

# Parable of US

## Series: Parables #8

Mark 12:1-2; Matthew 21:33-45; Luke 20:9-18

Ray Anderson – July 21, 2019

## Introduction

### Mobilization: Belize

First, I want to thank you. Some over 200 people gave generously over the past couple of weeks for us to meet a particular need for a new partnership we have in the country of Belize. And we were able to send them the funds. We targeted \$175,000 to purchase this property next to their current property and they were thrilled that we could do that and responded so quickly. It turned out they needed a little bit more money for the closing, and you gave a little bit more money. And so, we were able to send them \$200,000 dollars to cover that cost and those closing things – very exciting. For circumstances outside of our control (in-country issues), we have not been able to send teams from Grace to Uganda or Ethiopia or even Reynosa just across the border, so we're excited that God's opening up this partnership with us in Belize.

## Jewish Memory Method

This week -- yesterday, as a matter of fact -- we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of man landing on the moon and walking on the moon. So, complete this famous statement with me:

- **That's one small step for man ... one giant leap for mankind.**

Great, we're going to continue to do that. I'm going to give you a prompt, and I want you to complete this sentence, okay? There's a pop quiz right at the beginning of class today.

- **Oh, say can you see...** by the dawn's early light ...
- **We hold these truths to be self-evident...** that all men are created equal ...

Let's switch to the Bible. Okay ... this is double.

- **The Lord is my shepherd...** I shall not want

- **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... I will fear no evil**  
...

Great. You get the idea. What we were just doing is what a Jewish teacher would do with his students, although he would expect more of you, that when he would prompt a passage, you would say the whole passage. So, I'm letting you off easy.

But it was a technique they used to help a student understand and make sure the teacher knew that the student knew the passage of Scripture. Now the reason I wanted to do that with you is because Jesus is going to do that today in the context of this story that we're going to look at, this particular parable.

Now our summer series has been looking at the parables of Jesus. A parable is a teaching tool. It was used to help an audience learn something very important by putting it into a different context. It's storytelling, and that's what Jesus is a master of.

### **Context of the Parable in Mark 12**

Now for today's parable in Mark 12, it is very important for you to understand the context, what's happened in the previous couple of days, to understand how this story gets played out at this particular moment in time.

So, let me give you the context. This is Passion Week. This is the week that leads up to what we call Easter. It starts the Sunday before Jesus' resurrection with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He comes riding in on a donkey and they're laying palm branches in front of Him. We call that Palm Sunday. And they're shouting and singing, and one of the things that they're saying is, "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Now as I described it, you don't quite get the visual impact of that. So, let me describe it in a different way. Let's take our property, these five acres from the edge of The Echelon buildings – you probably walked there when you parked your car – and extend it all the way out to Highway 360. Let's include Jollyville Road that's right here, and then we're going to double all that and flip it over. That is approximately the size of the Temple Mount. It's huge. And in the middle of that is the temple itself. And that temple footprint would probably fit within the context of this building. So, it's a huge complex. It's a huge deck with a relatively small building

on top of it, in the middle of it. Now this parade on Sunday would have started (in our context) over at the Renaissance Hotel. It would have come down the hill on Arboretum Boulevard and then come up the hill of 360 and then burst through a staircase onto the Temple Mount. This caused quite a commotion. This was a Jewish version of a ticker tape parade – what the women just experienced in New York City for the soccer championship. That Sunday Jesus looks around, wanders around the temple court here, and then He leaves.

On Monday He comes from the same route because He's staying in Bethany, further that way up Jollyville Road. He comes down that same route and up 360 without all the fanfare and comes to the temple court. Now on this day, He's going to do something very radical. He's going to drive out all the people there that are changing money and selling animals for the temple worship. It's referred to as the cleansing of the temple, or the clearing of the temple. So, He takes and occupies, not this room, but the whole deck. And He keeps people from going through. And He holds that for several hours. You get the picture? He's doing something very profound and radical and controversial.

What's significant about this cleansing of the temple is not that it is a stand against religious corruption. It wasn't just that He was mad about these people profiting from temple worship. There is something far more profound in His statement here other than that. Now He does say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of thieves." He's not excited about what is happening there for sure.

This area where they were selling and where they set up this marketplace was the Courtyard of the Gentiles. The Gentiles were all nations other than the Jewish nation. It was supposed to be a place where non-Jews like you and I could come to the temple area and pray to the living God. And they had turned it into a marketplace.

It's a significant statement about that kind of corruption, but there's something far more profound in what Jesus does in clearing the temple. He stops all animal sacrifices that day. He stops it. It's as if He's standing between temple worship and God Almighty and says, *This system is coming to an end. A new system is coming.*

Now if you were a temple leader, you'd be pretty mad by this point. So, Jesus does that – holds the temple for a while – that's Monday. And then He leaves and He goes back to Bethany.

On Tuesday, He comes back to the temple area, and on this day through all this day they're going to begin to question Him about why He's doing these things. They want to find grounds to accuse Him so that they can arrest Him. They want to put an end to this stuff.

### **Mark 11:27-28**

**They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to Him.<sup>28</sup> “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”**

And so, we need to look back to Mark chapter 11 to catch a key question they ask Jesus. So, let's look at Mark 11, verse 27. “They ...” – this is Jesus “arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elder came to Him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’”

To put this in Texas speak they are saying, “This town isn't big enough for the both of us.” *Who do you think you are coming into our place, our house, and doing this kind of thing?*

And so, Jesus says, “Look. I'll tell you where I get my authority to do these things if you'll answer me one question first.” Jesus is going to play with these guys. These are the teachers of Israel and He's going to play memory games with them.

So, He says, “Look, John the Baptist, was his baptism from heaven or was it of man?” In other words, did God send the John the Baptist as a prophet, preaching His message to men; or was it just a guy who figured out a way to have a ministry in the desert?

So, they contemplate their answer here and they say, “Well, if we say it's of man, then we've got to deal with the crowd who thinks John the Baptist was a prophet.” Which he was. “If we say of heaven, then Jesus will say, ‘Why didn't you listen to him then?’”

So, they choose none of the above. They say, “Well, we don't know.”

So, Jesus says, “I'm not going to tell you, then, where I get my authority. But I'll tell you a story.” And He's going to start a memory game with them, like a teacher with a student.

## The Parable of the Longsuffering Landowner

### Mark 12:1

**A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower.**

So here's where we pick it up in Mark chapter 12, verse 1: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, he dug a pit for a winepress and built a watchtower."

Did you get it? Did that trigger something in your mind? No? Nothing, right, blank? A man built a winepress for pressing wine. Okay. But to them – let me try to help you understand it from their mindset. For them this was a Scripture trigger. Jesus just quoted an Old Testament passage. And so, for them, what came immediately in their minds was a parable in the book of Isaiah – Isaiah chapter 5. This description is lifted right out of that.

### Isaiah 5:1-2

**I will sing for the one I love  
a song about his vineyard:  
My loved one had a vineyard  
On a fertile hillside.  
<sup>2</sup> He dug it up and cleared it of stones  
And planted it with the choicest of vines.  
He built a watchtower in it  
And cut out a winepress as well.**

I'll show you Isaiah chapter 5: "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 stone ..." He'd have used the stones to build walls. "... and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and he cut out a winepress as well."

See, it would have immediately triggered in their mind. These are scholars, they are biblical Old Testament scholars. They would have memorized this passage. And so, it would

have triggered in their minds, *Oh, he's going to tell us the story from Isaiah chapter 5 about God's vineyard.* So, they would have known immediately that the owner, this man Jesus talks about, is God, God the Father.

Now in Isaiah's parable, it goes on and says that he plants a vineyard there with these choice grapes, but what grows out of that are bad grapes. And God was the one who built the vineyard, He created it from nothing. He built the walls and built the winepress and towers. He would have expected His vineyard to be fruitful. And then He would have expected to have a share of its fruitfulness. That's what is going on in their mind.

But Jesus changes the storyline here. Let's go on with the parable.

### **Mark 12:1b-2**

**Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. <sup>2</sup> At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.**

“Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.” It makes perfect sense. That's what he would do. He set this up, he entrusted it to these people, and then he left. He would have sent his servant to get what was due him.

These leaders would have understood this. They would actually have connected with this personally, because most of them had become very wealthy. And their family land was not in Jerusalem; it was out in the countryside. And they would have known that you have to trust servants and tenants to do the right thing in the management of their own property. So, this parable is making perfect sense to them. Jesus is just changing it from what they thought it was.

So, he rents it and he goes away – they connect with that. But then let's see what happens next.

### **Mark 12:3-6**

**But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup> Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. <sup>5</sup> He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. <sup>6</sup> He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, “They will respect my son.”**

“But they seized him” – the tenants seized the servant – “beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he” – the owner --- “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, and others they killed.” So, there’s this continual processional of the owner sending servants and they’re mistreating them. The tenants of the property are humiliating the servants and they’re disrespecting the owner. The owner is continually being patient and gracious with them. He keeps sending servants, putting them at risk to get the tenants to do the right thing. And then it says, “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”

So, do you get this picture? Here’s this landowner who’s being incredibly patient and gracious with these tenants.

Now let’s put it back in the context of that first audience. They knew the vineyard was God’s vineyard. They would have easily figured out that the servants of God in the Old Testament are the prophets of God. God would send His prophets to His people to get them to choose to do the right thing, to do what was right, to be in right relationship with Him.

Just like the forefathers of Israel, what happens in this story is that they beat those prophets or they killed them. And what’s happening here, again, what would trigger for them is the descriptions Jesus is giving them of how these servants are treated are the ways that the prophets in the Old Testament were treated. Jeremiah was beaten; Isaiah was killed. Zechariah was stoned. John the Baptist was beheaded.

And then the landowner, after all that, contemplates sending his son.

Now if we were watching this as a TV drama, we would be up on our feet at this point yelling at the television, saying, “Don’t send the son! They’re going to kill him. It’s predictable. They killed many of these servants and beat them, they’re disrespecting the landowner. Don’t send your son! No, go get an army of servants and soldiers and arm them and go there and wipe out these guys. Yeah, do that, but don’t send the son. It’s crazy.”

But look what happens.

## Mark 12:7-8

**But the tenants said to one another, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.”<sup>8</sup> So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.**

“Then 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 you and I, because of the way we’ve been trained and educated, we tend to think of story as linear. There’s a beginning, there’s a middle, and then there’s the end. And for us, when you’re telling a story, the climax comes at the end.

But this isn’t our story. This is a Jewish story. And many times, in a Jewish story, it’s not what happens at the end that’s important. It what happened in the middle. The middle is the hinge on which the story turns.

So, the point of this parable is not what the tenants do to the servants or even that they killed the son. What would be shocking would be that the landowner would send his son at all. It was predictable what was going to happen to the son if he sent him unarmed, unescorted. But he did.

The owner isn’t powerless. He’s not stupid. He’s incredibly patient and gracious to give them every chance possible to make a right choice and honor him as the owner.

If you look in your Bible, this parable is probably labeled “The Parable of the Wicked Tenant.” That’s probably the paragraph title above it. It’s mislabeled. It should be “The Parable of the Longsuffering Owner.” That’s the point of this story. That’s what Jesus is trying to get across.

It’s because the owner views this arrangement with the tenants as a relationship, not a business deal. They may want out of the business deal, but the owner doesn’t want out of the relationship. He put his people in charge of his vineyard. And he’s longsuffering with them because it’s about a relationship to him. And God desires relationship.

Jesus is telling them and us something very important about the character of God in this parable: that God will go to great lengths to give His people an opportunity to choose to relate to Him in a way that demonstrates a mutual loving relationship. He was willing to humble himself



and show patience with those who are disobeying. He was willing to put His servants at risk and at peril in order to give the tenants every possible opportunity to choose a right relationship with Him.

It's the same picture that we get in what we call "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." The shocking thing is not the behavior of the son in that parable; it's the behavior of the father. He was loving. He waited patiently. He was longing to see his son return. He looked, he prayed. And then he humiliated himself by running out to greet the son.

### **The Addendum**

At this point in this parable, Jesus kind of extends it and adds an addendum here. For the sake of time – there's a party waiting for us at the end of this – I can't go into all the details of that. But He does this Scripture game with them again. He's going to give a quote about builders rejecting the cornerstone. And that would trigger in their minds Psalm 118. And they would probably start going through Psalm 118. It's interesting – He does two things with that psalm.

One is that He stops short. It's a three-sentence stanza and He only gives the first two. So, they would have immediately completed that. You need to go to Psalm 118 this afternoon and read it. And then look at the context of that passage, because this cornerstone deal is out of place. It's describing a bigger event going on. It's the description of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and people singing, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

And at the end of that section it says, "Why don't you join the procession?" He uses that Psalm 118 to answer the question, "Where do you get this authority?" I'm the son of the landowner. That's where I get my authority.

And when they know who the father is, who the servants are, who the son is, they quickly figure out who they are: they're the wicked tenants. And they're pretty mad at that point.

## **Mark 12:12**

**Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders 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.**

And we can see that in how their reaction is described in verse 12: “Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; and they left him alone and they went away.”

They wanted to arrest Him so they can kill Him and put an end to this. They’re going to keep questioning Jesus the rest of that day while He’s on the Temple Mount on that Tuesday.

On Wednesday, Jesus won’t even come back into the city. By Thursday evening, they’ve figured out a way to arrest Jesus through the night. They put Him on trial by Friday morning. They crucify Him on the cross and they put Him in the grave and they say, “We settled it.” They killed the Son.

But another triumphal Sunday is coming that they’ll find out about.

So, Jesus does this incredible storytelling here, and He summarizes in this parable God’s history with Israel. He’s the one that created this nation, this people. He created this place for them. He put them there and left them in charge of what was His. And they killed His servants and they beat them. And then He sends His Son and they’re going to kill Him too.

God wasn’t weak. He wasn’t powerless. He wasn’t stupid. But He was incredibly patient, longsuffering, with their foolishness. That’s who He is to them and that’s who He is to us.

### **Application**

So, how should this affect us? What should we take away from this particular parable?

Now I don’t want you to miss the character of God that’s being revealed here. God is pursuing you and He’s pursuing me. He wants to have relationship with us above all else. He loves us and He’s patient with us. Sometime that might even feel like He’s nagging us.

Now let me share with you two ways that I think God demonstrates His persistent pursuit of us. The first way is before we come to faith in Christ.

If you were to ask me when I first trusted Christ as my personal Savior, I would say it was in the summer of 1971. I was sixteen years old and that evening I called out to God and said, “God, I need You. I want You to forgive my sins. I want You to make me the kind of person You want me to be.” Something changed that night. Something profoundly changed that I couldn’t explain. And it all started with a simple prayer calling out to God. That’s *when* I became a Christian.

But if you were to ask me who or what led me to make that decision that summer night, it would be a much longer story. It would start in my early childhood when I had this incredible God-consciousness that I couldn’t explain. I had this incredible sense of right and wrong. I learned to pray somewhere along the way to a God that I just thought was out there somewhere and that He might hear my prayers.

It would include me going to a Vacation Bible School when I was nine years old and sweet little church ladies telling me stories about Jesus. That week I memorized Psalm 23. I learned a song: *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.* And I never lost that out of my head.

It would also involve circumstances and people and great disappointments and frustration in my life. All of these things God was using as He kept pursuing me. He engineered circumstances and people, events and crisis and near disasters to encourage and appeal to me, a young kid in Georgia – *Just trust me.*

It was a relentless pursuit of God after me to want to have a relationship with me. I kept not responding and not responding and not responding. Until one summer evening I did.

Now I know many of you – I’ve heard your stories too in membership class. And you would testify to the same kind of deal, this relentless pursuit of God in your life, bringing people and circumstances into your life to get you to respond to His love for you.

Studies show that a nonbeliever has anywhere from five to eight contacts with followers of Christ before they come into a relationship with Christ themselves. God sends servant after servant after servant to get them to respond to God’s love for them; to appeal to them that He wants to have a relationship with them. God isn’t dissuaded by our rejection. He’s not dissuaded by our rebuff. He’s going to keep pursuing you.

Some of you might be here today because someone spoke into your life or cared for you at a critical moment. You don't know why you're here today, but as you think about it, it's just one more thing God seems to have done in your life to get you to hear a message that He loves you, He cares for you, He wants you to experience His love and forgiveness in Christ.

Maybe that's where you are today. Maybe your application to this message today is saying, "I need to say a simple prayer – a simple prayer like this: *Lord Jesus, I surrender. I'm tired, I'm weary, I'm lost, I'm afraid. I need You to forgive my sins through Your death and burial and resurrection. I recognize that You're the owner of me and my life. So, You take control of it. You make me the kind of person You want me to be.*

It's a simple prayer of faith, responding to God's prompting in your life to choose to follow Him. If that's where you are, I don't want to let this pass. Take that moment today and settle that issue.

That is one example of how God pursues us, persistently over time, sending people and arranging circumstances that we would hear the message that He wants to have relationship with us.

But it doesn't end at that point for us. Most of you have done that point where you called out to Jesus as your personal Savior. And then somewhere along the line after that you begin to think, *This life is my own. I'm the owner of me. I get to self-determine what I do and how I live.*

Well, even after choosing to trust Christ as your Lord and Savior, your life isn't your own. He created you. He has the rights to you, your talents, your resources, your time, your heart, your trust, your dream. And He's going to keep pursuing you.

### **Galatians 2:20**

**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

Jesus purchased you for a price. In Galatians 2:20 it says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live" – right now, today and tomorrow and every day onward – "in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Do you continually find yourself in a position where you're resisting the claim of God's ownership in your life? Maybe not all of it, but maybe parts of it. Do you see how you or I at any point in time can act like these tenants and say, "This is my life. I'm in charge"?

There was a booklet that came out, I want to say years ago, but I'm now at the age that I actually have to say decades ago. It's called "My Heart, Christ's Home." And in it was a simple explanation that said that our life is like the rooms of a house. And Jesus knocks on the front door and we let Him come in. But we say, "Jesus, there are certain rooms you can be in and there are certain rooms we don't want you in. So, be in the living room or come in the kitchen and have a cup of coffee, and if You need the bathroom it's down the hall. But certainly don't go in that room on the left because that's my private space. God, you're not welcome here."

Now that room that we're trying to keep God out of may be where we keep the heart of our marriage or our work or our finances or our children. Maybe it's the room where you keep that experience of hurt or broken relationship or disappointment or resentment or failure that you just can't clean out of your house. And so, you made a special place for it.

And now you're letting that room define your whole house. And then maybe God, in His pursuit of you, brings people around you that you see love you and care for you and want the best for you and want to point you towards God. And they start saying, "I think it's time for you to let God into that room, the one you want to keep Him out of. He wants in there and He can straighten out that mess. He can heal what's broken and hurt and remodel that room so it's a part of the whole house."

I had someone come to me one day asking for my advice. And for some reason I said, "Well, who else have you talked to?" And they listed off about five people, all of which I knew, all of which I knew he'd had a relationship with for a long period of time, all of which were godly friends, all of which were telling him the very same thing: not to make this choice that he wanted to make, to choose to go toward God and not away from him. He didn't listen and he made the choice.

Because we need to remember in the midst of God's pursuit of us, there are other influences that want to pursue us too – influences that want to lead us away from becoming like Christ in all of life. It's Satan. He will pursue you too. He will send people to say, "Don't listen to God. He doesn't really care for you, He doesn't really want the best for you." They'll distract you and they'll lead you in a different way.

And I've seen people do that – to make a series of choices so that they could hold onto some area of self-righteousness or pride or things that have become an idol to them, and they didn't want to give those things up, and so they just said, "No, God. You're not welcome here." And then they wonder why they ended up where they were.

No matter how much you reject or resist God, He continues to pursue you. That's His nature.

In 2 Timothy 2:13 it says, "Though we are faithless" – no faith at all – "He remains faithful because He cannot deny himself."

Our God is a pursuing God. He is persistent, He loves you, He cares for you, even to the point that He would send His Son to die for you. And He is a God who wants relationship with you and with me. So, let's not forget that. In those ways that we continue to resist Him, it's time to surrender our resistance.

We need to see God as loving, caring, patient and gracious. He's always waiting for us to make the right choice, to choose relationship with Him over everything else. That's the message Jesus was trying to get across in this parable. Let's pray.

*Father, first of all, thank You that You don't break character. You love us, You are patient with us, You are relentlessly pursuing us. You desire a relationship with us so that You would be honored. Father, help us to lay aside our resistance and surrender to You, that we might see the fruitfulness in our life that You want us to see. In the great name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.*