4-5. Jesus went on to detail some of the other things the renters did to the owner's servants, or as we know them, God's prophets. Read Hebrews 11:35-38 which details some of the treatment God's prophets received.

Read in Mark 12:7-8 what Jesus said the renters did when he sent his son,

I find it amazing that the owner would put up with all of that, or as we know it to mean, that God would put up with His people treating the prophets that way. I know, compared to the way some of the nations around them lived, the Israelites overall were angels but oh how far short of God's requirements they fell. Nothing but a loving and extremely patient God would have done that. It is too easy to compare ourselves with the truly ugly sinners we see in the world in general and think we are pretty good. In truth, while we do not kill God's prophets today, we ignore them all too often. But God is so patient with us and those in the world around us. Read Peter's explanation of this way in II Peter 3:9. Praise God for His patience and that His love still flows to us. Remember that God is love and that all love flows from Him. No where is that love more evident than in His patience with us and His willingness to send His Son to be our redeemer.

Matthew and Luke add a detail to this parable that Mark omitted. Matthew 21:40-41 wrote what Jesus asked and what their response was. Read those verses.

Like David when confronted by Nathan, the leaders of Jesus' day knew that the way the renters acted was so wrong. Because the Israelites refused to act responsibly as God's people the task of being a blessing to the world shifted from them to the church.

Read Mark 12:12.

Before Mark wrote of the anger of the religious leaders, he wrote what Jesus said. Read Mark 12:10-11. The same statement is found in Isaiah 5, but it originated in Psalm 118 verses 22 and 23. That Psalm is a "Messianic Psalm" that speaks of the promised Messiah. The Psalm states the Messiah would be the cornerstone of a new kingdom that he would build. Reject the chief cornerstone and you reject the kingdom He came to establish. Jesus was signaling that the leadership of His new kingdom was about to shift from Israel to the church.

That does not mean that God does not still consider the Jews to be His people or that He will not fulfill every promise He made to them, but it does mean He has grafted the church into those promises and blessing. Read Ephesians 2:19-20. We are the current tenants who are responsible for the care of the property and the rent due for it.

One of the problems we have reading a passage like this is leaving it as a fact of history. It is easy to see religious leaders who often persecuted God's prophets, deserved judgment. End of story. But that is not the end of the story. There are lessons for us to see today.

First, just as it was totally wrong in Jesus' day to reject Him as the chief cornerstone on which God was building a new kingdom, so today anyone who rejects Jesus is rejecting the kingdom He came to establish. God's Word has a lot to say about the consequences of such a rejection. It really does matter in eternity what we do with Jesus and the kingdom of which He is the cornerstone.

Second, we must not miss the truth that what God provides for us is always as complete and perfect as is currently possible in a world cursed by sin. Psalm 24:1 reminds us **"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;"** God's gifts are always good and for that we should always be anxious to give Him praise. Withholding praise is withholding a part of the rent we owe to Him for all of the gracious gifts He has provided.

And, just as Israel was responsible to, for lack of a better term, pay rent, so too are we. The farmer was to give a portion of the harvest to the owner, to God. Read Malachi 3:8. How wrong was it for the renters to keep all the crops and not pay their rent? As wrong as it is for us to receive from God multiple blessing. i.e. crops, and then keep it all to ourselves.

If God was upset with the people of Jesus' day for not giving back to Him what He deserved, how much more will He be upset when we reject His Son and withhold that which is due to Him because of the Cross?