

## **“Living on Borrowed Time”**

Mark 12:1-12

*Series: STEPS Week 12*

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In her lifetime, Agatha Christie wrote more books than any person on the planet. The Mistress of the mystery novel was married to an archeologist. Agatha Christie said, “All women should be married to an archeologist because the older she gets, the more he is interested in her.” Toward the end of her life, Agatha Christie made this observation:

I live now on borrowed time, waiting in the anteroom for the summons that will inevitably come. And then - I go on to the next thing, whatever it is. One doesn't luckily have to bother about that.

What is ‘Borrowed Time’? One definition puts it this way:

A period of uncertainty during which the inevitable consequences of a current situation are postponed or avoided.

When a husband and wife lead separate disconnected lives, their marriage is living on borrowed time. When there is a merger or a lay-off coming, employees know they are living on borrowed time. When the doctors say there is nothing more they can do, it's time for hospice, it's the beginning of living on borrowed time. Truth is we are all living on borrowed time. We are all in the waiting room. We all know, eventually, our number or name will be called. And then – we go on to the next thing. Yet here I think Agatha Christie is wrong. It is essential that we think about what comes next.

The first question: From whom did you borrow the time? God. Psalm 139:16 says, “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” We do not own our lives. We borrow our time from God. And whenever you borrow something, you have to give it back. Sometimes there is a penalty to pay. Joel Schelsinger borrowed a book called The Joy of Camping from the Orchard Park Public Library in 1981. I'm sure there was no joy when he discovered he still had the book 24 years later. Though he lived in another state, Joel wanted to do the right thing. He drove 400 miles back to his hometown to return the book and pay the fine. When he learned the maximum penalty for overdo books is \$15. Joel wasn't satisfied. Since the library needed funds, he calculated the fine at 10 cents a day for 24 years and wrote out a check for \$2,190.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus asks this question: “What can a person give in exchange for one's life?” (Mark 8:37). The answer is: nothing. There is no overdue fine you can pay when the time comes to return the life you borrowed from God. So what does the Lord want us to do with the life He lends us? Jesus tells us:

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<sup>1</sup> "Uh, I Found This in My Attic," The Christian Science Monitor (5-20-05).

A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. 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. Mark 12:1-2

Much of the farmland in Galilee is owned by foreign landlords. So it's common for the owner to lease the land to tenant farmers who agree to pay their rent with a certain percent of produce. When harvest time arrives, the distant owner sends a servant to collect the pre-arranged rent. That's when the trouble starts.

But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he 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, others they killed. Mark 12:3-5

Talk about a terrible job assignment. It's a bill collector's nightmare. "All right Johnson, it's your turn to get the rent from the Grim Reapers. Oh, and Johnson, before you go make sure your life insurance is paid up and your will is in order." Why did the owner keep sending his servants to be beaten?

This is not just any vineyard and any landowner. When Jesus speaks of a vineyard his listeners know he really means the nation of Israel. The Landowner is the Lord. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah writes:

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 stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. Isaiah 5:1-2, 7

Who are the servants on this suicide mission? The prophets of the Old Testament right down to John the Baptist. Each one comes with the same message for God's people: Turn back to the Lord. Give God the fruit of your labor. Worship Him alone and throw away your idols. Be fair and just in your business, care for one another. But what do the people do with every prophet God sends? They beat some, stone some and kill the rest. The leaders of God's people refuse to acknowledge God's ownership of their land and their lives. They attack anyone who says otherwise. So the Landowner has one last option.

He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But 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. Mark 12:6-8

When the wicked tenants see the owner's son arrive, they quickly hatch a plot. They conclude the owner must have died and now the heir is coming to collect his property. If they kill him, then the land will have no owner. It will become theirs. As the young man enters the walls of the vineyard, the tenants cordially welcome him. At first they listen to him. Then they savagely fall upon him, tie him up, drag his body outside the walls of the vineyard and murder him.

But the tenants make one crucial mistake. The Owner is not dead. Jesus concludes his story with a question to the audience.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 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. Mark 12: 9, 12

Why does Jesus tell this story? He is living on borrowed time. The Son of God has just entered the walled vineyard called Jerusalem. The crowds cheer and welcome Him at first. But by the end of the week, in the dark of night, the leaders send troops to fall upon Him. They tie Him and try Him and take Him outside the vineyard walls to crucify Him. They know Jesus is accusing them. But instead of repenting and turning to Him, they do the very thing their ancestors did to the prophets, the very thing He warned them not to do: they kill God's messenger and take control of God's vineyard. What they do not know is Jesus' other prediction will also come true: in less than 40 years, Jerusalem and the Temple will be burned down. They do not know they are living on borrowed time.

God, the Owner, asks, "What are you doing with the life you borrowed from Me?" Years ago in a Men's Group the question came up: What will be written on your tombstone? Several of us confessed before we came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, the message was selfish. "Driven" or "Workaholic" would be chiseled on a few blocks. Several stones would boast of our achievements and acquisitions. Then someone asked, "What would your wife write on your tombstone?" No one dared answer that one. Yet we all know that's who will probably write it. But once Jesus became Lord, the words on the grave marker change. Now we want our graves to say: a good husband, father, Christian.

Whether you admit it or not, God is the owner of your life. The world will tell you your life is yours to do with as you will. Jesus says your life is a loan, you don't own it. It's important to follow the directions of the owner because He will ask for it back. You and I can say Jesus is the Lord of all my life, but the reality is right now He may only possess part of it. He may have your Sunday morning, but what about Monday through Saturday? He may have your heart but what about your eyes or your hands? He may have your home but not your career. He may have your soul but not your mind and body. He may have you when you're in public, but what about when no one is watching? I know Jesus does not have all of me. But when they asked, "What do you want on your tombstone?" God gave me the words John the Baptist said about Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). I want Jesus to own more and more of me.

How do you do that? Follow the steps He gives in the Gospel of Mark. All through the series we've been studying these stories to find out how to live as citizens of the Kingdom of heaven while we live here on earth. So ask yourself these questions:

1. Follow - Do I Stop Drop and Follow like the disciples? – Stop living for myself, drop the nets selfishness and follow where Jesus leads?
2. Change - Do I let God change me from the Inside Out like the paralyzed patient on the mat?
3. Share - Do I share the Good News about Jesus like the sower of seeds - even when I face frustrations and don't see much fruit?
4. Break - Do I ask God to break the chains which keep me in the darkness like the homeless man who was home to a legion of demons?
5. Trust - Do I trust Jesus to help me with my doubts like the father of the possessed boy?
6. Release - Do I get rid of the power, possessions, pleasures which block my relationship with God. Am I a loaded camel trying to shimmy through the eye of a needle?

These are the fruit the Owner wants from us.

This parable also relates to the vineyard God loans to you. Your vineyard is the area where you have influence: your school friends, your team, your work place, your neighborhood, this community, your family. These are also on loan to you. What fruit are you producing for God? Are you practicing kindness, humility, gentleness, forgiveness? Are you sharing the Word and inviting family and friends to find their way back to Jesus? Are you honest, fair and just? Do you stand up and speak up for those who are denied their rights, equality, fairness? Are you sharing your resources with the poor, oppressed, hurting, hungry, homeless, hopeless? What fruit do you give to the Owner of your life?

I am in awe of the fruit which comes from the vineyard of Woodside.

- You hosted our neighbors who are homeless on nineteen frigid nights in January. Some nights we welcomed as many as 58 guests on one night and 739 times a person received a delicious meal and a warm place to sleep.
- This month 40 hungry neighbors were served by our Dinner ministry.
- 130 meals were served to people in Kensington through Cast Your Cares.
- 56 people seeking recovery attended the Recovery Worship Service in February.
- More than 200 are receiving the Good News about Jesus through the Alpha Course.
- Last Wednesday our children assembled 45 Easter baskets which will be delivered to the children of Trenton through Urban Promise.
- On April 4<sup>th</sup> Habitat for Humanity will dedicate the first of the three houses we framed in our parking lot last summer.
- The children of the Mandevu School in Zambia have a safe place to learn and clean water to drink.

- And now you are helping train Evangelists who spread God's Word and raise up fruit for God's Kingdom in Zambia.

When we recognize Jesus is the Owner of our lives and we follow His will, we see miracles happen.

What are you doing with your time?