

Why Jesus is Hated
Mark 12:1-12
Rev. Brian Bill
September 23-24, 2017

I wanted to apologize for something. I feel badly that I've let something slide. Many of you are no doubt wondering about it so I thought I better make it right.

Pardon me for going a couple months without showing pictures of our grandson.

Here's a recent picture of Pip on a swing at a park.

He's also really into books. I mean, *really* into books.

He loves being read to and following the storyline. At his age he prefers books with few words and lots of pictures (like his grandpa).

Many of us first heard stories from our parents or grandparents (by the way, our newest Growth Group is called *Extreme Grandparenting* – it meets right here at 4:00 pm on Sundays).

His dad Jamie describes the process Pip goes through when he's read to: "*His eyes comb the surface as if he's afraid he'll miss something as you read...sometimes he'll bring you the same book a hundred times in a day and sometimes it's a new book every ten seconds.*" Lydia says, "*He will bring a book and put it in our hands or lap to let us know he wants to read it. He has favorites where he copies word sounds and points out characters and things on the pages.*"

In a similar way, young Israelite children were well versed in certain stories and allegories. Most would have grown up knowing that the grapevine was an illustration of Israel. These stories became their favorites and they were very familiar with the characters.

Allegories are alluring, aren't they? I'll never forget reading about the power hungry pigs that took over a farm and oppressed their fellow animals. George Orwell intended *Animal Farm* not to just be a story about animals but to be an indictment on communist leaders who oppress people. Other examples of allegories include *The Cave* by Plato, which pictures the human race in a dark cave as trapped prisoners who only experience reality as shadows on a wall. *Pilgrim's*

Progress by John Bunyan has been translated into more than 200 languages and is a picture of a Christian's pilgrimage through life. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is an amazing allegory by J.R.R. Tolkien. One reason the *Hunger Games* is so popular is that it is an allegory about the abuses of reality TV.

The parable of Jesus that we'll be looking at today draws from a well-known allegory in the Old Testament. These are not just tame little children's stories, however. I like what Albert Mohler writes: "*Rather than seeing parables as the Christian version of Aesop's fables...they are incredible explosions of biblical truth. Jesus threw them at His opponents and consoled his followers with them. Each parable detonated with a very clear message.*"

A parable is like a story with a punch line. The unusual twist is what gives the parable its impact and biting force as it jolts the listener into seeing things in a new way, bringing us to a point of decision and action.

Before we jump into our text, let's listen to an allegory from the Book of Isaiah, written 700 years before Christ. Jesus will take this allegory and turn it into a powerful parable that delivers a knockout punch to the religious leaders.

Listen to Isaiah 5:1-7: "***Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard:***

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? [Incidentally, the word "**wild**" refers to "*stinking things.*"]

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!"

With that as background, in Mark 12:1-9, Jesus preaches an historical parable with a powerful twist that leaves the leaders hysterical. Isaiah's allegory speaks of judgment and Jesus' parable ends with judgment. Before I read it, let's establish the main characters...

Vineyard	God's Kingdom
Owner of Vineyard	God
Tenants	Religious Leaders
Servants	Prophets
Beloved Son	Jesus

Jesus then switches metaphors in verses 10-11.

Builders	Religious Leaders
Cornerstone	Jesus

“And he began to speak to them in parables. ‘A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this Scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” And 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.”

As we ponder this parable we'll see three major attributes of God – His *goodness*, His *grace* and His *glory*. I'm thankful to Alan Carr for this helpful outline.

1. God's goodness. We see God's goodness in verse 1: ***“A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a***

tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.” Those listening were likely facing the Mount of Olives, which was literally covered with grapevines. They could also see one of the doors of the temple on which was carved a gigantic grapevine that was embellished with leaves made out of silver and gold. Listeners would know immediately that Jesus is talking about Israel.

Psalm 80:8-9 shows God’s goodness when He transplanted the tender vine from Egypt to Canaan, where it flourished: ***“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.”***

Fences provided protection from wild boars and were often made out of rocks. A pit was dug to collect the wine and a tall tower was constructed to provide a place for the workers to live and from where they could spot any enemies. The owner of this vineyard went over and above to provide everything necessary - security, storage and shelter. Every provision was made so they could be prosperous. They should feel fortunate to work for such a good owner.

In a similar way, God is good to us, isn’t He? Psalm 73:1: ***“Truly God is good to Israel.”*** According to 2 Peter 1:3, He’s ***“given us everything we need for life and godliness.”*** In Thursday’s Bible reading I came across Luke 6:35, which says that the Most High ***“is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”***

The arrangement where the landowner would lease his property to tenants was very common in that culture. We read in Song of Solomon 8:11: ***“Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.”***

At the time of Jesus, normally the landowner would receive between one-third and one-half of what was harvested.

We see God’s *goodness* in verse 1 and now we see His *grace* in verses 2-6.

2. God’s grace. Notice the first part of verse 2: ***“When the season came...”*** It’s important to know that a long time would have passed between planting and being able to enjoy the fruit of the vine. It usually took about four years for a newly planted vineyard to produce a harvest. In addition, according to Leviticus 19:23-25 for the first three years after the grapevine was planted no one was allowed to eat the fruit. The fruit from the fourth year was considered holy to God and then in the fifth year they could finally enjoy it.

When the time was right, the owner ***“sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.”*** It would have been expected that the owner would send someone to collect the rent. Would you notice that the theme of ***“fruit”*** comes up again? Jesus had earlier cursed the fig tree, another symbol for Israel, because it didn’t have any fruit. When Jesus used the word ***“servant,”*** those listening would have thought of the prophets. These servants were sent by God to grow their faith and to search for fruit. Hear the passion behind God’s plea in Jeremiah 26:5 as He longed for them to: ***“...listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not listened.”***

Notice what they did to the first servant in verse 3: ***“And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.”*** This means they treated him with contempt and scourged him. It’s telling that he was sent away empty because in order for the owner to legally retain his property, he had to receive produce from the tenants. By not giving him anything, the tenants were trying to usurp his authority and claim the land for themselves.

In verse 4 we read, ***“Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.”*** This servant had his head kicked in and was abused in shameful ways. This could be a reference to John the Baptist who had his head chopped off.

We see God’s grace again in verse 5: ***And he sent another, and him they killed...”*** They scourged the first, struck the second in the head and slayed the third. The workers mistreated, mishandled and murdered the messengers the owner sent their way.

You would think the owner would stop now and send in the SWAT team but we read that he kept giving and giving and giving: ***“And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.”*** In general, people don’t want to hear from prophets. Most of us would rather get rid of the messenger than hear the message. Elijah was driven into the wilderness; Zechariah was stoned to death; Jeremiah was beaten and thrown into a well. It’s believed that Isaiah was sawn in two with a wooden saw and Uriah was killed with a sword. Listen to Hebrews 11:36-37: ***“Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.”***

Everyone listening to Jesus was thinking that the owner would be totally justified in wiping out all the workers after they did these unspeakable things. Martin Luther once said, *“If I were God and the world treated me as it treated him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces.”* But the owner, in the ultimate demonstration of grace, sent someone very dear to him.

Look at the first half of verse 6: ***“He still had one other, a beloved son...”*** This is similar to the language of Genesis 22:2 when God says to Abraham, ***“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...”*** This also makes us think of John 3:16. The phrase ***“one other”*** refers to the ***“one and only”*** and ***“beloved”*** means, ***“dear.”*** Our minds go to Mark 1:11, when Jesus was baptized: ***“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”*** When God speaks it’s all about His Son, in whom He delights. The Father is actually quoting Isaiah 42:1: ***“My chosen, in whom my soul delights.”*** The Father repeats this at the Transfiguration in Mark 9:7: ***“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”***

The end of verse 6 says: ***“Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”*** The word ***“finally”*** is also translated as, ***“last of all”*** and means that there is no other. The son is the final and ultimate demonstration of the owner’s grace. There is no other. Mohammad is not the final prophet, nor is Joseph Smith. *It’s only Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone!* Jesus left nothing unsaid that His father gave Him to say and nothing undone that the Father gave him to do. John 1:14: ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”***

When the tenants see the son they huddle up and decide to slay him in verse 7: ***“But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’”*** The phrase, ***“Come, let us kill him”*** is exactly what Joseph’s brothers said in Genesis 37:20. The tenants assume the owner has died so if they kill the son they will be able to claim the vineyard for themselves. There was a custom at that time that ownerless land could be lawfully possessed by whoever lived on the land.

Verse 8 tells us what they did: ***“And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.”*** The phrase ***“threw him out”*** means, ***“to forcefully expel”*** and was used of Jesus casting out demons. John 1:11 says: ***“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”*** To leave someone unburied was an incredible dishonor. We’re reminded that Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem

according to Hebrews 13:12: ***“So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”***

God is *good* and He is *gracious*. That leads to the third truth. God will always get the *glory*.

3. God’s glory. As we learned last weekend, as the master teacher, Jesus frequently employed probing, personal and provocative questions. By the way, we’ve made copies of the 15 examples of questions that can be used in evangelism. You can pick up a hard copy on the Resource Table or go to “Sermon Extras” on our website. We see in verse 9 that Jesus asked a question that is both probing and provocative: ***“What will the owner of the vineyard do?”*** The religious leaders would have identified themselves with the landowner until Jesus turned the tables (again) and identified them as the wicked tenants!

He answers his own question with the answer that they are formulating in their own minds: ***“He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”*** Because the owner had been so good and so gracious so many times, he is totally justified in destroying those who had rebelled against him. In the minds of the servants the owner was so distant and disengaged that he would never do anything to them. Perhaps they thought that he would keep on giving grace and they would get away with their behavior. I worry that some of us might be thinking the same thing.

To ***“destroy”*** means, ***“to bring to naught.”*** In Matthew 21:41, we read an expanded explanation of what will happen to those who reject the Son: ***“He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”*** In Luke 20:16 the tenants respond with bold unbelief: ***“Surely not!”***

I’m reminded of 2 Chronicles 36:16: ***“But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.”***

Judgment on the Jewish nation came in A.D. 70 when the Romans leveled the temple. To reject the God of grace means to face the God of wrath. Everyone will stand before Jesus Christ and face Him as Savior or as Judge. You will either face the Lamb or the Lion. Romans 11:22 states these twin truths of God character:

“Note then the kindness and the severity of God.” Hebrews 10:31 says that it is ***“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”***

The reference to the owner giving the vineyard ***“to others”*** speaks of the gospel now going to the Gentiles. Jesus mentioned this in Matthew 8:11-13: ***“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** We see this fulfilled in Acts 13:46-48 when Paul and Barnabas declared to a Jewish crowd: ***“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”***

In verses 10-11, Jesus frames a very personal question to them as He changes the metaphor from a vineyard to a building and the imagery from the Son to the Stone. I love how He says that they haven’t read their own Scriptures: ***“Have you not read this Scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’”***

This is a quote from Psalm 118, which was sung on Palm Sunday as the people gave praise to Jesus as the son of David: ***“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”*** Jesus takes this passage and applies it to Himself. The leaders see Jesus as a little pebble from Galilee but He is the resplendent Rock!

They rejected the stone and cast it aside but in a marvelous reversal, God takes what they throw away and makes it the cornerstone of the kingdom. The rejection and death of the Son seems like a total tragedy but since ***“this was the Lord’s doing, it is marvelous in our eyes.”*** The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest turnaround in all of history! This reminds me of Habakkuk 1:5: ***“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.”***

The key to a good foundation is a totally straight cornerstone. If the cornerstone is not correct the whole building will be unstable. The Jewish leaders were ***“the builders”*** who determined that Jesus was not from the right place, did not come from the right family, did not have the right education or the right credentials so they rejected Him. But God took His rejected Son and made Christ the cornerstone of His church.

Jesus is indirectly answering the question about His authority from the passage last week when He says, *“I am the beloved Son and the Chief Cornerstone.”* How sad when we read that they *“left Him and went away.”* They knew that the parable was preached against them but their hearts were hardened.

We not only struggle with the authority of the Owner over our lives, in a real sense, each of us killed the Son. There’s a murder in the vineyard and we know who did it...we did! The nails are in our pockets. While we might want to walk away, we can’t. Matthew 21:44: ***“And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”*** I like how one translation puts it: ***“And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”***

It’s been gut wrenching to watch the aftermath of the earthquake in Mexico this week, on the exact day that over 10,000 were killed in 1985. Over 250 have been killed. Beth and I served as missionaries in Mexico City for three years and know the area of the school where over 20 children were crushed to death. The world has been riveted to the images of a young girl wiggling her fingers to let rescuers know that she was trapped in the rubble. Workers worked around the clock in the darkness and the rain to pull out over 50 people. They developed a system for calling for quiet by holding a fist or two in the air so they could hear the cries of those trapped [demonstrate].

Interestingly, the earthquake this week happened while a drill was being conducted in commemoration of the massive earthquake 32 years ago. What started out as a drill ended in a disaster.

Listen [hold up fists for quiet]. If we listen carefully we can hear the cries of those in hell right now. If Jesus falls on you in judgment you will be crushed. If you fall on Him you will be rescued. This is no drill. Disaster is coming.

Jesus uses extremely strong language to communicate that no one who comes in contact with Him can stay the same. Either we will be humbled and broken so that we believe in Him or we will be hardened and end up being crushed by Him. *You will either stumble and fall over Him or you’ll become humble and call on Him.*

We have a choice to make. *Either surrender to the Son or be crushed by the Stone.*

Summary

God is incredibly *good* and He is overwhelmingly *gracious* and He will get all the *glory*.

1. God is good. Take a look around you. Because God's goodness is everywhere, it's time to repent. Romans 2:4 asks: "***Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?***"

2. God is gracious. He has given you many opportunities to receive His Son. 2 Peter 3:9 says: "***The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***" I like something Ray Pritchard tweeted this week: "*If your view of God's grace makes it easier for you to sin, you've either got the wrong God or the wrong grace.*"

3. God will get the glory. God will get the glory if you receive His Son and build your life on Him as the cornerstone. He will also get the glory if you reject His Son and the Stone crushes you, causing you to be cast in the everlasting fires of hell. Either way, He will get the glory.

One week ago, Nabeel Qureshi, age 34, entered the joy of his master, Jesus Christ. Nabeel was raised a Muslim. His mother read books to him and taught him Urdu and Arabic before he learned English at the age of 4. By the age of 5, he had read the entire Qur'an in Arabic and memorized many chapters.

In 2001, while a college student in Virginia, he observed fellow student David reading his Bible in his free time. The two became good friends and engaged in debates that lasted for several years. As Nabeel examined the claims of Christ, he concluded that Muhammad was not the greatest of prophets and that Jesus was God's beloved Son. Listen to his journey as described for *Christianity Today*.

I began mourning the impact of the decision I knew I had to make. On the first day of my second year of medical school, it became too much to bear. Yearning for comfort, I decided to skip school. Returning to my apartment, I placed the Qur'an and the Bible in front of me. I turned to the Qur'an, but there was no comfort there. For the first time, the book seemed utterly irrelevant to my suffering. Irrelevant to my life. It felt like a dead book.

*With nowhere left to go, I opened up the New Testament and started reading. Very quickly, I came to the passage that said, “**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**”*

Electric, the words leapt off the page and jump-started my heart. I could not put the Bible down. I began reading fervently, reaching Matthew 10:37, which taught me that I must love God more than my mother and father.

“But Jesus,” I said, “accepting you would be like dying. I will have to give up everything.”

*The next verses spoke to me, saying, “**He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for my sake will find it.**” Jesus was being very blunt: For Muslims, following the gospel is more than a call to prayer. It is a call to die.*

I knelt at the foot of my bed and gave up my life.

A few days later, the two people I loved most in this world were shattered by my betrayal. To this day my family is broken by the decision I made, and it is excruciating every time I see the cost I had to pay.

But Jesus is the God of reversal and redemption. He redeemed sinners to life by his death, and he redeemed a symbol of execution by repurposing it for salvation. He redeemed my suffering by making me rely upon him for my every moment, bending my heart toward him. It was there in my pain that I knew him intimately. He reached me through investigations...and called me to prayer in my suffering. It was there that I found Jesus. To follow him is worth giving up everything.

Nabeel went on to get his master’s degree in Christian apologetics, while also completing his medical degree. He received an additional master’s degree and entered a PhD program at Oxford in New Testament studies. In 2013 he became a speaker with the Ravi Zacharias International Ministry.

He responded to God’s goodness because he was broken by God’s grace and he gave God glory by receiving the Son. Because he was converted to Christ the Cornerstone, Nabeel is now in glory, experiencing the ultimate reversal in heaven.

What about you? Are you ready for God to get the glory as you respond to His goodness and grace?

Closing Song: “Cornerstone”

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus’ Name

New Member – Marlene Franklin Sunday @ 10:45