

# Were they Successful?

Drs. Larry and Lois Dodds



Sometimes we can become wounded. I'd like to share some thoughts from Mark 12, the story of the tenants. It starts off, "Jesus began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a long journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 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 and others they killed. He had one left to send, his 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 and threw him out of the vineyard."

The question that I'd like to raise is about the servants who did the master's will and went and tried to collect the harvest. And I'd like to ask the question - were they successful? Were they able to bring home the rent? Of course not, they weren't able to. But were they faithful?" Indeed, yes. These servants went out, went into the vineyard, did what they were told. Some of them were beaten and went empty-handed. Others were treated shamefully and still others were killed. Sometimes in ministry, it is easy to forget that we are indeed working in the Master's vineyard. He sends us out. What He asks of us is to be faithful. Now if we can be successful, that's wonderful, but the first thing He asks of us is to be faithful. But sometimes, in being faithful we may not be able to bring home the rent, bring home the fruit. It is something to consider when you are involved in the work in the vineyard- what may be happening to you. You may be mistreated, misused. Some people even killed, but are you faithful?

Another thing to consider-what was the master's viewpoint of the servants? Because they went out and followed his instructions and came back empty-handed. What did he think of them? Now the passage doesn't deal with that portion of it, but I think if he is really a righteous master, he would say, "You did the best you could. You were faithful." Those that were wounded in following his instructions, he would provide everything necessary for their restoration and their care, so they could continue serving him. But this is a passage of scripture that talks about this-that we can be wounded as a result of ministry. But the main thing the Lord asks of us is that we be faithful in doing what He asks. He doesn't turn us away if we don't bring home the fruit.

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I'd like to add to Larry's on the concept of obedience to God creating suffering for us. If you are an American Christian particularly, you've been taught that success is the number one thing. We know lots of people in ministry who get cut out of the mission budget or cut off the church staff, or however they may be supported, because they can't give the right statistics about their success. America and the western world are consumed with the idea that we should be successful. And for a while there was a trend to not support anyone who worked in the U.S. because it was more successful to work abroad. This is not Biblical because when we looked at scriptures like Larry read in Mark, what we see the pattern Jesus' commented on is obedience and faithfulness. That was His measure. His measure wasn't success. Because if He measured success, none of those people he sent out were successful. They didn't achieve the goal. So the Master has something in mind besides reaching the goal. He had a process in mind. He had maturity in mind. They were faithful to what He called them to do. I think that is a crucial distinction because we do get beat up when we are in ministry. We see people every day who have been deeply wounded because they were faithful. They didn't get hurt because it was their own fault. They got hurt because they were faithful to God's call. Many have been killed through the centuries and in this generation. Hundreds of thousands of Christians are killed because they were faithful. So, if you're struggling with the idea that maybe you aren't being successful or you are wondering why God is letting you suffer, please remember that you may be suffering because you are faithful.

Our American tendency is to think that I must have done something wrong. I think it comes from the 'Sound of Music.' Remember the song that Maria sings-when something good happens, she must have done something right. And when something bad happened, she must have done something bad. Maybe we got that from the Austrians being in the 'Sound of Music,' but we often think that. So we see lots of people who have been deeply wounded in ministry and Satan plants the idea that-"You see there, it was your own fault. You didn't hear God correctly, therefore you are beat up and wounded." But if we go back to the scriptures, those who were beaten up, wounded, and sometimes killed-it was precisely because of their obedience. I see in Jesus' life a transforming concept that when Jesus was crucified, He was in the exact center of God's will. Really the high point of all history-Jesus in the center of God's will and yet he was killed, right there in the center of God's will. It doesn't make sense and yet if we can have that perspective instead of the western world idea of success, I think it helps us keep going on our journey when we have been wounded.