

What will the lord of the vineyard do?

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[0 : 00] Now as we come to this chapter 12 in Mark's account of the gospel, one of the things that we need to bear in mind is what we've often mentioned in the past is that the original scripture as it was written and inspired by God of course did not contain chapter and verse and these breakings up of the text with which we are now so familiar.

And the point to make here is that between verse 33 of the end of chapter 11 and the beginning then of verse 1 in chapter 12 there is in fact a continuous narrative.

And the reason this is important is that when we come to verse 12 where it says they sought to lay hold on him but feared the people. Unless we bear this continuity in mind then it's not immediately apparent that he's talking to or about the chief priests and the scribes who confronted him from verse 27 in chapter 11 saying you know who gave you the authority to cleanse the temple?

By what authority do you overturn these tables and the money changers and who gave you this authority? And so he asks them the question about John's baptism and then it says he began to speak unto them by parables.

And if we take the breaks in the chapters as though you know making a whole new scene then we mentally click into the idea he's just talking to the people.

[1 : 24] In which case if he's just talking to the people and the chief priests and scribes aren't still there then who are those at verse 12 who see that he has spoken the parable of the vineyard against them?

In other words they are still there. They've been baffled by his question about John the Baptist but they are still there not daring to retreat. They are there in his immediate presence with the people, with the crowds as he then launches into this parable which he then tells.

I was going to say against them but it's simply a parable which if the cap fits and they see that it does then they are compelled to wear it. As Jesus begins this parable, the parable of the vineyard, a certain man planted a vineyard and said an hedge about it, dig the place for the wine vat, built a tower, let it out to husband men.

Then two things are immediately apparent to his audience. One for those who are aware of the scriptures and that would be most of them would have had some kind of grounding in the scriptures. They would instantly recognize one of the famous illustrations of the prophet Isaiah chapter 5. Isaiah chapter 5 which begins, Now I will sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.

[2 : 44] My well beloved have a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it and gathered out the stones thereof and planted it with the choicest vine and built a tower in the midst of it.

And also made a winepress therein and he looked that it should bring forth grapes and it brought forth wild grapes. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?

Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes brought it forth wild grapes. And then he says in the conclusion of verse 7 in Isaiah 5, For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant.

And he looked for judgment but behold oppression, for righteousness but behold a crime. And as soon as Jesus began to talk about the vineyard and the man planting the vineyard and all the details therein it, he planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, digged a place for the wine vat, built a tower, and let it out to the husband and think, oh yeah, that's like Isaiah 5, that's like the story we heard years ago in the synagogue.

And they would click into that and they would understand instantly that this is a parable painting a picture of the people of Israel. Painting a picture of God's relationship with Israel and that all is not well in that relationship.

[4 : 03] All is not as it should be. Secondly, however, remember that when Jesus took his parables, he took that which would be familiar to him. Scenes of agriculture or fishing or, you know, the difficulties of what we might call industrial relations between bosses and labourers and so on.

And such would be the case here. Israel, Palestine in those days, was filled with absentee landlords. The people were taxed heavily, the labourers were poor, the people were oppressed, and the landowners tended to be rich.

And they were often absent. Either they had gone to seek a better life in a different country but still regarded their land as a source of income. Or perhaps it was a Roman citizen who was the lord of the vineyard and he was away in Rome but he still wanted his dues when he sent for the money and so on.

And the husbandmen or the labourers in the vineyard having the responsibility of doing the work and still having to send off the rent to the landlord. And the friction between them perhaps.

This would all be very familiar to the people to whom Jesus is talking. So instantly their ears prick up and their eyes will open because this is something they know about.

[5 : 14] This is something they're familiar with. Now as we go into the details then of this parable, we understand firstly, well they would understand in a way that perhaps we don't.

We read this first verse, we think, oh yeah, he dug the wine flat and he hedged it about and he built the tower and so on. As long as the work of five minutes. Remember that the Bible tends in its descriptions to telescope things.

If you look, for example, in Genesis 38 where you've got the account of Judah and the raising up of his family. And you've got him meeting his wife, marrying his wife, having his first child and then he arranges a wife for his first child.

All in the business of five verses. So you've got the business of meeting, marrying, having kids and then choosing a wife for the firstborn of his children. By which time obviously the firstborn has grown up.

They've just skipped past like 20 years plus just in order to get to the main event which is the problems that arise in that marriage and all that follows from it.

[6 : 15] So the business of digging out a wine vat which would be underneath the wine press, that probably has to be dug out of the rock. You don't have diggers, you don't have cranes, you don't have pressure kind of machinery to do it for you.

It has to be dug out with picks by hand. Hard work, long slog, takes a long time. Setting the hedge about it might be a physical hedge and otherwise plants growing up with a sort of frame or it might just be a stone wall round about the hedge.

Either way, it takes time. You've got to find the materials, you've got to grow the hedge if it's a physical hedge or you've got to build a wall, dry stone wall. We know what that's like in this island and this kind of culture and community.

See, it takes time. A lot of skill, a lot of investment. Build a tower. You've built the tower in order to store your projects so that when you gathered in your groups, they could be stored there.

All your wine, it could be stored in the tower, locked away. You'd have a watchman on top of the tower to watch for any potential thieves at harvest time, keeping a constant watch on your investment.

[7 : 18] The tower would also be sufficiently substantial and roomy for the labourers to have their lodgings in it. They would live on site at the vineyard.

That's where they would stay. And then he let it out to have a minute. So before you even get to the renting out of the vineyard, you've got a huge investment of time and effort and energy in the planting of this vineyard.

Vines are not sturdy, strong plants. They are fragile. They need a lot of attention. They need a lot of nurturing. To do it from scratch on ground that would have been like virgin ground beforehand, that's a huge amount of breaking up on the ground.

That is a massive investment. Just as in Isaiah 5, you know, they skip over, or the Lord, he cleared out the stones and he built the hedge and he made the vineyard. This is years of work that's involved here.

So before we even start with the husbandman, the Lord of the vineyard has made a massive investment of time and energy and of himself and his own wealth and resources in order to bring forth this fruit.

[8 : 28] And obviously when we get into the parable itself and we see the relationship between God and his people, the Lord is always ahead of us. Whatever may be our current dealings with the Lord or the nature of our relationship to him or what's going on in my life just now, the Lord has already seen this coming.

He has already prepared whatever the circumstances or the situations in our lives. He is already well prepared for every eventuality. He is already way ahead of us.

He has made his plans. He has invested his resources. Nothing catches him by accident. And as I've often said in the past, forgive me for repeating myself, if you doubt that, then take your Bible and stick your thumb or your finger in where the New Testament chapter 1 begins.

And look at the fatness of what goes beforehand by way of preparation before you even get to Matthew chapter 1 in the New Testament, which is explicitly about the Lord Jesus Christ.

But remember that all that has gone before is also about preparing the way for Christ. It is not just the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as the title page says.

[9 : 44] It is also the Old Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is all about him from start to finish. Look at the difference. The fatness and the thinness.

The amount of preparation and investment beforehand and then the amount that actually deals with the lifetimes and testimony of Jesus and his apostles and so on. God is way ahead of us, investing hugely in the lives with which he has to do.

And at the season, he sent out to the husbandman a servant that he might receive from the husbandman of the fruit of the vineyard. How long is at the season?

Well, Luke's account of this parable tells us, chapter 20, verse 9, that he went into a far country for a long time. How long is a long time?

How long is a piece of string? If you look at what Leviticus says about the fruits of the land, we look in chapter 19. It says at verse 23, When ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised.

[10 : 50] Three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you, it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year, all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the Lord withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof.

I am the Lord your God. So if the owner of the vineyard is going by the law of God, then he won't be seeking fruit before five years from the planting of the vineyard.

So the laborers in the vineyard, they've had a good long time tending it, nurturing it, getting paid, no doubt for doing it. And all this time when they're pretty much running the show themselves.

So we see here God's generosity. We see his trust. And we're about to see something of his divine patience here at the season.

He sent to the husbandman a servant that he might receive from the husbandman of the fruit of the vineyard. This is the standard way in which rent would be paid. A proportion of the fruit. Either it might be a fixed rate, a set amount, or it might be simply a percentage of what the vineyard had actually produced.

[11 : 57] And they caught him and beat him and sent him away empty. What makes them so bold to do this? What on earth makes them think they can get away with it? This, I would suggest to you, the owner of the vineyard is a long way away.

If you think in terms of the Roman Empire and think of Palestine, you think he might be in Rome, he might be in Greece, he might be in Babylon, he might be in Egypt. He's far away. And it takes months for news to travel.

If they have beaten up one of his servants, then, you know, by the time he reaches his master, his wounds will be healed, his bruises will have faded. And, you know, it'll be months later, he says, well, actually, they beat me up and they wouldn't give me anything.

So his master may or may not believe him, but he'll send somebody else. That takes months. In the meantime, another year will have come and gone, another harvest will have been, and so on.

And again he sent unto them another. Send another servant. And at him they cast stones and wounded him in the head and sent him away shamefully handled.

[12 : 59] Now this isn't just throwing the odd stone like a nasty children like a dog or something like that. This is attempting to stone somebody almost to death. This was a method of execution in the Old Testament.

They don't actually kill him, but they wound him in the head. He's been hit in the head with stones. And so he is almost stoned to death, but not quite. They sent him away shamefully handled. Now it says, verse 5, he sent another. This is the point at which it becomes very, very clear that this is actually just an illustrative parable. This is not Jesus telling an incident that actually physically happened.

How do we know this? Because there is no person on earth who would allow any of their employees to be maltreated twice over like that and to be refused their legitimate rent before they hired a mob, killed the tenants of the vineyard, and took it over again themselves.

You might, you might, for the sake of argument, put up with it once. You're never going to put up with it twice. But here the owner of the vineyard is, he sends another one.

[14:12] And after, and they kill that one, but again it will take months for the word to get back to the Lord of the vineyard and many others beating some and killing some. And this, of course, is becoming increasingly obvious.

This is a parable, an illustration of the prophets of the Lord and their relationship between God and the people to whom they are sent with God's messages. Some of the prophets they murdered, others they banished, others they just maltreated or wounded or whatever, or put in prison, beating some, killing some.

Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. Now you might think on the one hand, what on earth would persuade him that they would reverence his son when they hadn't revered his servants.

And on the one hand, you think, well, because they will see that he is taking this seriously. This is the boss's son that is here now. We probably better stop all the fun and games that's been going. Yes, we probably better toe the line now and give him what we ought to get, what we should have been giving before. Yes, okay, fair enough. They will reverence my son.

[15:23] They will see that I'm serious. They will see that I mean business. They will see that this has moved up a level now. This is the boss's son here now to require what ought to have been given at the outset.

Now remember that by this stage, at least two or three years must have passed from the original sending to request for fruit, because each time you send a messenger and one of them gets beaten up or killed or whatever, it takes months for the news to travel backwards and forwards in the Roman Empire of that way.

But those husbandmen said among themselves, this is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. Now notice what it says. He sent him also last unto them, saying, they will reverence my son.

In Matthew's account of this parable, chapter 21, at verse 37, it emphasizes this point, it says, last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son.

It is the end of the line. There are no more prophets, no more times of preparation after this. You know what, like what Hebrews tells us, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2.

[16:37] God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners, spake in time passed unto the fathers by the prophets, the servants who have been sent to the vineyard, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the words.

In the past he spoke by the prophets, now he spoke by his son. The end of the line, or as Matthew puts it in chapter 11, verse 13, for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, John the Baptist, last of the prophets.

Now you've got Jesus, the son. There is nothing, there's no prophets after that with a capital P. There's people with the gift of prophecy in the New Testament church, in the apostolic church, but no prophets with a capital P, like Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel or John the Baptist.

That's the end of the line. It finishes, it culminates with his son. Now this is something to bear in mind if you happen to be visited, for example, by representatives of, say, the Latter-day Saints, who would ever say, well, God always deals with his people by a prophet.

He always leads his people by a prophet. And he'll quote a couple of scriptures here and there. You've got to bear in mind the law and the prophets prophesied until John. John is the last of the prophets, capital P.

[17:52] Once Jesus has come, once the son has been sent, it is last of all. There are no legitimate prophets after that.

There are no legitimate prophets preparing the way of the Lord after the Lord Jesus Christ. And obviously that has implications for other world religions too.

But this is the end of the line. Last of all, he sent to them his only son. Another little point which is worth bearing in mind is that not only is it last of all he sends his son, but in Mark's account of the gospel, and also in Luke, his account of the gospel too.

Not in Matthew, but in Mark and Luke. This is actually the last parable Jesus tells. Strange as it may seem. This is the last parable Jesus tells in Mark and Luke.

All the rest, it's answering questions or teaching his disciples about how he's got to die and be offered up and rise again on the third day. You've got the Passover. You've got the interaction of Judas and the chief priests.

[18 : 55] You've got all these things affecting the last week and the last few days of his life. But this is the last parable Jesus tells in Mark and Luke's account of the gospel.

And as he tells this last parable, so this last parable culminates with the sending of the son and the response of the husbandmen to the son.

It also tells us about God's infinite, divinely extended love. This is love that no human being would stretch to. Even if they felt the love, they wouldn't allow their love to stretch this far to interfere with business to this extent.

If you're waiting for your rent and they're busy killing your servants and beating your servants and so on, if this was a Roman landowner here, then after the first incident, possibly the second, he would simply send in the troops.

They would just probably crucify publicly outside the vineyard, the husbandmen. They would settle a retired Roman soldier over the vineyard and they'd just carry on. Nobody is going to put up with this amount of grief the way that God has done so with his people.

[20 : 06] This is a divine love, which is beyond our comprehension here. Like Paul writes to the Ephesians, chapter 3, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

This is divine love, way beyond anything that man can comprehend. And it is the end of the line.

What shall therefore the Lord of the vineyard do?

They said, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. There was a tradition or a law, you know, Genesis 15 alludes to it, that servants could inherit if there was no son, if there was no heir to inherit.

Remember, Abraham's steward in Genesis 15, Eleazar of Damascus, he stood to inherit everything, one born in his house. Whether or not these tenants would come into that category, it's dubious, but at the end of the day, you know, they say, that inheritance will be ours, possession nine-tenths of the law, and they possibly thought, he's so far away anyway.

He's not going to care what we do here. He's probably got umpteen vineyards all over the empire, even if we kill his son. The reason the son is here is probably because the father's dead, or he's too old, or he's too decrepit, or he doesn't care enough.

[21 : 41] He's not going to bother if he's still alive, and probably he's dead anyway. So if we kill the son, we get control over everything. Put the son to death.

They took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. They didn't even bury him. They cast him out of the vineyard. And here is the ominous question at verse nine.

What shall therefore the Lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen and will give the vineyard unto others.

Matthew emphasizes it even more. You know, it says, and what the Lord of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? And in that account, in Matthew's account, Jesus asks the question and the crowned answer.

And the way that it's put in Matthew's account, it's an emphatic, he will miserably destroy those wicked men. And in the Greek in which it's originally written, it's an emphatic that doesn't easily translate.

[22 : 42] There's two Greek words as *cacus*, *cacos*. It's almost like a play on words, *cacus*, *cacos*, miserably destroy. It's an emphatic, it's almost like saying, he will smash them to bits or he will tear them limb from limb.

It's not, oh, he'll come and destroy them. Oh yes, he'll come and punish them. So they, no, his vengeance is going to be poured out on them emphatically. And he will let out the vineyard to others who will render unto him the fruits in their season.

He, the vineyard is too valuable a commodity. There's too much invested in it for it to be discovered. It will be given to others. The vineyard will continue.

With or without those husbandmen. Now, the Lord obviously in the context is speaking about Israel as a people, about the rulers of Israel, and about how they have treated the messengers sent them, how they have treated God's own messengers, and how they will ultimately treat his son.

This tells us not only that Jesus is the last in the line, it also tells us that he knew he was going to die. He knew that his death was already on the cards, and he was prepared for it and accepting of it.

[23 : 59] The husbandmen thought they would get away with it. They thought the boss was unlikely to care enough. They probably thought he no longer had a care or concern for them, but they were so, so wrong.

Everything in our lives, everything in the lives of these husbandmen, everything in the lives of Israel, everything in the life of every individual who has ever lived will be defined at the last day in terms of their relationship to the death of God's son.

I know I have said it before. In some ways, I apologize for repetition. In other ways, it's a point that needs to be emphasized. Everything in our lives will be defined ultimately by our relationship to the death of God's son, Jesus Christ.

Yes, yes, your other sins will be judged. Yes, yes, my sins, they'll all be set out there and I'll have to account and atone for every one of them. I know in that sense, not atone, but give an explanation for each one there and will be judged according to my life and judged according to my works, but justified or not according to my faith in Christ.

We will be judged according to our works. We'll all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. That everyone may receive the things done in his body, whether it be good or whether it be bad, will be judged according to our works but we will be justified according to our faith in Christ.

[25 : 28] The ultimate thing, despite all the sins of which we are all guilty, these things, yes, yes, they will have to be given an account for and yes, the price of them must be paid but the real thing God wants to know is where are you in relation to my son?

My son has been killed. My son has been crucified. My son is dead. I was raised again by my power. Where are you in relation to the crucifixion of my son Jesus?

Where do you stand in relation to the son? And that is the ultimate question that the Lord will require of us each at the last day. It is the question to which we must all give an answer because if we are in relationship with Christ, if our sin is covered by his blood, if we are trusting in him and his death has been accomplished for us and all the other sins of which, yes, we are guilty, we are paid for, they are atoned for, they are washed away by his precious blood and the Father looks on the righteousness of Christ which clothes us then and he smiles in love and pleasure at the goodness of his Son and that is what he sees rather than the wickedness of our lives because there has been that exchange.

He has taken our sin upon him. He who knew no sin became sin for us and we took his righteousness to clothe our nakedness and the Lord looks upon us and sees his beloved Son and is well pleased.

But if we are not in Christ, if we are not trusting in him, if his death is something, leaves us unmoved, leaves us indifferent, nothing to do with me, yes it is.

[27 : 22] We are all in that sense the husband of God's vineyard. He has prepared the vineyard for us, he has put us into it and you think, no, it is not my vineyard. No, it is not your vineyard, it is the Lord's vineyard.

He prepared it, he put you into it. This world and all the things into which you have entered in your life, they are already there. All the business you undertake, people who were already doing that business long before you came along.

People, houses like yours were already being lived in long before you occupied yours, their life into which you entered. The people that you married or whatever the case may be, they were already living long before they met you.

The Lord prepared the vineyard. He invested his time, his energy, his effort. He put you into it and he requires a return for his investment.

Where are the fruits of the vineyard? What have we done with the message that he required of us? Most importantly of all, what have we done in relation to his beloved son, Jesus?

[28 : 26] Because his death is either done for us or it is accounted as having been done by us. What then, therefore, shall the Lord of the vineyard do?

He will come and destroy the husbandman and will give the vineyard unto others. Have you not read the scripture, the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner?

In other words, that which people thought didn't matter. Psalm 118, there it is, verses 22 and 23. The stone which the builders refused has become the headstone of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. The early church referred to this again and again and again. Acts 4 at verse 11 and in Romans 9 verse 33 are making reference to a similar verse in Isaiah 28 at verse 16 which reads, Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.

He that believeth shall not make page. So Acts makes mention of it. Romans makes mention of it. Ephesians chapter 2 verses 20 and 21. 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 and 6 and 7.

[29 : 35] They're all referring to the stone which the builders rejected, which has become the headstone of the corner, the most important stone on the entire building site and we reject this one and the building will never be finished, never be complete.

The life that the Lord has given you here upon this world will continue to be incomplete, unfinished and you'll go through it thinking there's something missing.

This can't be all there is. I can't be saying this was my life. Here I am now I'm facing in my twilight years and what did I do with my life? What was it all for? These questions, questions.

Why isn't it complete? Why isn't there this sense of fulfilment, this sense of everything fitting together? Where is the purpose? Where is the meaning? Where is the answer?

For those who are in Christ, those answers are already met. That fulfilment is already achieved.

The headstone of the corner is in place and the building is gloriously finished and we are become the temple of the living God.

[30 : 45] The stone which the builders rejected because it looked unimpressive and it didn't seem important and if you're filled with the things of the world that Jesus of Nazareth did not seem especially important that this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes and they sought to lay hold on him but they feared the people for they knew that he had spoken in the parable against them and they left them and went their way.

Now they know what they plan to do in respect of this particular teacher. Now they know they desire indeed to kill him and cast him out of the vineyard because their own interest has been threatened and their own existence has been identified for exactly what it is.

It is earthbound. it is concerned with the tenure of the vineyard but not with the lordship of it not rendering the fruits desiring the inheritance and all that is there but not recognising the lord of the vineyard who is far away and out of sight and probably doesn't exist anymore he is probably dead he is probably not really there it is in that how so many think of this world well God was fine for previous generations God was fine for my grandparents and their day and so on but now come on we are a bit more sophisticated than that we have grown up we have moved on and we have certainly moved on but whether we have moved forward or whether we have moved back we can't really say have we regressed into paganism and darkness or have we actually moved forward into the light the one thing we can say whether we have moved back or whether we have moved forward we have definitely moved away from the Lord and our relationship to him that once was the hallmark of our nation and particularly of our islands this was the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes the husband men believed it would be okay but at the end of the day the infinite patience of the

Lord of the vineyard has an end and it has its end and its culmination in his son that is the thing that he will not forgive that is the thing that he will not pass by not that his servants were unimportant not that his vineyard didn't matter but everything focused upon his son and heir so friends tonight this is the thing that you must have right with the Lord the vineyard into which you have been brought the Lord has set you there he has provided everything that you need in this world it wasn't your making you might say oh yeah but I did the work for maybe I built my house or I got my boat or else I built up my business and hey I've worked pretty hard but who gave you the strength and the ability to be able to work at your job who gave you the skill that made you perhaps a master in your profession that made you able to do all these things who preserved you from accident or harm or illness or

disease so that you were able to do these things who is it as Deuteronomy 8 tells us who gave you the ability the strength to get wealth who has put you into this vineyard and who has created all these things for your benefit for your good and now he has sent his son into the midst of us and he requires from us a response what is a response to Jesus

Jesus whom others have taken and crucified and cast out of the vineyard they didn't even bury him do we side with them or do we side with the Lord do we side with the son of the vineyard himself do we side with the son of the master or do we side with the husband men we know where we'd like to be we say oh well of course I would never do that I would never want to kill anyone I would never want to do anything like that what is your response to the fact that it has been done who is on the Lord's side and where are you now tonight because the one thing you know as well as I do when this question is asked what shall therefore the Lord of the vineyard do you know it and so do I the question is where are we in relation to

[35 : 25] Christ so what will he do to us