

Your Last Warning!

<i>Text</i>	Mark 12:1-12
<i>Readings</i>	Galatians 5:13-26; Psalm 118:1-9, 19-29; Isaiah 5:1-7
<i>Theme</i>	Jesus uses a parable to warn the religious leaders against killing him.
<i>Purpose</i>	To emphasise the patience and love of God in sending his only Son and to warn you against rejecting him.

“This is your last warning!” Have you heard someone say that to you? Your parents perhaps, or a teacher at school, or your boss at work, or a traffic officer?

If you have heard those words it means that you have also heard other warnings. Your parents or your teacher will have spoken to you on other occasions, perhaps *many* other times! They may have been very patient with you and have given you many chances, but now their patience has come to an end. This is now your *final* warning!

In this passage Jesus gave the Jewish religious leaders their final warning. On many other occasions he had spoken to the Pharisees and the Sadducees and scribes about who he was and what he had come to do. Very few of them believed in him.

Now it was less than one week to his death.

On the Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey to the cheering and praise of the crowds, a day we recall as Palm Sunday.

The next day, the Monday, he cleared out the temple of all the traders and money changers.

And on the Tuesday he again spent the day in Jerusalem teaching the people and speaking to them in parables, including this one we have read. This is the last parable recorded in this gospel and probably the last one Jesus told.

A parable, children, is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning – that is, a story which draws on everyday events to teach a lesson about the kingdom of God. In this parable Jesus described a typical situation in Palestine.

A landowner built a vineyard.

He built a wall around it to mark off the boundary and to keep out animals and strangers.

He dug a pit to collect the grape juice as it was being pressed out.

And he built a watch-tower – a high wooden platform about two metres square; it was used to guard the vineyard, especially when the grapes ripened, and it formed a shelter for the farmer.

Then he rented out the vineyard to some farmers and he went away on a journey. This was quite a common practise in those times. The whole of the upper Jordan valley was owned by foreign landlords who had others working their fields. Those who worked the land were allowed to keep the crops but a proportion of it had to go to the landowner.

Those listening to Jesus knew the Scriptures well enough to know that the vineyard represented the people of Israel; we read about that in Isaiah chapter 5.

They also knew that the owner of the vineyard was God, and that the tenant farmers were the leaders of Israel – the kings and priests and scribes.

Jesus used this parable to tell his hearers and us about God – about **his patience, his love and his wrath.**

1. We see the **patience of god** described in verses 2-5.

a. Once the vineyard began to bear fruit the owner wanted to collect his share of the crop so he **sent a servant** to receive it (verse 2).

But the tenants grabbed this first servant, beat him up and sent him away empty-handed. This too was a familiar picture for those listening.

Labour unrest is nothing new, and even in those times there was a lot of ill-feeling between owners and workers. This sort of behaviour was wrong but it was not uncommon.

But the owner was not one to give up easily and he sent another servant. But they “struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully” (verse 4). Then the owner sent yet another servant but they killed him. After that he sent many others – some of them were beaten, others were killed.

This was a picture of God’s servants the prophets. They were sent to remind the kings and priests what God expected of them. But the leaders of Israel rejected the prophets; some were beaten up, many were killed. Think of the shameful treatment given to Jeremiah during his ministry.

b. The vineyard is a picture of God’s people and he expects his people to **produce fruit.**

He wants to see the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. He wants to see the fruit of faith and obedience.

God has been very generous to all of us. We enjoy many privileges and blessings; that includes all the children and young people as well.

What are you doing with all this? How are you responding? What fruit are you bearing?

When the Lord looked for good grapes from his people Israel he found only bad ones. "He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." (Isaiah 5:4,7b).

Are you producing fruit in your life – the fruit of justice, righteousness and obedience?

c. That God kept sending his prophets is a remarkable demonstration of **his patience**.

The people of Israel mistreated and killed his servants the prophets. Yet he kept sending them; he persevered; he continued to show patience despite this rejection.

Why did he do that? He wanted to give them time to come to their senses. He wanted to give them an opportunity to repent, to change, to do what they ought to do.

It is the same today. The Lord Jesus is still sending his servants: elders, deacons, pastors, preachers and missionaries. The Lord continues to call people to himself through his Word and Spirit.

God is patient. This is why he is delaying the return of the Lord Jesus; "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" (2 Peter 3:9).

That includes each one of you; the Lord wants you to repent, all of you, each of you. Don't despise God's patience because you don't know how long that will last.

2. God's patience climaxed in a display of **his love**. The owner of the vineyard had sent many servants. **"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved."** (Verse 6)

This is a picture of the relationship between the God the Father and God the Son. When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan there was a voice from heaven; "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Jesus is the only Son of the Father, his unique Son, his eternal Son. The Father and the Son have always existed in this relationship together, from all eternity.

The Father decided he would send him **last of all**. This suggests that Jesus came at the end of all these previous servants. Jesus was the final messenger from the Father. His coming was the climax of everyone who had been sent before.

The writer of Hebrews explained this at the beginning of his letter: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us in his son." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

One of our hymns puts it like this;

"We read thee best in him who came
To bear for us the cross of shame;
Sent by the Father from on high,
Our life to live our death to die." (Psalter Hymnal 329)

"He sent him last of all" (Mark 12:6).

As he did so he said; "**They will respect my son**" (verse 6b).

If one of us had been the owner we would not have done this; by this time we would have been cynical, disillusioned, careful; we would have thought the worst of these good-for-nothing tenants.

But Jesus described the love of God the Father. This is where we should not press the details of the parable; the thoughts of the owner are not the thoughts of God, for the Father *knew* what the leaders of Israel would do to his Son. He was not naive. He knew that the scribes and the pharisees would not respect his Son, would not believe in him and would not turn to him. God knew that Jesus would be rejected and killed.

But still he sent him – he was sent as the ultimate demonstration of his love.

Someone has asked:

"Who delivered up Jesus to die?
Not Judas for money,
Not Pilate for fear,
Not the Jews for envy,
But the Father, for love."

The apostle John expressed this love in famous words; "For God so loved the world he gave his One and Only Son". (John 3:16)

“He sent him last of all saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”

Sometimes when you are reading a book you hesitate to turn the page because you know something terrible is going to happen.

Or you are watching a movie and someone turns down a dark alley, or goes into a deserted car park; there is creepy music, and you know that person is walking into great danger.

This is how those listening to Jesus must have felt at this point in the parable. “No!” they thought, “they won’t respect his son!”

They expected the worst – and the worst happened. The tenants saw the son coming and they assumed that the landowner had died and that the son had come to inspect his property. If they killed the son, they reasoned, the property would become theirs. They could then claim ownership of the vineyard. So they murdered the son and threw his body outside.

The lesson is that the leaders of Israel did not care about God or the prophets or God’s son. They were only concerned about themselves. They were selfish and greedy and they would stop at nothing to pursue their own ends.

3. Jesus therefore warned them that they would experience **god’s wrath**.

We have considered God’s patience, his love, and now we consider his wrath or his anger.

When Jesus spoke about the loved son of the landowner he introduced himself into the story. He spoke about his own death and the religious leaders knew it. They knew he had directed this parable at them.

He did this as a final warning to them about what they were intending to do. This was their last chance to turn aside from what they were planning.

But they would have none of that. “They looked for a way to arrest him” (verse 12). They were determined to go ahead with their plans. They were full of anger and hatred and jealousy. They ignored the warning and carried on.

Jesus then asked a rhetorical question – a question for effect. Verse 9a: “What then will the owner of the vineyard do?”

Jesus knew the answer and so did his hearers: “He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” (verse 9b)

That wrath and judgement of God came upon the nation of Israel in 70 A.D. when the Roman armies marched into Jerusalem, killing the people and destroying the city.

Then the vineyard was given to others – to the gentiles. The Jews had rejected the son, Jesus, the Messiah; so God broadened his plan of salvation to take in all the peoples of the world.

At Pentecost the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to the New Testament believers. They went out and planted vineyards all over the world: In Judea and Samaria and Antioch and Ephesus and London and Tibet and Africa and in New Zealand.

The death of Jesus seemed like the end – but it was only the beginning. This is why Jesus concluded this parable by quoting from 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.” (Verses 10-11)

Jesus changed the image from a vineyard to a building. The word capstone literally means: “head of the corner” and it probably refers to a large stone that was set to anchor the corner and align the wall. It was the first stone laid in a new building.

Jesus knew he would be rejected, but he would also be raised. He would die but God would bring him to life and seat him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. “The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes!” (verse 11).

In this parable Jesus explained that God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.

God has sent his One and Only Son as the greatest demonstration of his love.

But he will judge all those who reject Jesus, his Son.

There are some situations in life where you get a last warning.

That is also true in your life with God and in your response to the Lord Jesus.

This may be your last warning. Don't ignore it.

Amen.