



# Christ Reformed Community Church

161 Hampton Point Dr. Suite 2 | St. Augustine, Florida | 32092 | christreformedcc.com

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Dr. Andrew Smith

## “Parable of the Vineyard” Mark 12:1–12

Please remain standing and take your copy of God’s Word and turn with me to Mark chapter 12, Mark chapter 12. The title of the message this morning: “The Parable of the Vineyard,” a familiar story that Jesus told. And Mark gives this to us in twelve verses, so I want to begin reading in verse 1, and I’ll read through verse 12 as we hear the Word of God together.

*And he [that is, Jesus] began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this Scripture:*

*“The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”*

*And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.*

Thus ends the reading of God’s Word. Please be seated. Let’s ask for the Lord’s help before we look at this text in detail together.

Our Father, we come this day, really the most important day of our week, most important moment of the week to study Your Scriptures. We pray that You might give us insight, Lord, as we seek to go back in time to recreate the events of this parable to understand it because so much of it is so foreign to us in our modern world. Help us, Lord, to understand this. Help us to understand not just the theological and historical aspects but also the practical application for our own hearts and our own lives, we pray, for the glory of Christ, our Savior. We ask things in His holy and precious name. Amen.

Verse 1 there in chapter 12 says that Jesus *“began to speak to them in parables.”* Parables were a common form of storytelling in Jesus’ day. They certainly would have been common for public speakers, for rabbis, and in particular our Lord Jesus Christ who was a master storyteller. Jesus had a way of communicating theological truths with colors in vivid detail, painting a picture that captivated His audiences as He brought to bear spiritual and practical application for them. The key to understanding parables is to understand that parables used features common to the people of the world in which they lived, yet always contained some sort of shocking value, some sort of shock value, and in Jesus’ case, many points of shock in order to arrest the attention of the hearers. For example, you’re familiar with the parable of the publican and the tax collector. Nobody expected in that parable for the publican to go home justified and the Pharisee to go home unjustified, but that’s exactly the way Jesus told the story, shocking His audiences. We aren’t left to wondering what the purpose of parables were. If you go back with me to chapter 4, Mark records Jesus saying exactly what they were for in verse 11: *“And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.””* Mark says in verse 10, *“And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.”* And so, Jesus is giving this explanation to say to the disciples that parables are designed to reveal truth to those inside of the kingdom in a subtle way and therefore hide truth from those outside of the kingdom.

However, in Mark chapter 12, we have an exception to this general rule regarding parables. This parable is different. This parable is designed to reveal the reality of God’s judgment to those outside of the kingdom. In fact, verse 9 speaks about God destroying the tenants and giving the vineyard to others, and then verse 12 says that the Sanhedrin perceived that Jesus told the parable against them. In other words, they were outside of the kingdom, and they understood exactly what the parable represented. They had challenged Jesus’ authority, right? We saw that last week in chapter 11. They come to Jesus as He’s teaching in the temple. They had interrupted His teaching. These scribes and elders, these Pharisees, they were a delegation sent by the seventy-one-member board known as the Sanhedrin to question Jesus by what authority He did these things. And in verses 27 through 33 of chapter 11, Jesus made it clear He was the final authority. He pointed to the ministry of John the Baptist to say, in essence, that if John’s ministry came with authority and John commissioned Me into the ministry, then My ministry comes with authority, and in fact, I am in authority over you, even though you are in authority over all of Israel as the great Sanhedrin. You only think you are in authority. I am actually in authority over you.

It is on this same occasion, as we move into chapter 12, that Jesus deliberately provokes these leaders by giving this parable about them. The purpose of the parable is to show very simply the historical pattern of Israel’s relationship to God, how they rejected all the prophets, how they are now rejecting His Son, but how His Son will have ultimate authority over them, eventually leading to His judgment of them. Jesus said in John chapter 5 very clearly that all authority had been given to Him: *“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”* In Matthew 7:29, it says they came to destroy Jesus because He spoke as one who had authority. Jesus says, *“And he has given him authority [the Son] to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man.”*

This parable delineates that. This parable teaches us several things about the longsuffering nature of God’s patience toward sinners. It teaches us the love of God in sending His Son into a world of wicked sinners. It teaches us about the willingness of the Son to suffer at the hands of cruel men. It teaches us about the literal and certain severity of God’s judgment toward wicked sinners who spurn and reject the Son sent to them. But it also speaks about God’s—listen to this—ultimate triumph in history through His successful accomplishment of the saving mission of the Son in spite of rebellious Israel. God’s glorious vineyard will bear fruit, and Jesus will reign as King. So, some have rightly called this parable a parable of judgment, and so it is, but it is also a parable of prediction. Jesus predicts His own death in this parable, suffering at the hands of the tenant farmers. And in that, He showcases the culpability of man to plot and to participate in the death of Jesus while at the same time highlighting the fact that this is part of God’s divine plan. It was necessary to the Father’s plan of redemption that the Son be killed. Remember Jesus said to the disciples on the Emmaus Road, *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”* Later this was affirmed by the apostles. It was necessary that the Son be killed. Acts 4: *“For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”*

This parable teaches us about the human responsibility of man in killing Jesus, but the divine plan of the Father that His plan cannot be thwarted even when wicked sinners kill His Son. But this parable is not meant to be relegated to the dusty shelves of history. This parable is just as much a story about us as it is about Israel. One commentator says this, and I quote:

God’s expectations were understandably high, for with all Israel’s advantages, He expected the development of a people who so radiated Him that they would be a light to the gentiles. In the divine plan, so much rested with the farmers—that is the spiritual leadership, and we must take great care that we do not leave the spiritual relevance of this back in the dusty passages of time. We farm a far richer vineyard than that of ancient Israel. We have no living prophets like Isaiah or Daniel, but we do have the complete Word of God and the testimonies of His messengers. We have so much more in our risen Christ, in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit along with the full revelation of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Added to this is the testimony of the saints for two thousand years. We are so rich spiritually, intellectually, and materially, and in fact Jesus said, *“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more,”* Luke chapter 12.

God is looking. He is ever looking to gather spiritual fruit from His people. He desired spiritual fruit from ancient Israel in the Old Testament. He desires spiritual fruit from His people today, and God is patient, God is longsuffering, but He is also a jealous God, one jealous for His glory, one capable of severe and certain judgment at the rejection of His Son. So, while I believe this is a parable of judgment and it is a parable of prediction, it is also a parable of optimism because it is made clear by Jesus that no one can thwart the plans of the Father. God’s glorious vineyard will bear fruit and God will be glorified even in a sin-cursed world.

Now, as we look at this parable, this parable of the vineyard as told by Mark, there are really three parts to this parable that reveal God’s authority, God’s authority to judge the world but also God’s authority to triumph with His true people in human history in spite of the crucifixion of Christ, His

only begotten Son. Three parts revealing such authority. First of all, we see the historical investment of the vineyard; secondly, the hate-filled indictment from the vineyard; and third, the humiliating indictment on the vineyard. The historical investment of the vineyard, the hate-filled indictment from the vineyard, the humiliating indictment on the vineyard.

Notice with me, first of all, the historical investment of the vineyard from verse 1. Jesus begins the story, *“A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.”* Jesus’ original hearers, who were Jews, Mark’s original audience to whom he wrote who were gentiles would have immediately understood that the vineyard Jesus spoke about was something commonly spoken about in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 5:1–7, the song of God’s vineyard, Israel, a vineyard that Isaiah 5 makes clear God had historically invested in. God had historically invested in the people of Israel beginning with father Abraham, to make a nation of them through whom he and his people would bless the world. We’ve looked in times past at Genesis chapter 12. What does God say? He says to Abraham, *“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* Isaiah 5 makes clear that Israel was this vineyard that God had planted. And so, after Jesus has this run-in with the religious leaders that we saw at the end of chapter 11, He gives this parable to highlight the history of Israel, all that God had done for them, drawing His imagery from Isaiah chapter 5. By the way, at the same time, people in Jesus’ own day would have understood the importance of vineyards. That was a heavy industry even in Jesus’ own day, so Jesus is drawing from the Old Testament, but this was common day language. Vineyards were common in Jesus’ day. And Jesus sets the parable up in verse 1 by describing a man who planted a vineyard. The man in the story did all that was humanly possible to ensure that this vineyard produced fruit from which wine could be made. First, notice verse 1, Jesus says, *“[He] put a fence around it.”* He put a fence around the vineyard. This likely involved first removing the stones that were in the way, and then resourcefully using those stones to build a protective wall around it. Afterward, the owner of this start-up vineyard, this start-up business, would have then planted the vines. He is doing all that he can.

Secondly, it says *“[He] dug a pit for the winepress”* there in verse 1. That’s so that after the grapes were cultivated, they could be crushed and then processed into wine. This was a monumental task which required literally excavating the earth, digging a very deep pit for the wine vat with an upper portion where grapes were crushed by the feet of grape treaders, a lower portion that had a pipe feeding to it from which the juice ran down from which it was later cultivated. The wine market in Israel was very huge. Now, there is what I call prohibition interpretations of Scripture which leads to the widespread use of grape juice at the Lord’s Supper. That is not what is being spoken about here. This is real wine that is sold for an expensive price, and yes, many people bought it and many people got drunk. The wine that Israel drank was not like grape juice. Now why do you think the Bible speaks so strongly against drunkenness? It’s because they had wine that could get them drunk. So, this is not grape juice. This is wine that would be sold for a very expensive price. This is a wealthy landowner who has a business venture.

Notice, third, what he does in verse 1. He builds a tower. He builds a tower. This is likely, first of all, for the storage of that wine before it was later sold, and also a place sort of to look around to guard the vineyard from jackals and foxes and would-be thieves. In fact, in Isaiah chapter 5, there’s

a watchtower that God has in His own vineyard. This would have been some twenty to twenty-five feet high. Fourth, the owner leased the vineyard to the tenants as verse 1 says, “*and went into another country.*” This was very common. The owner was a businessman, and the tenants were hired to work the land, to collect and store the wine, to continue to cultivate the vines in the absence of the owner, and then on collection day to then give back to the owner, to his servants one-fourth or maybe fifty percent of the proceeds of the sold wine that was basically agreed upon by a written contract. This is official business. This isn’t a hobby. This is an industry. This is serious stuff. And I’ll remind you that it’s not odd that this owner of the vineyard would go away to another country to have hired farmers because you will remember that even shepherds did that. They would have what were called hirelings, and you remember that Jesus used that as an analogy for the false teachers. Remember, Jesus said:

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing about the sheep.*

That was spoken about the religious leaders of Israel. Is that a clue to you that at the beginning of this parable when Jesus speaks about the hired farmers; that is, the tenants that He is speaking about the religious leaders? They didn’t invest the money. It wasn’t their vineyard. It was God’s. The tenants, they were blue collar workers. They needed a job. The landowner, he was white collar. He’s the one that had the money. He’s the one that had the creativity, the cultivation, the production of the vineyard. He’s the one that planned all of this. So, he goes away. He lets the workers work. Jesus sets up the parable for it to be understood what was very common, and that is you would only hire people you trusted. There was a deep level of trustworthiness between the owner and the hired farmers. There was also the expectation of the fact that they would actually work, that they would produce the wine, that they would sell it, that they would have some sort of business savvy themselves. Afterall, they were under contract, in submission to the owner.

Jesus is borrowing imagery from Isaiah 5, Israel’s long history of being recognized as God’s beautiful vineyard, His precious garden. And even as Jesus teaches this, He’s teaching it in the temple, the temple itself where there was ornately carved grapevines seventy cubits high around the door leading to the Holy Place, complete with branches made of gold and clusters of grapes made of costly jewels. All of that is in the background. Herod had the temple designed to fit the imagery of what represented Israel in her past, and that was that she was God’s vineyard. Throughout the Old Testament, it speaks about God planting this vineyard, this special, beautiful, historical vineyard that God invested in. For example, Psalm 44:1–2, “*O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them,*” that is Israel, “*you planted*” in a new land, Psalm 44. Or the song of Moses in Exodus 15, Moses sings, “*You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The Lord will reign forever and ever.*” So, everyone on this day would have understood that the vineyard was Israel, drawn from Isaiah chapter 5.

Now, I want you to turn back to Isaiah chapter 5 just for a moment. We read it earlier in our public reading of Scripture, but verse 1 is really the key to understanding this whole parable, and Isaiah 5 is key to understanding this parable. Notice with me in verse 1 of Isaiah 5: *“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard.”* Isaiah is referring to God as *“my beloved,”* and He says here, *“My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.”* God’s vineyard was land that was expected to produce fruit. It was fertile land. God didn’t buy cheap land. God didn’t cut corners. It was expected to produce, and God wasn’t afraid of work, verse 2: *“He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.”* This is almost identical language to Mark chapter 12; clearing the land, building a wall around it, having a watchtower, having a wine vat. This is God. This is Isaiah speaking about His beloved God who has a vineyard, but it produces wild grapes, as verse 4 says.

And then Isaiah says in this song, verse 5, *“And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.”* What is this? Destruction to a vineyard? Not just any vineyard, verse 7: *“For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is”* what? *“the house of Israel, and the men of Judah.”* They *“are his pleasant planting,”* but they have not produced grapes. In Isaiah’s song, God’s vineyard is laid waste. This is a biblical allegory that Isaiah gives. God is the owner. Israel is the vineyard. They are expected to produce spiritual fruit, but they are spiritually fruitless. They are a faithless nation. After all God has done for them in planting them in a fine land, choosing them from all the peoples of the earth, preparing them, cultivating them, giving them the Law of God. Romans 3:2, *“The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.”* They were stewards of God’s Word, stewards of God’s Law, and they fumbled it. That’s the context, and with that context of the parable drawn from the biblical allegory of Isaiah 5, we’ve really found the key that unlocks the parable by which we can go a little bit faster because the door of the parable’s meaning is now open to us.

We move, number one, from the historical investment of the vineyard; number two, to the hate-filled incitement from the vineyard, verses 2 through 8. It’s harvest time when Jesus picks up in the story, verse 2. Jesus says, *“When the season came, he sent a servant.”* *“When the season came...”* That would have been harvest season. Now, according to Leviticus 19:23–25, five years had to pass before you could harvest land, so understand that these hired tenants are growing a little bit comfortable. The owner hasn’t been around in five years. They’ve basically been able to do what they want to do with no supervision. But now collection day has come, because harvest time has come, and now all that has been invested by the owner in this vineyard will now come to fruition. So, he sends, verse 2 says, a servant *“to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.”* He’s eager to hear and see and taste the product that he had invested in. Apparently, he’s very wealthy. He probably had many business ventures, but this was his special one. He is able to pay a servant, travel expenses and all, to go all the way from the far country he’s in all the way to the vineyard to collect the money that was due him. Common, something that would and could happen in any sort of business, but Jesus introduces a shocking detail in verse 3. He says, *“And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.”* Completely disregarded their contract. They violently kicked this servant out after beating him, sending him *“away empty-*

*handed,*” revealing their disrespect, revealing their dishonesty. They broke the contract, revealing their ingratitude, revealing their greed.

This is absolutely shocking. Who would do such a foolish thing as that? But unfortunately, the pattern continued. Even more shockingly, verse 4, *“Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.”* And then verse 5, *“And he sent another, and him they killed.”* And then Jesus says, *“And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.”* The second servant is almost killed. They strike him on the head, shamefully mocking him. The third one they kill. The others, whatever they want to do—some they beat, some they killed, all sent away empty-handed. This reveals a settled hardness of heart, a violent, greedy, jealous, ingratitude for all that the owner had done for them in even giving them a job. Having the freedom to work their own land that was the owners but sort of theirs when he was gone. At this point it’s apparent that there’s another shocking thing about this parable, something that would have never happened in the world Jesus lived in, and that is there is something different about this owner. This is not like any other owner. He is longsuffering and he is kind. He’s different like other men who have power. He doesn’t use his power or his legal right to exact revenge. He sends servant after servant after servant after servant, and in fact, we see the most shocking thing of all, in verse 6. Jesus says, *“He had still one other.”* Not a servant, *“a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”* *“Surely, they’ll respect my son because he’s not just a servant. Surely, they won’t mistreat him. He is the heir of the vineyard. He is the one who has rightful claim to it. He is the one that will come with the most authority in my stead, in my place. Surely, these tenants will take that into account, that this is my son, that this is my heir.”*

Well, they did take it into account, but not the way the owner expected. Notice verse 7: *“But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’* Wow. I believe this is an echo of Genesis 37, the exact words that Joseph’s brothers used when they threw him in a pit: *“Come now, let us kill him.”* They were talked out of killing him, so they threw him in a pit, but they wanted to kill him. These tenant farmers do kill him. This is premeditated murder. I mean, understand the picture here. They don’t just want the fruit of the vineyard and the wine of the vineyard; they want the vineyard to themselves. They don’t want the owner to have anything to do with it. So, they try to avoid the authority of the father and his claim on the vineyard by killing the son, dismissing him, getting rid of the heir. This is shocking. It is wicked. It is utterly unthinkable, and at this point as Jesus told the story, everything they knew about vineyards and the business of wine was completely blown out of the water. They had never heard of anything like this ever happening. Who would do it? Did the tenant farmers think that the father was dead and that’s why the son came? Did they think the father was dead and all they had to do to get the vineyard was to kill the son? Because, after all, there was a law that said that unclaimed land for three years became the property of those that worked it, and maybe that’s a valid assumption. They assume the father is dead.

Perhaps they thought the owner would lose interest and not fool with the vineyard out of grief over the son’s death. I mean, after all, this is the owner of a vineyard that has a lot of businesses and a lot of money. *“Maybe he’ll just give up and it will be ours. We don’t have to listen to him. We don’t have to give him any of the produce, any of the product, any of the wine, any of the proceeds.”* But note again, verse 8. They not only kill the son, but notice it says they *“threw him out of the vineyard.”* They want no sign of authority. They want to forget the owner, forget the

son. They throw him out of the vineyard to be consumed as roadkill. No decent burial, complete disrespect, utter disregard, complete ingratitude. And we need to remember that this is just a story. It’s a story Jesus makes up, many of the details of which we must leave room for speculation. We don’t know why the tenant farmers killed the son. Was it because they thought the father was dead and they could get away with it because the son was the heir and once it’s gone it was theirs? Who knows? Maybe Jesus didn’t even intend for us to speculate that far, but this is what you do need to understand. All of the hearers and then later Mark’s readers and us even today are sucked into this story because of how obviously clear who Jesus is speaking about. He’s not telling the story for entertainment. He’s telling it to make theological, historical, and practical points that are a matter of life and death.

Who were these hate-filled tenants who incited first the longsuffering patience of the owner but then the justice of the owner, as we’re going to see? Who were they? Who does the vineyard represent? Who does the beloved son represent? Who are the servants? Who is the owner? Well, we’ve already discovered all of that, right? The vineyard is Israel. It’s the nation of Israel. Let me put it to you this way, with special privileges and prerogatives that God planted and prepared to bear fruit and with authority told them they must bear fruit. Who was the owner? That is God. He’s the one that has invested. He’s the one that has demonstrated His power, His creativity, His sovereignty. He is the one with the authoritative expectation. Who are the servants that are sent? Those represent the prophets sent time and time again to Israel, those who preached to Israel warning them, holding them accountable: “You must bear spiritual fruit. You must obey the Law of God.” All these servants that they beat and mocked and even killed. In fact, the word *sent* in verse 2, the word *sent* in verse 4 and verse 5, is *apsteilen*. It’s the word used for an official divine commission. It’s where we get the word *apostle*, “sent one.” The servants were sent ones from the authority of the owner, representing the prophets.

*“From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day,”* Jeremiah says, speaking on behalf of God, *“I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day.”* “Yet you do not listen to them. You do not incline your ear. You stiffen your neck more than your fathers.” That’s the history of Israel, constantly rejecting the prophet servants. Even Daniel’s prayer identified this. Daniel prays to God, *“We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.”* Over and over again. They would not obey the voice of the Lord God. *“They would not obey the Laws of God by listening to your servants, the prophets,”* Jeremiah says. What do we read in the New Testament but also a summary of the history of God’s people:

*Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

The people of God. What about John the Baptist? I believe he’s referred to in this parable, the servant sent that was struck on the head. John the Baptist lost his head, and who came after him? Jesus. Just like Elijah, driven into the wilderness. Just like Isaiah, tradition says according to the



second century apologist, Justin Martyr, sawn in two. Zechariah, who was stoned at the altar of God. Jeremiah, who was accused of treason. Jeremiah, like Joseph, who was thrown into a pit. Jeremiah, who was stoned according to tradition. Ezekiel, who was hated. Amos, who fled for his life. Micaiah, who was struck in the face. These servants, the prophets, are those represented by the servants of the owner in the parable.

The vineyard is Israel, the owner is God, the servants are the prophets, the beloved son is obvious, right? In fact, Jesus uses that phraseology, *“beloved son.”* *Huion agapēton*, *“beloved son.”* Go back with me to Mark chapter 9, the transfiguration. Peter, James and John, verse 6, *“For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’”* *“Listen to him.”* The beloved son of the owner was not listened to. He was killed. This represents Jesus. *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.”* The beloved son is the heir in the parable. The beloved Son is Jesus. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave [sent] his only begotten Son.”* In the parable, the son is thrown out of the vineyard, and what do we read about Jesus in Hebrews 13? *“[He] suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”* The bloodshed of the son in the parable is meant to remind us of the shedding of Christ’s blood upon the cross. They killed all the prophets before Jesus, and now they’ve killed the Prophet of all prophets, the one in whom the Father said, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* *“Listen to him.”* They didn’t listen to Him, but they killed Him. Remember the testimony of Stephen?

*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.*

You Israelites, who were stewards of the vineyard, you knew the Law of God. You knew the prophecies of God. You killed all the prophets. You persecuted the ones you didn’t kill, and then you slayed the very Son of God, the beloved Son? Israel is the vineyard. The owner is God. The servants are the prophets. The beloved Son is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and that only leaves one other character in the story, and that is the tenants. Who are the tenant farmers? These are the religious leaders, aren’t they? They are the ones Jesus is giving the parable to as an act of judgment. They are the ones who are stewards of God’s vineyard, Israel. Right? They were to nurture the production of the spiritual fruit and they failed. They were following in the footsteps of their fathers. Turn with me to Matthew 23:29. Jesus addresses them: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous.”* You act like you love the history of this great prophetic tradition as if you just hung on every word the prophets said.

*For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.”* Jesus says: *“Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. [You] are sons of those who murdered the prophets.”*

*Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

This generation, this generation of religious leaders. God says through Jesus, because God is Jesus, “I will judge you. Your fathers violently killed the prophets. You’re going to continually violently kill the apostles and the followers of Christ, and in this generation, judgment is going to come upon your establishment, upon your temple, upon your priests, upon your ceremonies. You will be judged. Why? Because you are the tenants of the vineyard that God created. You were the leadership responsible to prune and cultivate the vineyard so that it bore fruit, and instead you killed all the fruitful words of the prophets, so that now that I look at the nation of Israel there is no fruit. I’m done with them. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees.” Jesus’ original audience knew exactly who these characters represented. With the knowledge of Isaiah 5 in Israel’s leadership, they had interrupted Jesus’ sermon about His authority. So, now He deliberately provokes them by giving them a parable of judgment because of their fruitlessness and faithlessness.

And the parable moves on. Jesus’ authority is seen not only in the historical investment of the vineyard—the hate-filled incitement from the vineyard—but finally, number three, the humiliating indictment on the vineyard. Now comes the judgment, verses 9 through 12. This is the owner’s vineyard, not the tenants. So, Jesus says in verse 9, “*What will the owner of the vineyard do?*” What will he do? Jesus says, well, “*He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.*” Very interesting. The word *owner* is the Greek word *kyrios*. It’s the word for “lord.” Now, we know for a fact the owner is the lord in the story. The same word that’s used in Isaiah 5:3, the lord of the vineyard. This owner is going to destroy them. What happened in 722 BC? The Assyrians came and overthrew the Northern Kingdom of Israel, took them into exile. What happened in 586 BC? The Babylonians came and took the Southern Kingdom into exile. This was the history of Israel, right? The history of Israel was exactly what Jesus says in verse 9. The vineyard was destroyed, and it was given to others. That was Isaiah 5. That’s what Isaiah 5 was saying. The Northern Kingdom is going to be destroyed. The Southern Kingdom is going to be destroyed, but in those instances, it was temporary, right? The Jews always returned. They rebuilt the wall. They rebuilt the temple.

Here in verse 9 when Jesus says, “*He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others,*” this is the final word of judgment. He doesn’t say He’s going to destroy the vineyard. The people of God will continue. He’s going to destroy the tenants of the vineyard. He is going to destroy the leadership of Israel and thus wipe Israel out, and He’s going to give the vineyard to others. Remember, Jesus said, “This judgment will happen in this generation,” Matthew chapter 23. Jesus is predicting what would happen in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans. When Jerusalem was invaded, the temple was destroyed, complete and permanent destruction of the temple because of the Jewish revolt that God used in His sovereignty. No more temple, no more sacrifices, no more ceremonies, no more priesthood—God’s judgment. Jesus is predicting that historical event. He’s predicting the judgment of the tenants, the religious custodians of God’s vineyard, the Sanhedrin. He’s going to destroy them, and He’s going to give the vineyard to others. This is a

humiliating indictment. What He’s saying is this: the Sanhedrin which represents the twelve tribes of Israel will no longer exist. No more temple, no more sacrifices, and by the way, a temple has not been rebuilt. No more will this be going on with the Sanhedrin and their lack of good stewardship. No longer will you represent the twelve tribes because now I have the twelve apostles that will replace you. And after the twelve apostles replace you as stewards of the vineyard, look throughout all of church history and what you will find, something very ironic and purposeful by God, there is hardly any Jewish leaders in the church. They’re all gentile. Why is that? Not because God’s purposes have been thwarted but because they have been fulfilled. What did God tell Abraham? He said that His blessings would reach the nations, and in Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed. The only way that could happen is if this vineyard was taken away from Israel because they were not good custodians of all that God had given them. It’s an ultimate word of judgment.

And the apostles came with authority, didn’t they? The apostles came with authority. They spoke with the authority of the Old Testament. They continued to preach, of course, the Old Testament. *“All Scripture is breathed out by God, profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* All of Scripture, all of the Old Testament, all of the New Testament. Remember, Jesus told the apostles that they would have authority. In John chapter 14, Jesus told them, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”* We have the gospel writers who record all that He said to them. We have the apostle Paul who records holy inspired Scripture. John 15: *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”* Authoritative apostles taking over the vineyard, speaking with the authority of God. God has the right men in place now. John chapter 16:

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

All of the truth of God, all of the truth that God wants us to know, the apostles will clarify in the New Testament so that together with the Old Testament, they are preachers of God’s truth replacing the faithless leaders of Israel. You say, “Well, I thought ethnic Israel was always God’s people.” Well, God used them, and God certainly chose them and certainly blessed them, and God is still saving Jews today. But let me ask you a question; how can you read 1 Peter chapter 2 and not understand that the vineyard has been taken away from ethnic Israel and now we are in an international church, and we are the true Israel of God? Peter says:

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

The vineyard has been given over. As R. C. Sproul says, and I quote: “Jesus was saying that God would destroy the temple, the Jewish sacrificial system, the priesthood, the Sanhedrin, and all the rest. The very heart of Judaism He would destroy, and He would give the vineyard to the gentiles, and all this occurred when Rome wiped out Jerusalem in AD 70.” You even have a historical event that confirms it. But Jesus elaborates, notice your Bibles back in Mark 12:10. Jesus gets a little sarcastic: *“Have you not read this Scripture.”* I thought you were the religious leaders that had the Bible memorized. Have you never read the Scripture, Psalm 118? *“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”* This refers to the stone is rejected, originally the building of Solomon’s Temple, deemed unfit for use to build the sanctuary, and Jesus applies this to Himself. He says, “I am the rejected stone. I am the rejected Rock. I became the cornerstone. I became,” we could say, “the keystone around which God’s eternally perfect plan was fulfilled.” This wasn’t an accident. Gentile Christians are not simply plan B, and God’s going to go back to plan A, Israel. No, this was the plan, that He be rejected so that He could become the cornerstone by which the temple of God could be built throughout the whole world, so Genesis 12 could be fulfilled, that through Abraham and his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Jesus is bringing all this theology to bear upon His audience. And Mark brings this out because Mark also quotes Jesus as quoting, not just Psalm 118:22, but also verse 23. Notice your Bibles there in verse 11. It says, *“This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”* The human rejection is verse 10, right? The stone that the builders rejected—that was Israel, the religious leaders. They rejected Jesus. That’s humanity. Verse 11 is God’s doing: *“This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”* The divine plan. It was marvelous that Jesus was rejected. Why? So that the vineyard could be handed to others so that the gospel could go throughout all the world. The fruit of Israel’s vineyard was not being tasted in the Old Testament by the vast majority of the world.

How in the world is God’s promises to Abraham, the first Jew, going to be fulfilled unless this vineyard is given to people that will be responsible? This was all in the divine plan of God. This was the Lord’s doing. It was *“marvelous in our eyes”* because this was the beautiful, magnificent, marvelous plan of God from the beginning, that His Son would be crucified so that He would be raised and ascend on high. The gospel would be preached to the nations. God’s plan isn’t thwarted. As in the parable of the soils, the fruitless soils, there were three of them. Only one productive soil. The three fruitless soils did not affect God’s plan because God knows who His people are. He has chosen them. He sent His Son to die for them. God’s tree will produce fruit in the world. You remember back in Mark chapter 4, the parable of the mustard seed, verse 30?

*“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?”* Jesus says, *“It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

It’s amazing. Due the rejection of Jesus Christ, the rejection of that cornerstone, God’s perfect blueprint, His perfect plan was fulfilled, solidified, confirmed. In the wise counsel of God, though the religious leaders, though Israel rejected the stone because they thought it didn’t measure up the standards God did, God used that stone, Jesus, to be the very cornerstone from whom everyone is

connected around, Jew and gentile that believe in Jesus, who become the true Israel of God, the vineyard of God that bears fruit. He became the most important stone to the building of the true people of God, the one that made the temple of God sturdy and square, that fulfilled the promises of God. As Jesus said, *“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,”* through the gospel, through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the apostle Paul is not afraid to tell gentile Christians that they are *“no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”* They are Jews, spiritual Jews, *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”* Jesus is making all these statements about being the rejected cornerstone on the temple grounds, right there—the true temple speaking forth how God’s prophecies are fulfilled. First Peter 2:

*For it stands in Scripture:*

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

*So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,*

*“The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,”*

*and*

*“A stone of stumbling,  
and a rock of offense.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

Jesus is not only a cornerstone that builds up, He is a cornerstone that crushes, and He’s going to crush and judge these religious leaders because it was predestined by God that they be judged, the vineyard be taken away, given to gentiles so there will be an international church so that God’s fruitful tree will fill the world. Its branches will fill the world, and there will be enough shade for all the birds of the air to find rest in. This is what Jesus is saying. He is the sure foundation. He is the solid Rock that we sang about. He is our only hope. We must submit to His authority, all according to the plan of God. *“It is marvelous in our eyes,”* to quote Psalm 118:23 because Paul and Barnabas even said, *“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.”* Because of that, *“Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”* Turning to the gentiles. Jesus Himself had spoken about that. Remember the crumbs that were eaten in that story earlier in Mark?

What about those Jesus says in Matthew chapter 8: *“Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith,”* speaking about the centurion. *“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while,”* he says,

*“the sons of the kingdom,”* that is, Israelites, the religious leaders, *“will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* Can I just have a few crumbs? *“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”* *“Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”* Jesus says, *“For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.”* The Syrophenician woman, a gentile brought into the family of God. Israel and her religious leaders were still culpable. Even though it was predestined this would happen according to the divine plan of God, they are still responsible. Jesus says in Matthew 21:

*Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*

It's Matthew's parallel version of this account. The kingdom of God is being taken away. The vineyard is being taken away, given to another people that will bear fruit, and anyone who gets in the way of this stone now, the stone will crush. Jesus doesn't quote Psalm 118:24. He quotes verses 22 and 23, but interestingly verse 24 of Psalm 118 says, *“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”* This is something to rejoice about, that through the wickedness of evil men killing our Messiah, the vineyard has been enlarged. The gospel is now going into the world. Jesus is the true Israel you must be connected to. He is the one obedient Son of God.

*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [But] there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*

This is the authoritative risen Christ that must be submitted to, but even at this point, the religious leaders recognized the parable is about them and their hearts are hardened even further. Notice, finally, in verse 12. Jesus is done with the story. He's done with the application. He has humiliated them. He has indicted them, and verse 12 says, *“And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.”* Who was they? That's the religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, the committee sent. They feared the people because the people loved Jesus. How could you argue with the story Jesus just told, the clarity by which He spoke it, the authority by which He spoke it? And yet they walk away. *“For they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.”* Even as the parable concludes, it is barely concluded, the words are barely gone from Jesus' lips, and they're already fulfilling the tenants. They go away to conspire, to collude, to kill the beloved Son to their own detriment. I mean, the irony, standing right on Solomon's Porch where Jesus is teaching, the original location of the temple, the original cornerstone, the grapevine carved out ornately above the door of the Holy Place in the background, the gold leaves, the costly jewels that were looking like grapes, the Mount of Olives in the background. Remember the lone, barren fig tree? You can see the Mount of Olives right where they were standing, the lone, barren fig tree that represented them, the Kidron Valley 450 feet below—all a symbol.

They left that temple, and it’s like they stepped off the great abyss right into hell because their hearts were hardened. Jesus humiliated them and they would not bow to His authority. Galatians 5 is clear; true Christians produce the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is the essence of the Christian life. But like the withered fig tree not bearing fruit, like the religious leaders in Israel not bearing fruit, the Bible is clear that God will cut off branches that do not bear fruit. Remember what Jesus said, and these are the words of Jesus. He says He is the true vine.

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” Not rotten fruit but true fruit. And what was true of Israel is true of the church today. Paul offers a warning to the visible church in Romans chapter 11. He speaks about the wild olive branches grafted in, gentile believers, and Jesus says:

*But if some of the branches were broken off [Jews], and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” [Paul says] That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God.*

God is both kind and severe. Don’t we see that in the story of the owner, longsuffering and patient, but also severe in judgment? He’s only longsuffering to a certain point. You spurn His Son, you reject His Son, the branch gets cut off even if you’re part of the visible church, even if you’re a professed believer, even if you’ve been baptized. Think about the generations of Israelites that thought they were a shoo-in in the kingdom. They were rejected. The vineyard was handed over. God is a consuming fire. That’s why Isaiah says, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

All of His elect God desires to reach repentance, and to those that don’t He becomes a crushing stone, even to those who are connected to the family of God in some superficial way. It’s what the Bible clearly teaches. Paul says in Romans 9:33, “As it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’” But the one who rejects Him, Psalm chapter 2: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” Spurgeon said one time, “If you reject Jesus, He answers you with tears. If you wound Him, He bleeds out cleansing. If you kill Him, He dies to redeem. If you bury Him, He rises again to bring resurrection. Jesus is love made

manifest.” And I would only add to that, but if you spurn Him long enough, He will reject you. He will reject you. All authority has been given to the Son. Jesus the cornerstone, Jesus the Rock will either make you or break you. He’s one of salvation or damnation. He will crush and condemn or rescue and redeem. He is the only means of salvation. Turn to Him, look to Him, run to Him, find refuge in Him.

Maybe just another word about leadership. Leadership in the church is serious business. God judged the religious leaders of Israel for their domineering, headstrong, stubborn, arrogant ways. God uses faithful tenants to nurture His vineyard. He opposes faithless and violent tyrants. First Peter 5:3: *“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”* *“To whom much was given, of him much will be required.”* And so, you see that the vineyard is really God’s people. The vineyard is God’s church. God’s church has always existed. It existed in seed form in ethnic Israel, but it has always existed. It has always had people, people that God calls to bear fruit, spiritual leaders that are to nurture and cultivate that fruit by preaching the Word of God, by teaching the truth, calling sinners to repentance.

Don’t build your theology and outworking of God’s plan around ethnic Israel. Build it around the true Israel of God that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t be guilty of misunderstanding God’s plan of the world as a plan that only goes to a certain ethnic group of people. Jesus is very clear right here, the vineyard was taken away. Christians are made up of people from every tribe and tongue and people group. It is an international church because Jesus has supreme authority. The plan of the Father couldn’t be thwarted even though Jesus was killed. That was according to the Father’s plan so that He would be raised, that He would ascend on high, that we would go into the world with the authority of Jesus Himself, and declare the gospel so that God’s glorious vineyard would have vines and fruit that go down the street of your neighborhood, down the street of your community, throughout this world for people to taste the salvation wine of God, to be drunk with His Spirit, to live for Him so that someday this sin-cursed world will be a world controlled and ruled by God. God has not messed up. Plan A has not been ditched. He is sovereignly working out this whole thing in spite of the crucifixion of His Son. So, look to His Son, believe in Him. He is your King whether you recognize it or not, and He will judge all men and women, boys and girls some day. May our faith be in Him. Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for this parable that richly gives to us the history of Israel, the rejection of the prophets, the rejection and ultimate crucifixion of the Son, but the eventual victory of Christ. It is marvelous in our eyes that this occurred because even through the most extreme wickedness that ever occurred, the crucifixion of Christ, the most glorious plan of salvation was solidified, confirmed and realized. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is King. He is the one in authority. May we be submissive to Him. May He be Lord of this church, Lord of our lives, Lord of this community, we pray for Your glory. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.