

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME THREE

STUDY FOUR

A Violent and Bloody Parable

Mark 12:1–12

Even God's grace has a stopping point.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE tortoise that slowly but steadily wins the race tells us the value of persistence. The boy who cried wolf when no wolf was there teaches us to speak the truth always. The rich businessman who brags about his future profits but then suddenly drops dead prompts us to realize that tomorrow is promised to no one.

Stories have a special way of communicating important lessons. They speak to our hearts, not just our heads. They disarm us. Make us listen. Move us to action.

In the Scriptures, when the prophets desired to drive home a difficult truth and change people's lives, they often used a story. Jesus did just that when He confronted the religious leaders at the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus had just chased away the merchants and money changers, demonstrating His authority as the Son of God and messianic heir of David's throne. The religious leaders, however, didn't accept Jesus as their rightful King. So, the next day, when Jesus returned to the temple, He began teaching with a story designed to change their hearts if they let it.

Let's join the crowd gathering around Jesus and listen carefully to Him telling a parable to the religious leaders. Jesus was throwing them a lifeline. Would they grab the opportunity, repent, and be saved . . . or would they let it go and sink deeper into their sin? Let's find out.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

A Violent and Bloody Parable

Mark 12:1–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, ask God to soften your heart.

*The LORD is close to all who call on him,
yes, to all who call on him in truth. (Psalm 145:18)*

Make known to the Lord your genuine hunger and thirst for Him. Acknowledge how easy it is for your heart to be deceived by sin. Tell Him that your utmost desire is to welcome His truth and let Him reign.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The leading priests and teachers of religious law had tried everything to discredit Jesus. His words had cut them deeply and exposed the hypocrisy lurking in their hearts. But instead of believing in Him, they kept asking Him for His credentials:

They demanded, “By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?” (Mark 11:28)

It was time for Jesus to declare His mission and His identity in a way that would penetrate their hard shell. In His parable, He drew upon images from the Hebrew Scriptures that they would immediately recognize. To get their attention, He packed His parable with violence and bloodshed. It was a story they would never forget.



Observation: The Parable of the Evil Farmers

In his commentary *Insights on Mark*, Pastor Chuck explains that “a parable is an illustration that paints a picture in the imagination using the listener’s own experiences.”¹ Put simply, a parable is an earthly story designed to teach heavenly truth.

Jesus intended His parables to be heard, so if you can, read [Mark 12:1–12](#) aloud, imagining yourself in His audience listening to Him. Keep an eye on the facial expressions of the religious leaders and watch closely for the moment they realize Jesus was speaking about them!

A Violent and Bloody Parable

Mark 12:1–12

In the following chart, write down your observations of each character and feature of the story. For now, just observe what the parable is saying and save your interpretations for the next step.²

Characters and Features	Observations
The Vineyard Owner	
The Vineyard	
The Tenant Farmers	
The Slaves/Servants	
The Vineyard Owner's Beloved Son	

How did Jesus conclude His parable in Mark 12:9? What Scripture passage did He quote in 12:10–11 to illustrate His point?

Though Jesus did not directly accuse anyone, what did Mark say in 12:12? How did they know He was addressing them?

When you see yourself in the story, you wind up, if your heart is right, saying, "I'm the one. Guilty as charged." But not these men. In fact, shortly after this, they make the pact with Judas that begins the conspiracy that leads to the arrest, trials, and death of Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

A Violent and Bloody Parable

Mark 12:1–12



Interpretation: The Meaning of This Parable

To grasp the meaning of Mark 12:1–12, consult your Bible-study resources, such as Pastor Chuck’s commentary [Insights on Mark](#) or the online resource [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). In the space provided, write down what the parts of the parable represent.

Characters and Features	Meaning
The Vineyard Owner	
The Vineyard	
The Tenant Farmers	
The Slaves/Servants	
The Vineyard Owner’s Beloved Son	

Summarize the message of the parable. What does the parable communicate about God? About Jesus? About Israel? About the religious leaders?

The last person I’m going to send to the wicked tenant farmers is somebody from my family. But of course, I’m not God. And I’m not a person of grace. Take a deep breath, you’re not going to like the word, but it makes sense. This is called by one fine writer, “the idiocy of grace.” It isn’t really grace until it seems idiotic.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

A Violent and Bloody Parable

Mark 12:1–12

What did Jesus mean when He said the owner would “lease the vineyard to others”? Whom was Jesus referring to? Elaborate on the significance of Jesus’ teaching for today.

Jesus quoted [Psalm 118:22–23](#). What is the significance of this Scripture as it relates to Jesus and what was about to happen to Him in a few days?

These people knew the Scriptures backward and forward; they just didn’t believe Jesus was the fulfillment. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Read [Mark 12:12](#) in the MSG and J. B. Phillips translations. How would you describe the religious leaders’ hearts?

God continues to pursue sinners, no matter how often His grace is rejected. That’s the message. That’s the spiritual lesson. And they didn’t get it! They missed the whole point of God’s grace. But grace has a stopping point when judgment comes. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Difficult Truths Communicated Through Stories

Throughout Scripture, God has used prophets and their stories to deliver messages about the destructive nature of sin, the grace of God, the importance of confession and repentance, and divine judgment. What story did Nathan tell David in [2 Samuel 12:1–7](#) to convict him of his sin?

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In what ways did David model how the religious leaders in Jesus' day should have responded to Jesus' parable? Instead, what did the religious leaders do?

What lessons can we learn by comparing how the religious leaders and David each responded when confronted with the truth?

It is only moments later that the king, filled with guilt and shame, responded, "I have sinned against my God and I have sinned against these people who trusted me." The change came because of a story. The story itself was fictitious, but the elements within the story so gripped the heart of the king that he felt completely exposed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What heart posture should we emulate according to [Luke 18:9–14](#)?



Application: Heed God's Truth About His Grace

Let's wrap up our study with a principle that is hard to hear but cuts to the core of Jesus' parable. The religious leaders refused Jesus' lifeline of repentance, and they hardened their hearts in unbelief. Jesus' warning to them was this: *Even God's grace has a stopping point.*

Rejecting Christ in this life brings judgment in the next—as the writer to the Hebrews soberly warns us: “it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27 NASB).

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Who comes to mind when you think about someone who desperately needs Christ but keeps rejecting Him? Take some time to pray for this person. Ask God to soften his or her heart to the gospel and reveal his or her need for Jesus Christ.

Thankfully, the Lord is patient. “He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent” (2 Peter 3:9). Think about your own rescue—how the Lord patiently pursued you until you surrendered to His grace. Take some time to write your story below, as well as your note of gratitude to the Lord. Why not share your story with someone?

Thank You, Father, for Your great story. The whole Bible with its great story of rescue, how You found us. Your love isn't limited to Your nation, but it is applicable to us. May we realize it afresh and anew today, even more faithful than the love of a mother. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for rescuing me. Thank You for loving me so much! Help me to share my story with those who don't know You. Help me to appreciate Your grace! In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 306.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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