

“What a privilege!” (3)

I would like to begin by sharing with you all real quotes from letters, which were sent to some landlords.

1. The toilet is blocked and we can't bathe the kids until it's cleared.
2. The toilet seat is cracked: where do I stand?
3. I am writing on behalf of my sink, which is running away from the wall.
4. I request your permission to remove my drawers in the kitchen.
5. Our lavatory seat is broken in half and is now in three pieces.
6. Will you please send a man to look at my water; it is a funny colour and not fit to drink.
7. Will you please send someone to mend our cracked path? Yesterday my wife tripped on it and is now pregnant.

I guess we all know what these tenants were really trying to say to their landlords. Today we're going to look at the parable of “**The wicked tenants**” where we are going to try and understand what Jesus was really saying to these tenants. Please turn your Bibles to **Mark 12**.

Now some people like to say that this is a parable about “**The wicked tenants**” but by the time we have finished you'll see that it is more like the parable of “**The rejected Son**”. And we all know what the Pharisees and Sadducees were like; they hated Jesus and they were always plotting for a way to get rid of Him. And there were many reasons for this but one of the main reasons they wanted Jesus out of the way was because they could not or would not accept who Jesus was.

They were always questioning His authority. In **Mark 1:21+22** “**Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.**”

And in **Mark 11:27-33** we find Jesus walking into the temple courts, and it's there that the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him and asked Him **2 questions**. **Mark 11:28** “**By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you authority to do this?**” And so Jesus answers them by asking them a question, He asks them in **Mark 11:30**, “**John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!**” But they wouldn't answer Him because they feared the people.

And it's with this final rejection of the source of the Lord's authority that Jesus goes on to tell them the parable. **Mark 12:1-12** “**He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed."** "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?" Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.”

This parable tells us a lot about our God, mankind and Jesus Himself. **1st** lets look at what it says about our God. This parable tells us **4 things** about our God.

1. Our God is a gracious God. Jesus says in **Matthew 20:1** “**For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard”.**

I heard a story about a father who was reading Bible stories to his young son. He read, “**The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city, but his wife looked back and was turned to salt.**” His son was intrigued with this and then asked his father, “**What happened to the flea?**”

And I guess the point is that the Jewish leaders forgot to look back into their history and recognise just exactly who they were and where they came from. In **Ezekiel 16** we find a very graphic picture of what the nation of Israel was like when God took them under His care.

God says in **Ezekiel 16:4-7** “On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare.”

And then God goes on to describe how they grew up into something beautiful and how they were like a queen. But what a pathetic and helpless and hopeless picture this is. These religious leaders had forgotten just who they were and where they came from. They were God’s people and God owned them. It was God who made them into the nation that they were. It was God who cared for them when they were lying by the side of the road hopeless.

And when **Mark** tells us in **Mark 12:1** that a man planted a vineyard, he’s telling us that, that man was God, it was God who planted the vineyard. And notice that the vineyard was given everything it needed to do its work. It was given a wall around it to mark out its boundaries, to keep out robbers and to defend it from wild boars. There was also a wine press in the vineyard where people would trample all over the grapes with their feet. And underneath the winepress there was a wine vat and that’s where all the juice from the grapes would flow.

And they were given a tower. And it’s in this tower that the wine would be stored and the people would also live in there too. And it’s from there, that they could look out for robbers at harvest time. That’s why it’s called a watchtower. **Isaiah 5:2** “He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well”. The vineyard owner gave the vineyard everything it needed to make their work easy and profitable. And notice that God didn’t just give them a task to do; He also gave them the means in which to do those tasks.

You know there are Christians who say, “Well I just haven’t got any talents at all.” Wrong Christian, every Christian has got at least one talent, the problem is that you don’t want to recognise it and then use it. **1 Peter 4:10** “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

When Jesus is talking about those who were given talents, He said one had **5 talents** another had **2 talents** and yet another had **one talent**. But Jesus clearly tells us **Matthew 25** that all were given a talent. Jesus says you have got a talent; the problem is that some people are just too lazy to use it.

God has given you an ability to serve Him whether it is preaching or teaching. Whether it be giving to the needy or helping set up for worship every week. But He says, you have a talent and you need to use and develop that talent the best you can because if you don’t, He will give it to someone else who will use it.

2. God trusts us enough to do the work at hand. **Mark 12:1** tells us that the owner of the vineyard went away on a journey. God trusted the tenants to run the vineyard by themselves while He was away.

I heard a story about when Jesus ascended up to heaven and all the angels met him and asked Jesus what He did with the gospel of salvation. Jesus said, “Oh it’s in good hands, I left it in the hands of men.” Imagine that? The creator and author of our faith leaving the gospel in the hands of men! The responsibility of sharing the good news about Jesus Christ with people is in our hands. God trusts us enough to do that and He trusts us enough to give us freedom of choice about how we do that and how we live our lives.

You have probably seen that TV programme called “Tenants from hell.” And you see the landlord just pulling his hair out because his tenants are wrecking his house, but they can’t do anything because the tenants have rights too.

Well, God has entrusted us to look after His work here on earth but unlike those tenants we don’t have any rights. We don’t have any right to abuse the word of God. We don’t have any right to compromise the word of God. We don’t have any right to abuse any of the gifts He has given us. But God trusts us enough to allow us to make mistakes and do so much for ourselves.

3. **Our God is patient.** Notice how the master sent servant after servant.

Mark 12:2-5 “At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.”

We know that Jeremiah was a prophet of God who was beaten up time and time again by the so-called leaders of God’s people. Jeremiah 37:15 “They were angry with Jeremiah and had him beaten and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary, which they had made into a prison.”

Uriah is another prophet that was killed by the so-called leaders. Jeremiah 26:23 “They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people.”

Zechariah was another prophet who was killed by the so-called leaders. 2 Chronicles 24:21 “But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord’s temple.”

Hebrews 11:37 tells us that many of God’s servants “Were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated.”

These servants of God were God’s holy prophets who were treated like this. And even after the 1st one was abused and ill treated, God still didn’t get angry with them and come after them with vengeance. Oh no! He gave those tenants chance after chance, after chance to respond to His appeals.

And He does the same with people today. God puts up with our continuous sinning and He doesn’t cast us away after we sin as Christians. He gives us chance after chance to live holy lives and gives those who aren’t Christians time to become Christians. 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

And if we read on in 2 Peter 3:10 we find the 4th thing we learn about our God from this parable. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

You see these tenants pushed their luck; they pushed God’s patience. And like this parable tells us, the world can push its luck with its disobedience and rebellion but there’s a time coming when justice will be done. Hebrews 9:27 “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

You see loved ones, people will either be born again or wish they hadn’t been born at all. And unlike the world believes, our God has the right to judge the world. Our God is a patient God and He as the owner of our souls has the right to expect us to work in the field with the gifts He has given us. 2 Peter 1:3 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” He has given us everything we need for life and godliness.

This parable also tells us 2 things about mankind. 1. Mankind thinks it can get away with sin. Ian Huntley who murdered those two innocent school girls a few years ago here in England thought he was going to get away with it. He testified to being the last person to have seen those girls alive, but he didn’t tell the police at that time that it was him who did it. And so he walked around like a free man for weeks on end. But the police finally caught up with him and so he was charged with murder and sentenced.

And sometimes in the world’s judicial system people fall through the cracks and get away with their crimes, but God’s justice system doesn’t have any cracks. Now remember God’s people hadn’t heard a word from God for 400 years, they hadn’t heard a word from any prophet until John the baptiser came along. Out of site, out of mind, is the phrase they might have used.

They must have thought that God was too far away to do anything about the situation. Luke tells us in his account in Luke 20:9 that He was away for a “long time”.

And so because of that silence, they may have thought that God was dead and out of the picture. Oh but how wrong they were and how wrong people are today who think that there is no God or He is a dead God.

People today think they can get away with their sinful behaviour but our God is very much alive and kicking. **Acts 14:15** “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.”

Jesus says in **Revelation 1:18** “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” We don’t come here every week to remember a dead God, our God is alive and well today and when He returns the whole world is going to know about it.

2. You can lose your privileges. This parable has the story of what was still to come.

You see the Jews had all the privileges of being God’s chosen people. They also had many responsibilities, which went along with those privileges. But these people enjoyed all the blessings from God. He looked after them, He provided their everyday needs, He provided wisdom and guidance, food and shelter. He took care of all their needs like we looked at earlier.

And as soon as Jesus mentioned a vineyard, the Jews would know exactly what it meant. They would cast their minds back to **Isaiah 5** where **Isaiah** is talking about the vineyard. The problem is this parable doesn’t mean much to us today but to a Jew **Isaiah 5:1-7** was a very important part of Israel’s history, which they could not ignore or forget.

Isaiah 5:1-7 “I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”

Have you ever sat and listened to a sermon and thought to yourself, is that preacher speaking about me? Is God speaking to me through that preacher? Now sometimes you think well, maybe he’s not speaking about me, but there are times when it’s so much in your face, you know that God is speaking to you. And that’s what’s happening here, the religious leaders knew exactly what Jesus was going on about. Because it was very much in their face and it was very much about them.

These tenants or Jewish leaders knew Jesus was speaking about them but as usual they failed to listen and do their job. In **Matthew 23** we find Jesus talking about the so-called spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation and he says in **Matthew 23:16** “Woe to you, blind guides!” He calls them “Blind fools!” in **verse 17**. In **verse 19** He calls them “Blind men!” In **verse 23** He says, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!” And on and on He goes.

But the point is that the Jewish leaders were supposed to produce the fruit, and they were supposed to protect the rest of the vineyard. They were supposed to watch out for robbers but they didn’t because they didn’t do their job properly. And it’s because of their lack of faithfulness to God, that Jesus asks these leaders in **Mark 12:9** “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

In other words, all the privileges, all the responsibilities of being a child of God was going to be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will be grateful for everything He has done and will do for them. The Jewish nation will be done away with and another nation will be raised. A nation of people who will obey His words and take their responsibilities seriously, a nation of Christians.

And that would have hurt, **‘the Gentiles being a part of the kingdom of God. Never!’** A Jew would say.

Ephesians 3:4-6 “In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” All the privileges the Jews had with God were now going to be available to all who would be obedient to the gospel of Christ.

And that brings us to the final point. 1. This was the coming of the Messiah.

Mark 12:6-8 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.”

Now notice that Jesus doesn't call Himself a servant here. He deliberately removes Himself from the succession of prophets. He says they were servants, but He is the Son. And so because Jesus was always being questioned about His authority, He tells them right to their face, that He is the Messiah. They knew that He was the heir; they knew they were going to kill Him.

And so it's then that Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22+23 “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.” This stone, which was the keystone for the building, the most important stone of all, was being rejected. The Jewish leaders rejected the Christ, their long awaited Messiah.

And because they knew that but didn't want to accept Him, Mark 12:12 tells us that, “Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.” This was a right in your face parable.

A father was at the beach with his children when his four-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore, where a seagull lay dead in the sand. "Daddy, what happened to him?" the son asked. "He died and went to Heaven," the dad replied. The boy thought a moment and then said, "Did God throw him back down?"

The point of the story is when it comes to dying most of us don't know how or when that is going to happen. But Jesus knew when and how He was going to die. The cross of Christ didn't come as a surprise to Jesus but it was still a brutal and shameful way to die.

Hebrews 10 tells us that it had to be the cross; there was no other way. Hebrews 10:5-10 “Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Jesus Christ was born to die, that's why He came to earth in the first place. He knew He was going to have to suffer and be mocked both physically and mentally. But it's because of His willingness to go to the cross that we can come together and worship Him every week. You see the stone the Jewish leaders rejected has now become the cornerstone of a new building, the church.

Acts 4:8-12 “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

In other words, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the very words and teachings of Christ are the very foundation that Christianity is built upon. And what a privilege that is, to be a part of God's kingdom.

The question is, **what are you going to do with Him? Are you going to reject Him as your saviour or are you going to accept Him as your saviour?** The Jews were awaiting their Messiah, He came and they missed it. If you're not a Christian today, then like we said earlier, God is patient with you, not wanting you to perish. But He offers you salvation today; He wants to be your personal saviour. So don't be like the Jews and miss out.

But as **Fanny Cosby** wrote, **"Jesus is pleading, O list to His voice: Hear Him today, hear Him today; They who believe on His name shall rejoice; Quickly arise and obey. Calling today! Calling today! Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling you today."**