

## Jesus and Rejection (Mark 12:1-12)

This morning as we continue our journey through the Gospel according to Mark and all the ways Jesus confronted His culture and by extension, every culture with the values of the kingdom of God; I want to return to a topic we looked at in the beginning of this series, *Kingdom or Culture*; when we talked about how Jesus confronts our need for people's approval. Today we're going to turn it up a notch and look at Jesus and rejection; how Jesus handled rejection and how by following His example, we can conquer our natural fear being rejected; because in our culture today, the fear of rejection is the primary barrier between us and having the influence Christ wants us to have on the people around us. We may not think we care about people's approval but just about everyone fears rejection. It's the way we're wired. When researchers asked people to recall a recent experience of rejection while performing a MRI scan of their brain, they discovered something amazing. The same area of our brain becomes activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain. That's why even small rejections hurt more than we think they should, because they elicit real pain. And rejection is the most common emotional wound we sustain in everyday life. People ignore our texts or posts or phone calls and we wonder what we did to make them mad. People don't invite us to something they invite their other friends to and our feelings are hurt. Friends don't appreciate our efforts or praise our work and we feel like failures. These are minor rejections but when our spouse leaves or we're fired or a family member makes it clear they want nothing to do with us; the pain can last for years. I occasionally will think of people from my past who I know don't think well of me and it still hurts. In addition, recent changes in our culture have amplified the pain of rejection. In March of this year, New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote a column entitled *The Shame Culture*, pointing out that America has moved from a guilt culture to a shame culture. In a guilt culture you know you are good or bad by what your conscience tells you, but in a shame culture you know you are good or bad by how your community treats you. If your community thinks you're good, you're included. If they think you're bad, you're rejected. That means that in a culture of shame, morality is no longer a matter of clear and predictable rights and wrongs; only the shifting fancy of the crowd and you never know when you might be the one who gets voted off the island. As a result, everyone in a shame culture lives in a constant state of anxiety because they never know when they might be the one who is rejected and excluded. Brooks concludes that while the guilt culture can be harsh, at least in it you could hate the sin and still love the sinner. But the modern shame culture which allegedly values inclusion and tolerance, is unmerciful to those who disagree or don't fit in. Well, the Bible says that followers of Jesus won't fit in and unless we understand who Jesus is and who we are as a result, it is so easy to give into the fear of rejection and be silenced and ineffective as Christ's disciples in this time and place. So this morning, I want to look at how Jesus dealt with rejection and I want to look at three truths about rejection which we must be convinced of if we're going to live confidently in a culture of shame: (1) Rejection is Promised, (2) Rejection is Painful and finally (3) Rejection is Profitable. Let's look at Mark 12:1-11 and then we'll look at each of these truths.

We're in the final week of Jesus' life and the confrontations between the religious establishment and Jesus are escalating by the hour. Jesus is a threat to them and they are constantly on Him, trying to trap Him into saying something they can use against Him. He has presented Himself as the promised king and Savior of Israel and the leadership of Israel has soundly rejected Him. And so Jesus now tells a parable about rejection and about how God isn't surprised by Israel's response to their promised Messiah. Vs. 1, *"And He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey,'" which was a common arrangement in first century Israel. People who owned land didn't always farm the land. Often they rented it out to tenants in return for a share of their crops. So Jesus continues, "At the {harvest} time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive {some} of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and that one they killed; and {so with} many others, beating some and killing others."* (Mark 12:1-5) The men Jesus tells this story to would be shocked. No

tenant would treat their landlord like this in Israel and they should know, because all of them were wealthy landowners. Of course Jesus is telling the story of the Bible. God is the landowner and Israel is the tenant on His land. God gives them the Holy Land for a home, but they, for the most part, ignore God and claim the land for themselves. And when God sends prophets to bring the people back to Himself, the people often beat or killed those prophets. *"He had one more {to send,} a beloved son; he sent him last {of all} to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard."* (Mark 12:6-8) By this time, the men listening to Jesus would be incredulous. This landowner is far too patient – and foolish. Instead of sending in the troops to evict and punish his evil tenants, this landowner sends his own son, thinking that the tenants will at least treat him with respect. Of course, this is a picture of God sending His own Son to Israel to turn the people from their sins and to bring them back to God. But when the tenants see the owner's son, they irrationally reason that if they kill him, the land will belong to them. The wealthy men listening to Jesus' parable would think, "What a bunch of idiots. Killing the heir won't make them landowners." But that's exactly the point Jesus wants to make. He wants to show how foolish, how absurd, how self-destructive their rejection of Him really is. It doesn't make sense. Jesus comes to His own people, doing good, performing miracles, preaching peace and freedom. And He is rejected. Why? His people don't want a king. They have the warped idea that living under their own authority is better than living under His authority. Does that remind you of anyone you know? Sure, we're all like that. Each time we sin, we're telling Jesus, "I know more than You. I know what I need better than You know what I need. Every time we sin, we do the same thing to Jesus that the leaders of Israel did to Jesus. So when God sends His Son to earth as King, He is rejected and murdered and thrown out of the vineyard. Now Jesus comes to the punch line. *"What will the owner of the vineyard do?"* What would the owner do to tenants who tortured his servants and murdered his beloved son in order to get control of the land for themselves? Turn the land over to them - absolutely not. Not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and not in the first century either. And the leaders know that. There's no way those murderers are getting that land. And Jesus answers His question for them. *"He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others."* In Luke's version, he includes the religious leaders' reaction to Jesus' conclusion. *"When they heard it, they said, 'May it never be!'"* "May it never be?" Is that the way you react when you hear this parable? No, we think, "Get those guys. How hard hearted could they be, killing their landlord's son so they can steal his land." So why does the leaders react this way? They understand that Jesus is talking about them; that Jesus is saying that because Israel is rejecting God's own Son, the promised King of Kings and Lord of Lords, God will reject them, taking His kingdom from them and giving it to the Gentiles - which was something the average first century Jew simply could not fathom because their sense of religious superiority to every non-Jew was so firmly ingrained. But Jesus says, "You need to read your Bible." *"Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER {stone;} THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"* (Mark 12:10-11) Jesus quotes from Psalm 118. The stone the Psalm speaks of is a foundation stone, in fact, the chief cornerstone which bears the weight of the entire building. So Psalm 118 says that the foundation of the building will initially be rejected by the builders – meaning the leaders of Israel – even though this cornerstone is from God. The builders reject what God approves. Jesus says that He's the cornerstone of Psalm 118, rejected by men but precious in the sight of God and the foundation of God's kingdom on earth. Jesus' point is that both His rejection by men and His exaltation by God were foreseen in the Scriptures and that what is happening to Him in Jerusalem this week is predicted in Scripture. And His enemies get His point. *"And they were seeking to seize Him, and {yet} they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And {so} they left Him and went away."* (Mark 12:12) Psalm 118 is a psalm about the rejection of the Messiah and it tells us three important truths about Jesus and about His followers. 1. Rejection is promised. 2. Rejection is painful. 3. Rejection is profitable.

The first thing we learn about the rejection of Christ by Israel is that it was promised. Jesus asks His enemies, *"Have you not read this Scripture?"* Israel's rejection of the Messiah was no surprise to God or to Jesus. It was foreseen in the Scriptures centuries beforehand. That's why Mark 8:31 says, *"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."* How did Jesus know that He must be rejected by the leaders of Israel? The

Scriptures foretold it. The chief cornerstone would be rejected by the builders. The Son of God became a man, knowing that He would be rejected by the people He created. John writes in John 1:11, *"He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him."* Christ's rejection wasn't a surprise; it was promised and so is our rejection. Jesus says in John 15:19-20, *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."* If people reject Christ, they will reject you as a follower of Christ. Jesus promised it. So don't take it personally. That's what Peter means in 1 Peter 4:12-16, *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. (The fiery ordeal Peter refers to is persecution.) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if {anyone suffers} as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."* Peter says not to be ashamed when you're ostracized, criticized or vilified for following Christ but rejoice because it means the Spirit of God is evident in you; that you are the real deal. When people reject you simply because you're a Christian, it means you've been doing your job. And that is especially important to remember in our shame-based culture where we're tempted to feel like we've done something wrong any time people disagree with us or exclude us. My parents were ahead of their time because we were raised in a shame-based family. It wasn't that there were objective rights and wrongs; it was all a matter of pleasing them and I never knew what might set them off. So the culture of shame feels natural to me and for a long time, I thought that if people attacked me for being a Christian or for talking to them about Christ, I must have done something wrong and felt terribly guilty. I took responsibility for their rejection of Christ and me. And I learned to avoid doing anything which might set me up for rejection, whether socially or spiritually. I didn't reach out to people or bring up spiritual issues but instead waited for others to take the initiative. As a result I did avoid experiencing rejection; but I also avoided being used by God in people's lives. Simply understanding that in this world, rejection is inevitable for followers of Jesus has strengthened me to reach out to people more. Peter says don't be surprised when you're rejected for Christ's sake. Expect it. Jesus promised that it would happen. Of course that doesn't mean that rejection doesn't hurt which brings us to the second thing we learn from this passage: rejection is painful.

Jesus asks His enemies, *"Have you not read this Scripture; 'The stone which the builders rejected...?'"* The parable Jesus tells here is a violent story: the landowner's servants and eventually even his son are beaten and killed – which is a picture of how Christ and His servants are treated in this world. In some of the largest churches in the United States today as well as in many of the poorer nations of the world, the prosperity gospel has replaced the true gospel. The prosperity gospel says that if you please God, He will make you healthy, wealthy and wise; and if you're not healthy, wealthy and wise, it is because you're not trusting Him or obeying Him because pain and suffering are never God's will for His beloved children. Tell that to Jesus, the stone which the builders rejected. Look at how the Old Testament describes the Messiah. Isa. 53:2-3: *For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no {stately} form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.* (When the Son of God became a man, He did not choose to become an attractive man. Jesus was very average looking.) *He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."* Jesus experienced the pain of rejection. He was despised and disrespected, excluded and not valued; and experienced so much sorrow and grief as a result that Isaiah prophesied that He would be a man of sorrows and well-acquainted with grief. And He was the perfect Son of God upon whom God's hand of blessing rested His entire life. Or look at Ps 22:6 which is a messianic psalm which vividly describes the crucifixion hundreds of years before crucifixion ever appeared on the scene. *"But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people."* (which refers to the mocking and condemnation Jesus heard as He hung on the cross; with not even a hint of compassion that a fellow human was dying in front of them. Jesus bore the pain of being objectified and treated like an animal.) Psalm 69 is another messianic psalm. *"Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; what I did not steal, I then have to restore."* (vs. 4) Jesus endured the pain of being falsely accused and hated for nothing He had done. Ps 69:9 *"For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You*

*have fallen on me.*" Jesus endured the rejection and the reproach people secretly held in their heart for God. Just as we suffer because others hate Christ, He suffered because others hated His Father – so He knows the pain of rejection we experience because He experienced it all His life. *Ps 69:12 "Those who sit in the gate talk about me,* (Those who sit in the gate are the political and social leaders of Israel and they didn't like Jesus at all but conspired against Him and slandered Him) *And I {am} the song of the drunkards."* Talk about being shamed publically: drunks sang songs about Jesus. *Ps 69:19-21 "You know my reproach and my shame and my dishonor; all my adversaries are before You. Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,"* (...which we remember being fulfilled at the crucifixion.) Was rejection painful for Jesus? More than any other man; and He bore that pain throughout His life because of His great love for us. He who was and is honored above all in heaven was despised more than all on earth – and Jesus knew this would happen when He came. Yet He came anyway and He would have come if you were the only person here who needed to be saved. He bore the pain of rejection and ostracism and slander and false accusations for us and now He calls us to walk the same path for the sake of others. What I want you to see is that a relationship with Jesus doesn't exempt us from the pain of rejection. If anything, a relationship with Jesus amplifies our experiences of rejection. Rejection is painful and that is why there is always a temptation to not let people know we're followers of Jesus; to not share our faith, to not reach out to others when we're not sure how we'll be received – just to avoid the pain. There will always be a pain line to cross to be faithful to Jesus. And it is only by choosing to trust Jesus, embrace the pain, and step out on faith that we can be obedient as Christ's representatives on earth. Rejection will always be painful and risking that pain will always be scary. That's why we only can follow Jesus by denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him. I used to think I would eventually get to a point when sharing my faith with others became easy and natural. But it never does. As long as there is the potential for pain, I will have to deny my immediate feelings and cross that pain line in order to be used by Christ in another's life.

So why do it? That brings us to the third thing we learn about rejection from this passage. Rejection is promised, rejection is painful, BUT rejection is profitable. Enduring the pain of rejection ultimately profits us immensely. It certainly profited Jesus. Let's look at Psalm 118 again. , *"Have you not read this Scripture; 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone.'*" Jesus was rejected by men but chosen and blessed by God. And because Jesus knew He would be the chief cornerstone and the foundation of God's kingdom; because He knew He would be eternally blessed and honored and exalted by God, He was able to endure temporary rejection and shame at the hands of men. Look at how the writer to the Hebrews puts it in Hebrews 12:2. *"...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* What was Jesus thinking about as He endured rejection and shame in our place? He was thinking about the joy which awaited Him and what He would accomplish by bearing our guilt and our shame; the joy of sitting on heaven's throne with the church, His bride – all of us purchased by His blood and delivered from eternal death – sitting beside Him; the joy of fulfilling His Father's will and undoing all the results of sin on God's creation and restoring both us and the creation to what God originally intended. In view of all that He was accomplishing, the temporary shame He experienced wasn't even worth noticing. It was something to be despised because that rejection ultimately would be to His and to our great profit. Jesus knew the eternal profit He would gain as a result of the temporary rejection He endured; and the writer of Hebrews tells us that the more we focus on the shame He endured for us and its outcome; the more strength we will have to endure temporary shame and rejection we will experience in this life. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 5:11-12, *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (Matt. 5:11-12) Jesus was rejected on earth but rewarded in heaven; and so will we. Over and over, the Bible says if we're going to follow Jesus, the same things which happened to Him will happen to us as we become more and more like Him. We will be rejected in this life because He was rejected in this life, but we will also be honored in the next life as He is honored in the next life. Jesus loved me so much He took the rejection and shame it took to give me eternal life; and now He calls me to endure rejection and shame so that others can know Him. We never know how people will respond to Jesus until we give them the opportunity and that's why every conversation is a risk. We just can't know in advance whether we'll find rejection or responsiveness. That's why we have to be willing to bear shame and rejection for Jesus as He bore shame and rejection for us. Rejection

is promised, rejection is painful but rejection is ultimately profitable for us; and not only in the next life but in this life as well. Hebrews 12 is about how God trains His children through the suffering; and specifically through the suffering of rejection and shame for Christ's sake; and how while that suffering is painful, it results in the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Here's what I've discovered. I can be incredibly proud and full of myself and rather than freeing me from my self-interest, being a pastor actually encourages it. When you talk about the Bible and spiritual things all the time and people want to know what you think and you're the leader, it becomes easier and easier to take yourself far too seriously. That's why I need to experience rejection, disapproval and shame on a regular basis. It keeps me grounded. It reminds me not to love my life in this world; and that it's not about me but Christ and the only thing I have going for me is Jesus. Rejection and disapproval have a wonderful way of freeing us from ourselves and putting our confidence where it needs to be; in Christ alone. So expect rejection and when rejection happens, lean into the pain, knowing that Jesus experienced that same pain for us and that the pain we're experiencing is a necessary part of the process of us becoming like Him and God freeing us from our sinful self-absorption. Remind yourself that while all rejection is painful, you don't have anything to defend or to prove to the person who is rejecting you because the Son of God loves you and has declared you holy, innocent and accepted into His family. And what happens in your life depends far more upon what Christ thinks of you than what the person who is rejecting you thinks of you. That person doesn't have the power to curse you or to bless you – but Jesus does and He promises that He who honors me and I will honor but he who despises Me will be lightly esteemed. That's the gospel. The good news of the New Testament is that while we deserve to be rejected by a holy and just God, He sent Jesus to bear the guilt and the shame we deserve to make us acceptable to God – and absolutely nothing can separate us from or change His great love for us. It is His unchanging love for us that provides a firm ground upon which to stand in a fickle and changing culture. If I base my identity upon what people think about me, I will always be insecure and fearful. If I base my identity on what Christ thinks of me, I will be firm and unchanging.