

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

49. The Authority of the Owner

Mark 11:27-12:17

Mark 11:27 (CSB) ²⁷They came again to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple

We need to stop here and think about this: In the Old Testament YHWH, the only true and living God, called the Temple His house.

Isaiah 56:7 (ESV) ⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for **my house** shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

God said that the Temple was set apart to Him and for Him — He was the point of its existence.

1 Kings 9:3 (NIV) ³The Lord said to him: “I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have **consecrated** this temple, which you have built,

He did that by putting His Name there

1 Kings 9:3 (NIV) ³The Lord said to him: “I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have **consecrated** this temple, which you have built, **by putting my Name there forever**. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

Fast forward to **John 1**. John 1 opens like Genesis 1: *In the beginning*.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word* — the Logos — uncreated, eternal. *And the Word* — the eternal Logos — *was God*.

In **John 1:14** we’re told that *the eternal Logos became flesh and dwelt among us*.

Jesus is God come in human flesh. The Temple was not only HIS house; everything about the Temple — its furnishings, the priesthood, their garments, every

sacrifice they offered — all of that was all about HIM! All of that pointed to and anticipated HIM! All of that was fulfilled in Him and by Him!

On the Sunday before Passover Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouts of Hosanna — and then **(Mark 11:11)** went into His house and *looked around* — *took in the entire scene*. He found that the very men appointed by Him to **care** for His house and **maintain** it — keep everything about it consecrated to God — make sure that it was *a house of prayer for all nations* — had turned it into *a house of merchandise (John 2:19)* Walmart on Black Friday — a *den of thieves*,.

After taking all of that in He returned to Bethany. But on Monday morning He decided to go back to His house and do some house cleaning.

***Mark 11:15–17 (CSB)** ¹⁵... and he went into the temple and began to throw out those buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, ¹⁶and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. ¹⁷He was teaching them: “Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!”*

So, when Jesus came back the next day the men who were supposed to be caretakers of His house acted as if it was their own place and they were in charge of it!!

Mark 11:27–28 (CSB) ²⁷They came again to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came ²⁸and asked him, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do these things?”

In other words: “We are THE authority around here — We say who comes and goes — WE say what can be done and what can’t be done here — on what authority did you do this?”

They had no desire to recognize or submit to the authority of Jesus. In fact — they had already had a meeting and determined that Jesus HAD to be put to death.

John 11:46–51; 53 but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,.... ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

James Edwards, in his commentary of the Gospel According to Mark makes this amazing observation:

in the most authoritative place and before the most authoritative body in Israel, Jesus opens a window of understanding into his own authority.¹

Mark 11:29–33 (CSB) ²⁹Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; then answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

They come out as the heavy weights of Israel — *By what authority are you doing these things? — Who gave You this authority?* But Jesus immediately took the authority away from them. Jesus said: *I won’t answer you — You’re going to answer me!*

³⁰Was John’s baptism from heaven or of human origin? Answer me.”

Jesus wasn’t on the run — trying to take evasive action here. He puts them on the spot. If John really was from God, then he was right about Jesus and Jesus was indeed the Messiah. If what John said was true, then Jesus had all authority.

³¹They discussed it among themselves: “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ³²But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ”—they were afraid of the crowd, because everyone thought that John was truly a

¹ Edwards, J. R. (2002). The Gospel according to Mark (p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

If we want answers from Jesus, we have to deal honestly with the truth that has already been revealed. These men knew that John said Jesus was the Messiah — they simply refused to accept it.

So, this was the first in a barrage of questions fired at Jesus in the hopes of trapping Him so they could kill Him.

Mark 12:1 (CSB) ¹He began to speak to them in parables:

Jesus crafts a very specific story to illustrate the truth about what was going on in the hearts of the religious leaders, and those like them

“A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went away.

They would have immediately known that Jesus was talking about the nation of Israel. In **Isaiah 5** and **Jeremiah 2** and **Psalms 80** the Lord spoke of Israel as a vineyard. He spoke of how He did everything to make it possible for Israel to bear fruit. God had given them the land they lived in. God had given them His Word to govern them. God had given them the temple and the priesthood. But in **Isaiah 5** God said that

Isaiah 5:2 (NLT) he waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were bitter.

Mark 12:2 (CSB) ²At harvest time he sent a servant to the farmers to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard from them.

DON'T MISS THIS — Last week we saw that the cleansing of the Temple was sandwiched between two encounters with a fig tree. Like the vineyard, the fig tree was also a picture of Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus looked at a fig tree that had a lot of leaves but no fruit. The leaves said, “There are figs here,” but the figs weren't there. Jesus is back to the subject of fruit! **God is looking for fruit** from His people!

Mark 12:3–5 (CSB) ³But they took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴Again he sent another servant to them, and they hit him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵Then he sent another, and they killed that one. He also sent many others; some they beat, and others they killed.

Jesus is basically recounting for them the history of Israel's dealings with the true prophets of God.

***Matthew 23:37 (CSB)** ³⁷"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.*

AGAIN — this was common historical knowledge to everyone listening. Historically, those who were given the privilege of taking care of God's vineyard — taking caring of it according to God's Word and for God's profit — they acted as if they were more than mere tenants; they acted as if the vineyard belonged to them. They dealt with God's vineyard on their terms for their own profit. Because God loved His vineyard — and the tenants of His vineyard — He sent messengers — sent His prophets to the tenants. God was relentless in sending messengers to remind them that He was the owner and they were the tenants. But they hated that message — and because they hated the message they beat and killed the messengers. The more messengers God sent — the more hostile they got.

THIS PARABLE is such an amazing insight into the **undaunting faithfulness of God**

God didn't send just **one** messenger, and when they beat and killed him said, *"That's it! If that's the way they're going to relate to My messengers — they won't hear from me again!"*

It's not like He sent just two, or three, and after they were beaten and killed said, *"That's it. After you beat and killed the first messenger I sent you a second one! And after you killed the second one, I sent a third and you did the same to him! That's it! Three strikes! You're Out!"*

We should be amazed, we should be astounded at just how **steadfast** God's love is for His vineyard, Israel — and just how steadfast he was in His love that He would time after time after time seek correct those who tended it. There are 190 some times that we read the of His **steadfast love** in the Old Testament. The

Hebrew word is **Hêsêd**. It's used to describe the consistent — unfailing — relentless — constantly pursuing — one-way, covenant love of God.

I don't know about you — but I find it easy to read a passage like this and say to myself: "*Ya, those religious leaders.....*". We need to see that this parable has an application that is much broader and personal than just speaking to those who failed to take care of the people of God in the Old Testament and in the day of Jesus. This section speaks directly to you and me as well.

This parable teaches us that God has the same consistent — unfailing — relentless — constantly pursuing — one-way, covenant love for you and me. He never just gives us one chance. He repeatedly sends messengers into our lives to tell us and remind us that we are not owners. He repeatedly sends messenger after messenger our way to wake us from the delusion that we're independent and self-sufficient, to open our eyes the truth that we were made for vertical dependence — and as long as we think we're the owner and not the tenant, we are living below the line of what it means to be human.

QUESTION — Who are these messengers in our lives? One of God's messengers is that parent, or maybe both parents, who believe with their heart that the Creator and Redeemer is their owner and by faith they live by His Word for His profit. But here's the way we beat that messenger: No parent is perfect. So we use their failures to drown out; discount and discredit the message.

For some, the messenger(s) has been the local church and those who proclaim and explain the Word of God. It's so humbling and so wonderful to know that for some of you, Metro has been one of the messengers that God has sent to you. And as the Word of God was being taught you discovered that the idea that you own your life is an absolute illusion.

For some of you, the messengers have been a friend, or friends, whose lives preach to you as they live by God's Word for God's profit — and with their words they tell you the truth that God is the true owner of your life.

Sometimes providence is the messenger of God. One guy defined providence as the hand of God slipped into the circumstances of life.

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the men and women living in a 1st century Roman colony called Philippi, Paul said *"things have happened to me."* He literally said: *"Circumstances have dominated me!"* Injustice, wickedness in the world around us, unreasonable people we have to deal with every day who ruin our agenda (home/school/work), near tragedy or tragedy — all of those things tell us that we are not in control of our life. We discover that you and I are not the owners. I can tell you that more often than I would like to admit, I totally fail to grasp the fact that if I can't control the day in, day out flow of life, the most obvious explanation is that I am *not* the owner. Life comes at me **every** day with the same message: "Richard, you not the owner — you the tenant." When I try to be the owner I'm like an 8-year-old sitting in the driver's seat who can't even see over the top of the steering wheel. In every "dominating" circumstance God is saying: *"Richard, would you please give the steering wheel back to me? It was never meant to be yours!"*

How are you treating the messengers? When it comes to the messengers of providence, we beat them! We kick and resist and fight back against them as they relentlessly tell us the truth: We're not the owner!

When it comes to the parents, the friends, the ministries that God has sent into your life as messengers; are you listening to them, or are you beating them up? Are you treating them shamefully?

Mark 12:6 (CSB) ⁶He still had one to send, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

NKJV — ⁶Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Mark 12:7-9 (CSB) ⁷But those tenant farmers said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the farmers and give the vineyard to others.

In the parable the contempt of the tenants for the owner was like a massive iceberg. The greatness of their contempt was still hidden below the water line

— until the owner sent His Son. When the Son showed up — the fullness of their contempt for the owner of the vineyard God broke out — and they killed His Son.

DON'T MISS THIS — This was such a powerful picture that Jesus painted for those present on the Temple Mount on the week of Passover 32 AD — and for us in the week of Passover 2021 AD. Jesus wanted them and us to understand that the **plans and purposes of God** to redeem and rescue the descendants of Abraham — and the whole world with them — are **unstoppable**. (I love how God has been bringing this incredible truth to us time and again in our study through Mark and in our series titled *Two Tables and a Garden*.)

As He was telling the parable Jesus KNEW that He is beloved son sent. Jesus KNEW that He is the beloved son who would be rejected and murdered by the tenants. Jesus wanted those men to know that He KNEW that they were bent on killing Him! And yet — there He was — loving them — telling them the truth — as the clock was counting down to His death on a Roman cross.

¹⁰Haven't you read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. ¹¹This came about from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?"

Jesus moves from the imagery of growing things to building things. Those listening understood the reference

Isaiah 28:16 (ESV) ¹⁶therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

DON'T MISS THIS — Jesus changed the imagery — but the target is still the same: The tenants in the parable of the vineyard are the contractors who rejected the cornerstone.

All of human history to this point was moving towards the birth of the beloved son of God. But most pointedly — Israel's existence was literally all about the coming of the beloved son of God.

Charles Spurgeon — *“He is God’s ultimatum. Nothing remains when Christ is refused. No one else can be sent; heaven itself contains no further messenger. If Christ be rejected, hope is rejected.”*

JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE! You can either build your life on Him, or reject Him. Or as Daniel the prophet said: You can fall on the stone and be broken — or the rock will fall on you and crush you.

HERE IS THE BEAUTY AND WISDOM OF THE GOSPEL — When the Father sent His Son, the Son was killed out of hate. But the killing of the Son is the very way in which God kills the hatred. In the KJV version Ephesians 2:16 says that though we were enemies — we resented being tenants — resented ruled by God, God *put to death* the enmity between us on the cross of His Son.

THAT is the length that God went to make hostile rebels His friends! We’re told in 2 Corinthians 5 that God reconciled the world to Himself in the cross of His Son. Here’s how: He made Jesus — who knew no sin — to become sin for us. I’ll personalize it — Though I was the enemy — and deserved to be treated like an enemy, Jesus the Son was treated like the enemy in my place; He was slain in my place!

The Gospel is so utterly magnificent! Jesus stood in the place of those who resented God — those who resented that fact that they belonged to God by Creation — resented that they were made to care for their lives by God’s Word for His profit — and there on the cross Jesus paid for all of our hatred and rebellion towards God so any hostile rebel could be reconciled to God!

¹²They were looking for a way to arrest him but feared the crowd because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.

Those listening to Jesus KNEW that they were the tenants of God’s vineyard in 32AD.

But we’d make a really big mistake to think that the truth illustrated in this specific parable is that narrow.

The Bible says that the heart of fallen man is not merely indifferent to God. In the heart of fallen man there's actually a contempt, an enmity, a hatred for God. We would never paint our hearts in that light — but the Bible does!

In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome he described the way man thinks about God

***Romans 8:7 NIV** The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

Paul didn't say, "*The mind governed by the flesh **has** enmity toward God.*" He said, "*The mind governed by the flesh **is** enmity.*"

The Bible says that fallen man harbors a contempt toward God that we won't admit. The fact that it's there is seen in how irritated we get if anybody tries to tell us it's there.

DON'T MISS THIS — In this parable Jesus never named names. But they knew Jesus was speaking to them.

The same thing happens today when the Word of God is taught. Without a single name mentioned, the Word of God can speak to a man or woman by name.

¹² ...So they left him and went away.

But they were far from finished with Jesus. And there is a sinister synergy developing

Mark 12:13 (CSB) ¹³Then they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Jesus to trap him in his words.

The Herodians never got along with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were ultra-conservative in their theology; they were the ultra -orthodox / ultra-religious sect in Judaism. In things spiritual and political they the right-wingers in Judaism. The Herodians, on the other hand, were ultra-liberal in their theology. In things religious and political the Herodians were the left-wingers — spiritual and social "progressives" in Judaism. They believed that the best way to preserve the

existence of the Israel was by laying aside orthodox Judaism and accommodating Roman authority. The Herodians didn't like the ultra-orthodox Pharisees and the ultra-orthodox Pharisees didn't like the ultra-liberal / progressive Herodians — but they had a common enemy: Jesus! The Pharisees hated Jesus because he was a threat to their religious agenda and influence, the Herodians hated Jesus because He was a threat to their political arrangements. Both groups wanted Jesus.

Their common enemy made them allies.

Mark 12:14 (CSB) ¹⁴When they came, they said to him, “Teacher, we know you are truthful and don’t care what anyone thinks, nor do you show partiality but teach the way of God truthfully. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”

Everything they said there is true about Jesus. But they didn't believe a word of it.

QUOTE: R. Kent Hughes — *“Flattery is the reverse mirror-image of gossip. Gossip involves saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his face. Flattery is saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind his back.”*²

These guys were anything but sincere.

On the human level you might be able to convince people that you're someone or something you're not. But you can't pretend before God.

Acts 15:8 *And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us*

The phrase *knows the heart* is a single word: **kardiognōstēs**; from *kardía*, heart, and *ginōskō* — to know; knower of hearts. ³

Any man who attempts to deceive God is the one who is really deceived.

² Excerpt From: R. Kent Hughes. “Luke (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition).”

³ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

Jesus, we're really righteous men and we want to know if it's just, if it's righteous to be paying tribute to Caesar — and we believe YOU can tell us the answer.

They believed they had Jesus hanging over the dual horns of a dilemma — and would be gashed to death on one of them. If He agreed the tax should be paid, they could accuse Jesus of denying the sovereignty of God over Israel — and the people would turn on Him. THAT would be a big victory for the pretenders because *they feared the people*.

If Jesus said that the tax shouldn't be paid, they could *deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor* on the grounds that Jesus was an enemy of Rome.

EVERYONE in the temple courts was listening. The question was framed as either/or. The scribes and chief priests and the Pharisees and the Herodians are SURE that they have Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.

Mark 12:15–17 (CSB) ¹⁵But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at.” ¹⁶They brought a coin. “Whose image and inscription is this?” he asked them. “Caesar’s,” they replied. ¹⁷Jesus told them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.

THIS IS WHERE WE WILL PICK UP next time in our study of Mark's Gospel