

DAY 3: AN INTENTIONAL MEETING

Mark 12:1-12

We are in our 3rd week of Lent – and our 3rd day of the Passion Week. On day 1 we focused on Christ’s triumphal entry into the city, day two was his return to the temple and his “teaching” on just how corrupt the nation and the people of God had become – but here on day three Christ goes right after the chief priests, teachers of the law, and the elders. All the people that were responsible for the education, work, teaching, and sharing of the faith to the people of God. And he does it by way of a parable matched with words of old.

But before we get into Jesus’ challenging words – let’s understand what a parable is.

A parable simply means “putting things side by side.” It’s kind of like an allegory but it’s not as long and drawn out in its truth like an allegory is. Allegories also have more details that match up with your story but parables just try to hit 1 or two truths and then the rest of the details are meant to help convey the message. But the whole reason for the tale, the whole reason for the story (or parable) is to shed light on truth – but to do so in a blatantly obvious way. Which is really interesting because Jesus gives many parables that simply flew over the heads of his disciples...but here, to those who already opposed him, his story struck a chord.

Read Mark 12:1-12

What I find extremely fascinating and mind-boggling is that for someone who frequently used parables to teach ... in a good way, this isn’t something being taught in a “good way.” Jesus knew the response that he was going to get from them. He knew that this would not only stir the pot but he is actually turning the flame up. He’s handing them the whips that will beat him. He’s giving them the voice to cheer on the Roman guards as they will pound the nails into his hands and feet!

It’s important for us to understand that Jesus isn’t just walking up and saying, “*Hey...let me lay down some truth for ya. Check this parable out...*” All of this is part of a larger and more complex conversation that is going on day in and day out as Christ is wandering inside the temple courts. They’ve already seen him tossing tables around, they’ve already seen him be praised and joyed for by the people, and they’ve just challenged his authority to do any of that and they’ve been confused by the whole thing.

They've felt trapped, tricked, confused, angered, amazed, and looked like fools. They're done! They've had it. *"This man is wrecking our system, this man is deranged, this man is doing everything against everything we hold sacred and dear. And we don't like him challenging OUR AUTHORITY. We have the right to challenge his authority...but how dare he challenge ours!?"*

And so the parable Jesus gives, the story he outlines, is one that would have made perfect sense to them and all those listening as well. It's a story that speaks of landowners and workers and in this story Jesus speaks of towers and hedges and winepresses and all these other "things" – and while those are important we don't want to focus on them because they are there to give support to the real meaning – the real point. The message is that:

- God is the landowner (**Isa 5:1-7**)
- The vineyard is Israel
- The agents initially sent were the messengers of God – so the prophets
- The tenant farmers are those he's talking to (Sanhedrin, teachers, leaders priests, etc) – so they're the "vine growers"
- Son – is Jesus.

And so by implication...the tenant farmers will once again abuse the very system the landowner set up and the very people sent to work with them...

And this story infuriated them. Not only because they knew he was talking about them, not only because he's saying that they have been neglectful, harmful, abusive, and corrupt but because he says that you have been responsible for so much...God has asked you to do something so important and vital...and yet here you stand.

And what's tough is that the parable doesn't tell us what they were NOT doing. All the parable does is tell us that they were greedy and killed. They wanted the land themselves, they wanted the money that was being produced, they wanted everything that was the landowners and they were willing to kill for it.

One author states that the Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers, all these "high up" people WERE doing what they were supposed to be doing ... in a way. The problem is that it was not with love, it wasn't authentic. They were doing it because they were supposed to do it and then they were only taking in, loving, and serving, and healing...on specific days, for specific reasons and when Jesus comes he turns the whole thing on its head. I

think this is why in the parable Jesus doesn't give more details as to what the tenants were NOT doing

But that's what a parable is. It's not supposed to give us all the details in nice story form. Remember, a parable points out a couple of similarities...but not the whole thing. So we almost have tread lightly on where we're going with the parable and find the emphasis. And I think we also need to be a little leery treading some of the waters that we find ourselves diving into here. This isn't a parable about Jesus' feelings towards them nor is it a parable about how they were tending to the vineyard...this is about *them* and their feelings towards *him*. This is a parable that speaks of THEIR intentions.

Jesus broke every rule and tradition and system that they had in place. To those leaders who were strict to the written traditions...Jesus broke those nearly daily. To those leaders that were strict to the oral traditions...Jesus broke those traditions daily too. He questioned all of their authority, he healed on holy days, he hung out with people they said he shouldn't, he trapped them and confused them and made them look silly in front of each others and the very people they were supposed to lead and teach and guide. He questioned and lectured them on their understandings and teachings of scripture and he did it in a way that showed their incompetence. Not because he was being mean...but because he knew them better than them. He knew their emphasis, their importance, their focus and their reasoning.

He was the author of them!

The challenge with this text...is that these men, when shown how the errors of their ways, when pushed...they went to the extreme. Instead of falling on their knees and seeking repentance, instead of turning to the crowd and saying, "*You know what...Jesus is right and I'm sorry.*" they simply continued with their plot. The seed was already in their hearts...this man needed to die. What Jesus' parable does is simply give more fuel to the fire.

Again, I come back to the question of why? Why would Jesus push them over the limit? Why would he egg them on! Because he absolutely does! The whole point of the story is for them to made aware of the similarities between them and the words of the psalmist from **Psalm 118 (22-23)**, as well as **Psalm 80 (8-19)**, from the prophet Isaiah (**Isa 5:1-2**)...

The whole point of the parable is for Jesus to keep walking towards the cross. The whole point of the parable is to continue to move the wheels of the very anger and hatred that had built up and would be taken out upon him. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He knew what *they* were already planning. His showing up, his work in Jerusalem and surrounding cities undermines what they were doing and defeats the need for them – in their eyes. He didn't start what they had become...but he was here to finish it. Jesus parable essentially says,

“Go ahead and plot your plots. Go ahead and make your deals. Go ahead and work your schemes to get me confined, imprisoned, beaten, tortured, and nailed to a cross...because that's actually why I'm here.

You will reject me...and you will kill me...but all of that is not outside of what God is allowing and what God is doing. And it is wonderful to see.”

Whereas last week's sermon was convicting and challenging in that we need to be bearing fruit as Christians and as the body of Christ (as we are the vineyard)...this week's sermon is humbling in the fact that Christ knew all along what was going on, why he came, what he needed to do and the people that were going to do it *to* him. And despite all of that he still interacted with them, dined with them, taught them, challenged them, and showed them grace. He did it to the Pharisees...and he did it with his brother Judas. The very people he allowed into his life, that he talked with, and grew with, and helped, that he treated as family, as friends...to the very people who had animosity towards him he still was kind. He treated them the same way he treated all other people...even while knowing that they also dined with the devil.

The very people he time and time again broke bread with...sought to break him.

And not only that but numerous times Jesus could have walked away from all that stood before him. He could have ignored that healing on that day, that loving kindness to those people, that teaching, using those words, giving those challenges...that path to the cross could have been easily avoided – and yet never once does he flinch. Instead, he allows them to continue down their destructive path even though it's a path they are leading *him* down.

But again...that's what *they* thought. *They* thought they were doing these things against Christ but in reality God is in complete control here. And his plan was to allow them to

do their thing while he was going to do his. *“You go ahead and destroy...for I am coming to heal. What you are tossing aside I am using to reclaim.”*

And that’s the humbling, beautiful, grace-filled truth of this text. That the very thing some people hated was being used for good – for salvation. The very hatred so many of the people of God had was being used to save the people of God. It’s the excruciatingly painful implementation of death that was meant to deal with a criminal...and yet Christ would use it for his resurrection. It’s those very words we read in **Genesis 50:20**, *“What you intended to use to harm...God intended it for good.”*

That is the embodiment of this text. That’s the intentionality of this meeting and that most definitely speaks of the intentionality of Jesus Christ and his whole purpose for coming. To the teachers and priests – this was a meeting that left them angry...to Mark’s hearers, to the people there...this is a beautiful story of God’s love! This is a parable that displays the fact that God simply is relentless in his patience. Time and time again sending prophets, messengers, people who gave wisdom to God’s people in the hopes that they would turn back to him and even after they stoned, dragged, beaten, and killed people...he still didn’t give up. These are HIS people and he will not allow them to be completely run off.

This is a parable that displays the fact that when the Son comes HE TOO has the patience of a super hero (as one author bestows upon him). That he was willing to dine and work with, rest and play with, encourage and teach the very people who would despise and reject him and call for his death. Who would rather have Barabbas...than Jesus.

We should be absolutely floored at all of this. How many of us would be willing to dine with, hang out with, and spend time with someone we knew was working behind our back, spreading rumors about us, lying to others about us, plotting to kill us, and then actually turning us in for a crime we never committed? And yet ... that’s exactly what Christ did.

God did. I’ve said this before...we are no better than any of those people who plotted and worked against Christ and yet God still sent, loved, sacrificed, and forgave them – and us. We are just as bad as the land workers in the parable because given money and more money and even more wealth and fame ... we too would succumb to the sins and temptations of more...and greed. Or maybe it’s not money and fame, maybe it’s something else...but it’s called “selling your soul to the devil” for a reason! We have a

saying for it because it's part of our vernacular. It's not just something someone made up on the spot – it's said because we use it...and yet despite all of that...the Lord has sent his Son...and it is marvelous in *our* eyes – for where sin abounds grace abounds yet even more. **(Rom 5:20)**

Parables are meant to shine a light on an issue – but parables also bring to the forefront the very nature, the very heart, the very love and compassion of the parable giver. Because even in those words that sting...Jesus still is giving yet another opportunity to stop, repent, turn away, and seek forgiveness. Because that's what love does. That even while knowing the cross loomed...it was all part of the plan of God to bring salvation, love, mercy, and grace. That meeting with those leaders was intentional as were the words he gave...as were the love it too showed...as was the cross and the love of God.