

This talk is about doing the right thing, but doing it for the right reason.

Look at this parable--a story of phenomenal greed. A man owns a vineyard, but he lives somewhere else and leases the vineyard to tenants. At harvest time he sends his slaves to pick up the fruit, but the tenants won't hand it over. Instead, they keep the fruit and kill the slaves. They want the fruit so bad they'll kill to get it. The landlord sends more slaves and the tenants kill them. Finally he sends his son. The landlord figures, "Maybe slaves are the problem; surely they'll respect my son." But they don't. They kill the son.

This story isn't hard to figure out. The tenants are bad people: they steal, they deceive, they murder. The reason they act this way is that possessing the fruit is more important to them than human life. So they kill. They do the wrong thing for the wrong reasons.

This story isn't hard to figure out, but listen to the response the chief priests make to this parable. Jesus says, "What do you think will happen?" They say the landlord will punish the tenants and give the vineyard to someone else. That is the right thing to do. Good enough, but then the chief priests stick a foot in their mouth. Why will the landlord give the vineyard away? What is the reason that's the right thing? Is it because theft is wrong? Because deceit is wrong? Because murder is wrong? No. They say he'll give the vineyard to someone else because it's the only way the landlord can get his fruit. Even the chief priests think what's really important is the fruit. They chose the right action, but for the wrong reason.

Sometimes we take the wrong action for the wrong reason: We ~~abort~~ ^{Some} a human life for the sake of convenience; ~~we~~ ^{Some} cheat a co-worker for the sake of ~~our success~~ ^{getting ahead}.

Sometimes we take the right action for the right reason: We help the poor because it's our duty to share; we spend time with people because we love them.

And sometimes we take the right action for the wrong reason: We visit a sick relative so they'll quit bugging us. We take a spouse because all our friends did. Or like the chief priests we give someone our business but simply for our own benefit.

We often do the right thing, which is good. But doing it for the right reasons--that's better.