A few years ago, I did a 2 year study through all 46 parables that Jesus taught. One of the points that I learned most during that time was the purpose for parables. I used to think that parables were a teaching tool that Jesus used in order to convey deep, difficult truth, and there are several that undoubtedly do that: the parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the seed and the sower, etc., but in reality, looking at what Jesus said of His own parables, they were meant to do the opposite.

A couple of years into Jesus’s teaching it became very evident to everyone (least most Jesus) that the Pharisees were not genuinely interested in learning from the teachings of Jesus but trapping Him in them. So from that point on, the Bible tells us that Jesus only taught through the use of these stories. He would, often times, later explain the meaning of His sayings to His followers.

They were meant to keep the Pharisees (those bent on discrediting and destroying Him) at arms length—to keep them guessing, but there
was also a merciful aspect to teaching in these vague, ambiguous stories. In Matthew 13, Jesus is confronted by His disciples and asked why was it that He only taught in parables now. His response is essentially that everyone will be judged based upon the amount of knowledge they have, and if He continued speaking in such plain language but they refused to hear and obey Him, their judgment would be severe.

So He used these stories to help His disciples remember His teachings long after He was gone but also as a ministry of mercy to those whom Jesus knew would never accept Him into their hearts and lives.

Jesus has become famous in our culture for these stories. The earlier mentioned “Prodigal Son” is probably His most famous story: a know-it-all, rebellious son tells his dad that he wants nothing to do with him except to have his inheritance early, basically saying that his dad is worth more dead than alive to him. He gets his money, goes off into a far-country and wastes it with “riotous living.” When he is at the end of his rope, he came to himself and said that he would “Arise and go to His Father’s house,” where as he approached, his Father had been waiting for him, running towards him, all was forgiven.

There may be nuances in the text that upon reading dozens of times we finally understand it a bit more deeply, but the basics of the story are easy enough for all of us to understand. God the Father will lovingly accept us back if we just come back to Him. It's pretty cut and dry, but they are not all that easily understood.

Jesus’s parables are filled with allusions to farming, husbandry, shepherding, fishing and feasting. They teach truths on life as it is now;
how God sees everything, and perhaps the most difficult parable to try
and understand, the parables of prophecy which often times lead to
ambiguous and erroneous ideas about the future. For most we have to roll
our spiritual sleeves up and do the difficult work of understanding them.

But then there are parables like the one that we are looking at this
morning. It’s not that it is incredibly simple-minded, but instead, it is just
very direct. It is not as subtle as the others, but that is because this is
Wednesday of Jesus’s last week on earth. He will be killed on Friday, and
He has nothing to hide from them. The plan for His conviction and
crucifixion is most likely already set in motion; so He does not have to be
subtle in His teaching. He will be very direct.

**Mark 12:1** Then He began to speak to them in parables: “A man
planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the
wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and
went into a far country.

2 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he
might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the
vinedressers.

3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-

handed.

4 Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw
stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully
treated.

5 And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others,
beating some and killing some.
It’s a story that gets more gruesome at every turn. A landowner crafts a beautiful vineyard, complete with everything that a group of laborers would need in order to make a big profit for themselves. He even builds towers and hedges that will help protect them from marauders. He wants a profit, but more than that he wants these people that he leases it to to be safe and productive, living a wholesome life. Satisfied that he has done everything that he can for success, he leaves the vineyard in the care of these tenant farmers and leaves for a far country.

When it is time for the grapes to come in, he sends an ambassador to check on things and bring back some of the fruit. But these tenant farmers (or like my family was sharecroppers) basically start an uprising, beating and even killing not just one but every one of the ambassadors of the landowner.

The Pharisees (who they themselves were most likely the wealthy landowners of their day) they are burning with anger at the injustice that these petty laborers had worked: hurting, handicapping and even killing the messengers of the landowner. I am sure they are upset with the landowner for not bringing the hammer down, and they’re probably calling for justice or retribution or revenge for those innocent representatives. All three would be appropriate.

But then the story gets even more bizarre…

6 Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

In my imagination, I hear a gasp…How dense could this landowner be?! Don’t send your son into that war zone!
7 But those vinedressers said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’
8 So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

They kill the heir AND THEY DON’T EVEN BURY HIM! Did you see that? They just throw his body out of the vineyard so as to not dirty up all their hard work. They have no regard for authority nor do they have any guilt for what they have done.

So in verse 9, Jesus interacts with His audience, and He asks them a question:

9 “Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do?…”

And Matthew’s Gospel relays the response of the crowd in Matthew 21:41

41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

It doesn’t really show up in the English translation, but in the original language, you can hear how upset the Pharisees are who are listening to this story. Their sense of justice has been assaulted by this immoral story so when asked what should the landowner now son-less father do, they yell out, “HE SHOULD Miserably KILL THESE MISERABLE MEN!” That’s a very cleaned-up version of what they say, anyways. It wouldn’t be appropriate to give direct quote.

“They should get what’s coming to them!”

“No mercy!”

“Justice for the son!…o wait…” I think they are beginning to catch on to the relevance of Jesus’s story.
Mark 12:9 “Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.

10 Have you not even read this Scripture:

   The stone which the builders rejected
   Has become the chief cornerstone.

11 This was the Lord’s doing,
   And it is marvelous in our eyes’?

O yeah…they’re definitely understanding the point of the story now, but Jesus does not hold anything back from them.

Matthew 21:43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

Father God was the landowner Who grew a vineyard, built towers and hedges for their safety and even went the extra mile to make sure they could succeed and lead quiet, Godly lives. But when it came the season that He required something out of them, they lashed out at Him. He sent the prophets to minister to them, but they killed and beat and stoned them all.

Church history records that the Jews sawed Isaiah in half for his preaching ministry to them. Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet” in Scripture, consistently warned Israel about their soon coming destruction at the hand of the Babylonians, and what did he get for it? Constant abuse. He is chased about by them, thrown into a pit on numerous occasions until
finally they take him out the back of the city and stone him to death. Ezekiel was murdered by the Jews for preaching what God had revealed to Him. Amos fled for his life. 2 Chronicles 24 tells us the story of a priest named Zechariah who tried to warn Israel of their apostasy. They chased him down within the temple courtyard and stoned him right there on the spot. The king’s servants asked the prophet Micaiah to speak encouraging words to the king, but when he said exactly what God told him, they punched him in the face every time he spoke and starved him to death in prison.¹

Israel had abused every single ambassador that God had ever sent them. From Moses to John the Baptist, it was the same story 200th verse. They liked the man of God when he said things that made them feel good about themselves, but they railed against him when he stood firm on what God had said.

The most absurd part of this story to the Pharisees listening on has to be when the landowner decides to send his son as his ambassador to this hostile people. What a dumb move! How naive could this guy be?! Can I tell you something I have learned? How I respond to grace is an early warning system that God has set up in my life. To the proud, grace always looks dumb…naive…absurd…weak. So if you’re ever in a situation where you think someone is being too gracious, alarms should be going off in your mind that you need to take a step back, pray and evaluate your relationship with the Lord.

Well...as the Pharisees knew it would happen, they kill the son of the land owner, and as Jesus knew it would happen, He is just two days away from these who are appalled by this fictitious story and the mistreatment of this fake son to call for The Son to be stripped, beaten, traded for Barabas, and crucified. In fact, were it not for the kindness of a couple of Jesus's friends, they would have just thrown His body out of the city on the heap of bones where all the other Golgothan corpses were.

So Jesus asks the leaders of Israel that question, “What should the owner of the vineyard do to those vinedressers who constantly abuse his ambassadors?”

“HE SHOULD UTTERLY DESTROY THEM!”

“You and your fathers are those vinedressers…”

[Gulp]

You need to know that this parable, while not very subtle, has behind it theological ramifications. When Jesus says in Matthew 21:

Matthew 21:43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

He is affirming that there is no hope in Israel and its hypocritical religious system. The Kingdom of God is no longer for them. It is now for anyone who wants it. That is the point of this parable. The Pharisees hear it; they know it, and they do not like it. So they (having just heard a similar story and being upset by the violence of it all)...

Mark 12:12 And they sought to lay hands on Him... but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away.
As is the case with the majority of Christ’s parables, I think they have an application for us today, even aside from the theological point that you and I can now be grafted into God’s kingdom. I think that application is most easily seen in the mistaken assumptions that the tenant farmers made about their situation and the Landowner.

See yourself in these sharecroppers (tenant farmers); they began thinking three incorrect assumptions, and we, often times, have similar misconceptions about our life and God.

1. **They began thinking what had been lent to them was really their’s.**

   We do not know how much time had passed since the landowner had lent them his vineyard, but one thing is for sure. It was long enough for them to have forgotten that they were mere stewards of what he had left them.

   One of the gravest misconceptions that you could ever have in this life is to think that “your life” is “your life.” You did nothing of your own volition to exist. You did not will yourself to develop within your mother’s belly, nor did you display any skill in being born.

   Your existence is only because of God. He set the natural world in its order. He formed you in your mother’s womb. He provides the oxygen, the UV rays, the gravity. It has all been lent to you by God, and the worst thing that you can begin doing is thinking that all of this is yours.

   That’s why humanity does so much work in trying to erase God from its origins. If life can be explained by any formula which excludes God then man ceases to be owing God anything. But life
cannot be explained without God as its originator; therefore, you are beholding to Him; you owe Him something. This life is not yours; it is lent to you; to act or think otherwise is as treasonous as killing all of his messengers and His Own Son (which of course we did).

The second misconception is closely tied to the first but slightly different. Aside from forgetting that everything they had was lent to them by the landowner,

2. **They began thinking that all they had accomplished was because of their work.**

   After all, they were the ones who worked the vineyard for forever how long since the Master had left for the far country. They were the ones responsible for fertilizing and trimming and weeding and binding and stringing. They did all of the work; so shouldn’t they be the only ones who enjoyed the harvest?

   We so easily recall all of our efforts, and we so soon forget all of the work of others. They had done a lot of work; that is undeniable, and a lot of the fruit was *because* of their efforts. But they had forgotten that the Landowner was the One Who first grew the vineyard. He was the one Who put into process their ability to harvest.

   He built the winepress for them so that they could have a leg up on others around them.

   What’s more, they had forgotten that the Landowner had cared enough for them to provide for their safety. He crafted a hedge; He built lookout towers. And how did they abuse these? They climbed
the tower so they could see His Son coming from far away, and they used the time they had to plot His murder.

The Landowner wanted what was rightly His—His portion of the harvest, and so does God. He wants our worship. There are none of us self-sufficient. Each of us have been blessed by God in general and specific ways, and the idea that “I worked hard for what I got” as a means to undergird some self-important, self-reliant, “I don’t need anyone,” “I don’t owe anyone” is absolutely killing us in America today.

They really began to believe these two lies they had convinced themselves of: that they owned it all and they worked for what they got. That’s why when the ambassadors from the Landowner begin to come, the sharecroppers respond with such violent indignation. One messenger’s death turned into three, and I imagine with each one it just convinced them of their third misconception.

I think they thought they had gotten away with it all. Because the Landowner was so far away and because their violence was only met with another opportunity to rightly serve the Landowner, I think

3. They began thinking that delayed judgment meant no judgment.

There is pleasure in sin…for a season, but as Hosea wrote, those who sow to the wind will reap the whirlwind.

R. G. Lee was one of the most prolific preachers of a previous generation. He is most remembered for his powerful sermon “Payday Someday.” I’m not going to preach that sermon, but it’s a good one that you can even watch on YouTube. That title “Payday Someday” though, I want you to hear it.
I am sure that the tenant farmers had convinced themselves that they had gotten away with it all. They had disposed of the body and everything. All that was left for them (they thought) was to go on eating and drinking until they were filled and drunk with all of the blessings of the Landowner, while His Son’s body rotted a few feet away.

Their payday was someday. It might not have been as swift and quick as we self-righteous people would have liked, but it was still sure.

There is a reckoning of accounts coming, and all who do not give to God what is His (their very lives in service) will find themselves guilty of the blood of His Son.

And I’ll just leave you with the same question that Jesus did the Pharisees. What should the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer of this world do to those who have killed His messengers and murdered His Son?

There is a payday someday.