

Sermon Title: What Will The Owner Do?  
Scripture Text: Mark 12:1-12

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 7-28-19

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We are indeed working our way through the Gospel of Mark. Mark was writing to Romans—not to the Book of Romans, not to the church at Rome, but to the Roman culture. He was a man who understood the grace of God. We told his story at the beginning of this book. He was the one who was taken with Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Journey. Something went wrong, and he dropped out and he turned back, and greatly disappointed them. Remember, when they wanted to go on the next journey, the Apostle Paul said, "Let's go," and Barnabas said, "I'll get Mark," and Paul said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa—we're not taking that quitter!" Barnabas and Paul got into what's actually called a "paroxysm" in Acts Chapter 15; they couldn't agree, and they wound up going their separate ways. Barnabas took Mark and went and did a missionary trip that's not recorded in the Book of Acts; and Paul took Silas and went and did what we read about in the Book of Acts.

And then, remember the wonderful reconciliation story? By the end of his life, Paul writes from a desolate prison cell in Rome: "Only Luke is with me," he writes to Timothy. "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). Mark knew the "Wonderful Grace of Jesus"—"greater than all our sins." Mark knew the "Amazing Grace" that "saved a wretch" like him.

He knew that, the people who were most profoundly changed by Jesus were usually the ones that were least involved in the corrupted and twisted system and hierarchy of the Jewish religion, as it stood in the days of Jesus. So Mark is writing with a tremendous amount of understanding of what Christ has wrought that we now benefit from as the adopted children of God (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; 1 Jn. 3:2).

Today, we enter Mark Chapter 12, which is absolutely nothing new in the context; there's no logical reason for the break, except maybe a new paragraph here. We're still in the final week of Jesus's life, which occupies all of Mark 11 through 16. Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the last time during His first coming. He has made an enormous ruckus. First of all, when He arrived—I get a kick out of this: Remember, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were plotting His murder, and they had put out the word; not knowing if He would come to Jerusalem for this Passover, they said: "If anybody sees Him, tell us!" That was an APB for Jesus. And when He came, nobody had to tell them, because *thousands* of people were shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9, 15)—they were proclaiming Him Messiah and rejoicing at His coming! They figured out He was there. That was the first part of the ruckus.

Then the next day, He went in and cleared the temple of the ones who were profiteering at the expense of the pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the Passover, who had turned the place of worship into what Jesus calls a "robbers' den" (Mk. 11:17). And then, the next day after that—earlier in the day that we're studying—Jesus came again into the Outer Court of the temple; and the governing body of the Jews, called the Sanhedrin, sent a delegation to confront Jesus, knowing it was in full public view; they meant to shut Jesus down that day! They sent this delegation to demand that Jesus tell them why He was doing what He was doing: "Who gave You this authority? Who do You think You are?" Mark says it was "the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" (Mk. 11:27)—in other words, it was a delegation from the Sanhedrin. "Tell us by what authority You do this." We saw it last time: Jesus saw right through their

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hypocrisy. He masterfully tied them in knots with His answer to their totally phony question. They meant to shut down Jesus, and they wound up leaving that day with their tails between their legs; and we'll see that in our text for today.

Following that confrontation, which ends Chapter 11, Jesus spoke three parables to further explain what all was going on with this big ruckus of Him coming there. Mark includes only the one that we're going to see today; it's the second of the three. By comparing Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we know there were three. I suggest you're going to understand this parable all the better if we sneak a peek over to Matthew Chapter 21; you're probably going to want to keep a finger in Matthew 21 and a finger in Mark 12 today as we go back and forth a little bit, because I want you to see what Jesus said just before our text. The previous parable helps explain our text, although ours stands on its own, for sure.

Go over to Matthew Chapter 21; look at Verses 28 through 32. This is after Jesus has shut down the accusers; He says: " 'But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.' " It was obviously those Jewish leaders, represented by the one that said, "Oh, yeah, we will"—and they didn't. Then He goes on to say: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him."

That sets the stage for the parable that we're going to study this morning; spoken to the same crowd, on the same day, in the same situation—still a confrontation between Jesus and the hypocritical Jewish leaders, still in full view of all of the however-many hundreds or thousands of people who were in the temple that day. This parable goes even further. Jesus is going to explain that, those Jewish leaders had forfeited their possible position in His kingdom. This one further explains His actions in the temple, clearing the temple, His cursing the fig tree—all the stuff that He was doing.

So, the title of this is: "What Will The Owner Do?" That comes right out of our text, and you'll see it in a minute. As we study it, I want to take three points of exhortation for you from the principles in this text: Number 1—Learn From The Past, Verses 1 through 9. Number 2—Don't Reject The Cornerstone, Verses 10 and 11. Number 3—Produce Fruit, Verse 12. We're going to work our way through this and connect it to a number of other things.

First of all: Learn From The Past. Now, remember: in that previous parable, the man asked his sons, "Go work in the vineyard." That was a great illustration, because there were vineyards all over Israel, a very good place for growing grapes; they were familiar with that whole process. Furthermore, Jesus used terminology which was very familiar to everyone who was familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, and especially the Book of Isaiah.

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It will help you tremendously to understand our text this morning if we go back and look at Isaiah Chapter 5, Verses 1 through 7, before we look at this parable. Let this sink into your mind before we go to Mark Chapter 12. Isaiah 5:1 through 7—God speaking to Israel through the Prophet Isaiah: "Let me sing now for my well-beloved, a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. 'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.' " Now, listen carefully this: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress."

Jesus is going to take that situation in Isaiah's day, described poetically through that parable of a vineyard in Isaiah Chapter 5, and He's going to apply it to the people of *His* day, to illustrate the greater depths of *their* sins, compared even to the ones of the leaders of Israel in the days of Isaiah.

So now, come to Mark Chapter 12. And realize: Yes, this is a parable; it's a story—Jesus made it up—but it is *directly connected* to what God had already said to and through Isaiah. Mark 12:1—"And He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower"—you ever heard anything like that before? That's *exactly* from Isaiah!—"and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.' " Now, in this story—this parable—the man who owns this vineyard built a very *sophisticated* vineyard; it had all the necessary things to be a significant wine-making operation. The owner, as described in the story, is wealthy enough to have all of this, and also to rent it out to others to operate and manage it while he goes away, tending to other interests. When something like that was done, the renters were required to pay the owner—you might call it "royalties"; he would get a part of the produce of the vineyard, and the owner would send his delegated ones—his servants—to collect at each of the harvest seasons. So this is a wealthy landowner; he seems to have relatively unlimited resources available. His vineyard is state-of-the-art. Now, if you haven't caught on: the "landowner" represents God, both in Isaiah 5 and in Mark 12.

Let's keep reading. Mark 12, Verses 2 through 5—"At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head"—He uses a word that basically means, they *bashed* him in the head—"and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others." Now, Jesus is making up this story, okay? This is not a historical record. He makes it outrageous on purpose, to make a point.

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If you're already getting furious at the wickedness of these vine-growers, you're getting the point. But, brace yourself: your outrage is about to get worse. Read on, starting in Verse 6—"He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard." Now, you might think it's absurd that the owner would send his son. Jesus is making up the story to make a point: If people killed the first few messengers that *you* sent to do a job, you probably would not only *not* send your son, you would probably send a heavily armed delegation of people to take out the ones that were ripping you off and hurting your people. But, this is a parable; and, as we'll see in a minute, a primary point of this is the wretchedness of the sins of the leaders of Israel.

Beyond that, you've already figured out that in this parable, with the owner representing God, sending his son into the vineyard is a picture of God sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to His people. Now, in the parable, it would seem foolish that the renters didn't figure out: "Even if we kill the son, the *landowner* is still alive, and he's probably going to come after us." But again: in the story, the way Jesus made it up, the renters also illustrate how *utterly foolish* sin is. People *always* think that, they've figured out how they're going to get away with their sin (Deut. 29:19; Jer. 7:8-10; Rom. 6:15)—Me, too! You, too! Right? If only we would always remember clearly, at all times, that God sees and knows everything we do, and everything we think, and everything we say, and everything we mumble—we would avoid a lot of self-deception and we would refrain from sin (Prov. 16:6b; cf. Ps. 44:21; Prov. 5:21; 15:3; Matt. 12:36; Heb. 4:13).

I'm going to spend more time on this as we get further on, but do you see how vividly Jesus is echoing the message of Isaiah 5? He's *connecting* it: "Just like it was then, it is now." (see Acts 7:51-52) The Bible is all interconnected.

Now, Jesus is teaching in the temple in Israel. He's teaching in rabbinical fashion; we pointed out a couple of those things last time. One of the things that many teachers do, especially in a good teaching situation, is: they ask questions. So He draws the crowd in by asking a question. And bear in mind: the crowd still includes the ones who were hostile to Jesus—"the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" who had confronted Him. And as you'll see, they knew full well: this story was aimed directly at them.

So, Jesus asked the question: Mark 12:9—"What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others." Matthew lets us know that Jesus asked the question, and people actually gave the answer. Obviously, Mark attributes it to Jesus; so, they gave the answer, and then Jesus repeated the answer and explained it. In Matthew 21:40 and 41, He says: " 'Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?' They said to Him, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.' " Do you think that John Newton was stretching it when he said: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a *wretch* like me"? Where would he get an idea like that? Well, from a place like this.

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Now, we don't know if the people responded this way just because that's the obvious answer to the question, as Jesus worked the story together. Or, maybe they didn't realize that the parable was about their own spiritual leaders, who were standing next to them in the crowd; maybe they just blurted out the answer. We don't know if maybe the leaders themselves actually, in a sarcastic way, spoke up with the answer, realizing full well it was about them, and they were just wanting to have another reason to justify their hatred of Jesus; and they didn't need any more, because they were already over the top—they were already plotting His murder.

But what was in their minds, and who spoke the words of the answer to the question, really doesn't matter. What does matter is that *you* learn what Jesus said was the main point of this parable: It is about how Israel rejected and persecuted the prophets of God that He sent to them, up to and including John the Baptist (see Matt. 23:37); also, how they rejected the Son. And it also shows us that Jesus knew full well: He was about to be killed by those men there who were confronting Him in the temple.

So, Learn From The Past—that's why Isaiah is there, so that there would not, theoretically, have needed to be a Mark Chapter 12. But secondly: Don't Reject The Cornerstone. Now, this is pithy; this is direct. God holds spiritual leaders accountable for knowing and understanding His Word, and for instructing people so that *they* understand (see Malachi 2:7). So, it might be a new point in our outline—it's the next breath in what Jesus was saying: Mark 12:10 and 11—"Have you not even read this Scripture?"—you've got to stop there, and let that sink in; that is sarcastic, pointed, insulting, and personal. I picture Him looking *exactly* at the leader of the scribes, the leader of the Pharisees, the leader of the Sadducees, and saying: "Did you ever read your Bible? Have you never heard anything like this before? Have you not even read this Scripture?" And now, He's not going to quote from Isaiah; He's going to quote from Psalm 118, Verses 22 and 23—"Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Jesus openly mocked them in public for their spiritual blindness. There was this *huge* contrast between their claims that they were the keepers of the Word of God (Matt. 23:2)—the proclaimers of the Word of God (Rom. 2:17-20)—and yet, while they claimed that, they *rejected* what it actually says (Acts 7:53). And Jesus says, "That Word talks about you; and if you had read and understood and believed what the Old Testament said, you would have immediately *embraced* John the Baptist; you would have immediately embraced Me," says Jesus when He comes (see Jn. 5:46).

So He quotes this time from Psalm 118:22 and 23. Another little interesting sidebar here: this quote is from the Septuagint; we can discern that from the wording of it. The Septuagint is the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Koine Greek—the lingua franca of the world at the time that Jesus came. The language of the New Testament is Koine Greek, and that reaffirms our understanding that He often spoke in Greek. Obviously, He often spoke in Aramaic, as well—the Hebrew dialect of that time. It's likely that He quoted from the Septuagint on *this* occasion in the temple because it was the Passover, and there were visitors

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from all over the Roman Empire, including those for whom Greek was their first language—even the Jews, or, the "Hellenistic Jews," if you will (Acts 6:1; 9:29; cf. Jn. 7:35). Many of them were Greek-speakers, and so He used Greek in settings like that.

But what He's saying is: the "builders" here—Who are they? Well, they're what the leaders of the Jews *should have* been; they should have been building the kingdom of heaven—but instead, they were plotting to murder the King. "The chief cornerstone" is the first stone laid in the foundation of a building. It determines the position of the building, and it is the stone used as the reference point for all measurements to determine everything else in the building (see Is. 28:16; Eph. 2:20). So, "'Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone'—and then, look what He says—'This came about from the Lord'—that's a *very* strong statement of God's sovereignty and foreknowledge: God *planned it* this way.

You say, "Well, wait a minute! You mean, God planned for Israel to rebel against Him? God caused them to sin?" No, I don't mean that. I mean that He did not sit on the edge of His seat in heaven and fret over what to do about Israel's sin and the apostasy of her leaders and the rejection of the Messiah, because *all along*, He knows where history is headed; He is in charge of it all. That does *not* mean that God is responsible for the sins of those people. It *does* mean that God is not *the victim* of their sins; He's not the victim of the rebellion of man. God knows *exactly* what He will do; He's not on "Plan B." He's on *His* plan. He knows "the end from the beginning" (Is. 46:10), and He will sort it out and get Himself glory through His plan of redemption—*never* the victim of the act of any man. "This came about from the Lord"—and look at the next phrase; the result is: "It is marvelous in our eyes." It *really is* amazing! It is awe-inspiring to contemplate what God has done *in spite of* man's rebellion—what He has accomplished to secure your redemption. Here you sit today, 2,000 years after that; and if you are a Christian—and therefore, a member of the body of Christ—it's because of the wonderful work of God *in spite of* the sins of mankind; as a matter of fact: in spite of *your own sins*.

So He's saying: "Learn From The Past"—"Guys, you really should have known better! You are 100 percent responsible for your own spiritual demise" (see Prov. 14:32a). Secondly, He says to us: "Don't Reject The Cornerstone." And now, finally today: "Produce Fruit." Mark 12, Verse 12—"And they were seeking to seize Him"—Who are "they"? "The chief priests and the scribes and the elders" (Mk. 11:27)—"And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away." They came to the temple to shut down Jesus, embarrass Him, humiliate Him, arrest Him, and put Him in prison to hold Him until they could get Him crucified. That was their intention when they came that day. What happened? Tails tucked, they slithered away.

Now, to deepen understanding, I want us to eavesdrop again on Matthew's slightly fuller record of the end of this parable. It's not surprising that Matthew would say more about it, because Matthew wrote for Jews. He includes more of the words of Jesus relating to the connection with the Old Testament—like the Book of Isaiah, like Psalm 118—and he also says more about the disconnection between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He explains more in a theological way, from a Jewish frame of reference.

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Now, Matthew says the same thing Mark says, but he includes more of the eschatological and dispensational significance of this parable. Here is Jesus's punchline of the parable, as Matthew records it beyond what Mark said: Matthew 21:43—"Therefore I say to you"—how much more clearly can you say: "This is what that story was about?"—"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." "This is My point," says Jesus, "Therefore I say to you..."

"Kingdom of God"—sometimes it's called "kingdom of heaven," mainly in Matthew; sometimes it's called "kingdom of God," mainly in the other gospels; sometimes it's called "kingdom of heaven" and / or "kingdom of God" interchangeably; they're one and the same, it's just a difference of describing the same thing. They both refer to Jesus's rule as Messiah on the "throne of David" (Is. 9:7; cf. Lk. 1:32; Ps. 2:6)—the coming kingdom is what they're looking forward to. But there's a problem: the "builders" *rejected* the "chief cornerstone"; so until Jesus comes in His glory, in Revelation Chapter 19, the kingdom of God is *not* an earthly, physical kingdom—it is a *spiritual* reality, heart-by-heart, person-by-person; it's not physically visible (Lk. 17:21), and it's not anchored in Israel. The spiritual ministry of the kingdom of God was entrusted to Israel *up until* the time of Christ, but *now*, it's a whole different thing. Colossians Chapter 1—You have been "transferred" from "the domain of darkness" into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (vs. 13)—we are citizens of that kingdom; it's just that, the King happens to be away; it's as if the vineyard has been rented out. Ah! There's a connection, isn't there?

So, on this day, in this sentence, Jesus says in unmistakable language that, Israel—represented by those hypocritical spiritual leaders who were confronting Jesus—Israel was going to forfeit her stewardship of the kingdom of God. I don't think you can say it any more clearly than to say: "It will be taken from you." That happened spiritually, as soon as Jesus rose and ascended to the Father (Matt. 23:38; cf. Matt. 27:51); it was physically confirmed when Israel lost it all in A.D. 70, when Rome effectively took them off the map and physically destroyed, utterly, the temple (Matt. 24:1-2; Lk. 19:43-44).

In *this* era, therefore, whether you have any future with the kingdom of God when it comes—whether you have any legitimate claim to be a citizen of that kingdom—depends completely on your personal response to Jesus the King, Jesus the Christ (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12). Remember the metaphor that Jesus is the stone, the "chief cornerstone." And now, look at the next verse: Matthew 21:44—"And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." Peter would later describe it by quoting Isaiah 8:14, and he would say that Jesus is "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Pet. 2:8). Now, you can do as the leaders of Israel did: you can choose, in your own pride, to be offended by Jesus; you can "stumble" over Him, or "fall on this stone." If you do, you will be "broken to pieces." That part of this is a description of personal judgment (see Lk. 12:46).

But the second part of the verse is an allusion to Daniel Chapter 2, Verses 32 to 35; there, the Messiah is pictured as a "stone...cut out without hands" which, one day, will strike the unbelieving kingdoms of mankind and *pulverize* them; and only believers will remain to be part of His kingdom (Matt. 25:34).

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God called Israel; He chose them, He did it all by His own choice. He did it by His grace (Deut. 7:6-8). He gave them a beautiful land—a place of blessing, a place of promise. He delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. He delivered them from their enemies in the land, whenever they would trust Him to do that. He gave them salvation and promise of security. But the leaders of Israel, as the stewards of all those earthly blessings of the kingdom of God—they *blew it!* Israel misused the blessings, and instead of becoming "a kingdom of priests"—the idea is that, all the kingdoms of the world could come to God their Creator *through* the priestly nation of Israel, the intermediary (see Zech. 8:23)—instead of being "a kingdom of priests," Israel robbed God of that, and stopped being grateful for God's blessings. Instead, they led the people into idolatry (Acts 7:42-43).

And so, God graciously warned them; He sent prophets to call Israel to repentance, and to find forgiveness—just like the owner of the vineyard sent his servants, over and over. What did Israel do to the servants that God sent? Wasn't so great (see Heb. 11:36-37). Tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two, inside of a hollowed-out log. Scripture says that Jeremiah was thrown into a pit of slime; and tradition says that, eventually, Jeremiah was stoned to death. Ezekiel was rejected by his people *from beginning to end*—his whole ministry. Elijah and Amos had to run for their lives. Micah was smashed in the face by the people who refused to listen to his message. Zechariah was murdered right in the temple. And the last of the Old Testament prophets—John the Baptist—was murdered.

So, go back to Matthew 21:43—"Therefore I say to you"—"Guys, that parable is *about you*, and here's what I mean by it," says Jesus: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." The owner of the vineyard is going to come, and he's going to mete out punishment on "those wretches," and he's going to give the stewardship of the vineyard to someone else. Now, one part of that is very clear: Israel is forfeiting her stewardship of the kingdom of God. That's what "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you" means.

But the *second* part of that statement *isn't* clear, based upon the previous passages we've read. What does it mean: "and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it"? I know which nation that was: Luxembourg...well, maybe not. Maybe it's *not* a specific nation. We've already connected all the way back to the Book of Isaiah; we've connected to the Book of Psalms; we've come through the parable of Jesus in Mark Chapter 12 and in Matthew Chapter 21. In this case, Peter adds the commentary that we need to fully understand this. Remember, I said how thrilled I was that, in our Scripture reading, we got to Acts Chapter 10, where Peter is talking about the gospel going to all the nations: everybody gets to be part of this; and just as it was preached to the Jews, it's preached to the Gentiles; the same thing is happening to them—they're receiving to the same Holy Spirit; the Gentiles are being baptized *just exactly the same* as the Jews were. Peter was pretty astounded by that; and by the way, Peter didn't go as a willing participant—he had to have that vision of the sheet lowered three times, right? "Oh, no, Lord—I wouldn't go there!" And then he comes to the point of understanding: "God is not one to show partiality" (Acts 10:34). So this connects, to the rest of that verse, what Peter is going to say to us: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it"—Who is that?

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Well, that same Peter—who was privileged to be God's mouthpiece to take the gospel to that group of Gentiles there in Caesarea—he wrote this, some years later: First Peter Chapter 2, Verses 4 through 8—"And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God"—have you ever heard anything about "stones," "rejected," anything like that?—"you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"—just like Romans Chapter 12 says: "Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice" (vs. 1). By the way, one of most Biblical names you'll ever find on this planet is Livingstone. Coming "as living stones"—that's what we are; we're part of this dynamic spiritual thing (cf. Eph. 2:19-22). And don't you love the metaphor of a "living stone"? I have never met a stone that I had any kind of a relationship with; they're dead as dead can be. These are stones which are *spiritual* stones, being built into this thing that God is building.

Keep on reading what Peter says in First Peter Chapter 2: "For this is contained in Scripture"—it all ties together!—"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.' This precious value, then, is for you who believe"—I'll give you a hint: *that's* the "nation"; we'll get to that in a minute. "This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,' and, 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense' "—ever heard those terms before?—"for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed." God said what the penalty would be ahead of time; so when they made that choice, that is their doom—they will be judged just as God promised that they would be judged (see Deut. 18:15,18-19; Ps. 2:12; Acts 3:22-23). So Peter is explaining further, the things that Jesus was saying that day in the temple—which I'm sure he remembered as he was saying those words in Cornelius's house.

Now, here comes Peter's punchline, in just a moment. Think back, if you can, to the beginning of First Peter. Who was Peter writing to? Well, it's very obvious in the beginning of it: he's writing to Christians, those "who are chosen," those who have been given the "hope," those who have been saved by the message of the gospel. He's writing to believers—both Jews and Gentiles—"scattered" over a whole bunch of places; and he names a cluster of cities: "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"—places where believers had been "scattered" by about the late sixties A.D., around the northeastern regions of the Mediterranean Sea.

So, here's the connection to us; here's the connection to the Church. What is that "nation"? It's not a place that you can find on a map; it's a *new people*—and here's what Peter says: First Peter 2:9 and 10—"But you are a chosen race"—well, *that* was said about Israel—"a royal priesthood"—*that* was said about Israel—"a holy nation"—*that* was said about Israel—"a people for God's own possession"—*that* was said about Israel; everything that God promised to them, He has "taken away from" them, and He has "given" it to this new group! He says: "so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"—and look at the last part of this—"for you once were not a people"—you were "the peoples" (Ps. 2:1), "the Gentiles" (Matt. 12:18), "the nations" (Ps. 2:8)—"for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Sermon Title: What Will The Owner Do?  
Scripture Text: Mark 12:1-12

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 7-28-19

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So, if you want to study Mark 12:1 through 12, you'd better have the Book of Psalms handy; you'd better have the Book of Isaiah handy; you'd better have Matthew 21 handy; you'd better have First Peter handy; oh, and by the way: why don't you study the whole Book of Ephesians—especially those first three chapters, where he says everything that Peter says right here. The "nation producing the fruit of it" is: the Church—a *whole new thing* that didn't exist when Jesus stood there in the temple (Eph. 3:4-6). It includes every single individual who puts his or her trust in Jesus Christ—crucified, buried, risen, ascended, coming again—trusting Him for salvation. Those are the ones who have "received mercy."

Now, Matthew's final touch on this pericope—it's as clear as Mark's, but he added a little more verbiage. Let's look at what he says: Matthew 21:45 and 46—"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables"—he's referring to all three of them; we focused on the middle one here—"they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him"—why'd they come that day? To arrest Jesus; to get Him killed. "When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet."

They backed down; they slithered away. I think the ambient temperature in the whole Outer Court of the temple probably went up about three degrees, from how hot they were under their collars in their frustration. They couldn't get Him. Why? Because He's in charge! (cf. Jn. 7:30) He's arranging all of this (Acts 2:23; cf. Prov. 19:21; 21:30; Dan. 4:35).

So, put it all together: The vineyard represents Israel; the spiritual kingdom of God was entrusted to Israel. The one who planted the vineyard is God; He chose Israel to be His people on Earth. He has *a lot more* promises yet to be fulfilled; He'll get to them, but not now (see Rom. 11:25-31). The wicked renters of the vineyard, they're the leaders of Israel—"the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" (Mk. 11:27), the parties of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and all those who followed them and were under their sway; the whole nation was guilty, to one extent or another, and He lumps them all together.

The servants that are sent to collect the owner's share of the vintage represent the prophets of the Old Testament—up through and including John the Baptist—whom they beat, tortured, killed, rejected. The owner's son pictures Jesus Christ; you either embrace Him, or you stumble over Him. If you stumble over Him, He becomes your Judge; He will, one day, *pulverize* you—that's what the words mean (see Acts 17:31; cf. Matt. 25:41; Rev. 19:21).

If we only had time, I would love to show you how, despite Israel's rejection of the Messiah, God will still fulfill His every promise that He made to that nation (see Jer. 31:35-37); that'll have to be for another time. He *will* get it done (see Zech. 12:10; Lk. 13:35).

But we need to realize the importance of that question: "What will the owner do?" Do you want to be the target of His wrath? Do you want to be the object of His grace? Your choice; your call. The invitation is open (Jn. 3:18; cf. Ps. 2:12; 7:11-12).

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Let's pray:

*Father, how we thank You for Your majestic grace in the Lord Jesus Christ, that You would be so patient with us, to send Your Son, to not pulverize us when we have so many countless times deserved it; but You would let us stand in Your grace. Please make us ready spokesmen of this marvelous message. Please build Your kingdom, which now exists in the form of the Church—which is also "the household God"; which is also "the bride"; which is also Your family, the body through which You live; and You are our Father and we are Your children; and You are our Master and we are Your slaves. Oh, Father—let us revel in that, and realize that Your grace truly is amazing. Many around us have not heard that message, Lord. Please, give us opportunities to spread the Word, and please don't let a soul leave this place apart from standing in Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*