

## TENANTS, MK.11:27-12:12

Parables: Stories with a Secret #2

◆**Intro:** Suppose that you were walking through the capital building in Washington DC. Our family did that one summer. (pict?) And suppose that all of a sudden the members of the Supreme Court, complete with black robes (you know Gingsberg, Kennedy, Kagen, Thomas, etc.)...suppose they stopped you in the hall and questioned whether you belonged traipsing about in the halls of the Capital? It might be a bit intimidating, don't you think? You, a commoner, not a congressman or even a lawyer for that matter. How do you think they would sound, especially if they were suspicious of you? Official? Pointed? Accusatory? Certainly cameras would be rolling, large fuzzy microphones on poles might be dangling overhead to pick up the conversation of SCOTUS, all crowding around this singular "other" guy or gal.

◆Well, our text (v27) mentions here a group of folks that made up the High Court of the Jewish political/religious body, the Sanhedrin! SCOTUS of Israel! And they are edging toward a singular "other" fellow who holds no office: Jesus. And they are demanding of him an account of his authority, which is odd in itself. Clearly they notice an air of authority, they aren't just throwing him out. They are the High Court and they are the threatened ones. Weird, right?

◆Bear this in mind, though; as they talk with Jesus they are standing in the courts of the temple. The temple gate has over it a gigantic, carved grapevine, the national symbol of Israel. It is said to have been layered in gold, stretching up 150 feet, the grapes of which were embedded jewels that glinted in the sunlight. The Vine. Even the some old Maccabean coins in Israel



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have a grape leaf or cluster on them. (**pict**). My point is this: Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard, a grapevine and the people tending it, and they know he is talking about Israel, specifically them.

◆ “Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them.” Mark 12:12, NIV.

◆**1. The Allegory explained:** Ok, a little direction on doing biblical interpretation. Bear in mind that few of Jesus’ parables are straight forward allegories, and it’s not generally a good idea to, by default, read the Bible and interpret what you read as some allegory for you life. You’ve probably run across this kind of thing here or there. Some author is talking about, say, David picking up five smooth stones to fight Goliath with and he tells you that it means when you face a giant problem in your life, you need to involve five other people, and not face your giant alone. And that these folks must be solid people, like rocks, and smooth too -either without any misshapen aspects to their character, or maybe just bald people... I don’t know. And they should immerse themselves in the living water of God’s word, like the stones were in the stream, and... Do you see what’s going on here? It’s all quite clever but it’s not responsible Bible reading.

◆**B.** Now that being said, and being careful with such things, this parable is pretty clearly a straight allegory. Lets name the comparisons.

◆The vineyard is clearly Israel; everything about it matches the description God makes of Israel in Isaiah: *I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a*

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*winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit... The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress Isa.5:1-2, 7*

- ◆ The farmers are the leaders of Israel.
- ◆ The owner on a journey is God who steps back and allows men to live in his world, react to his creation, work the soil (like Adam) and produce something in life.
- ◆ The sent servants are the prophets of the Old Testament who come to remind the workers that God expects a crop with their lives on earth.
- ◆ The abuse of the servants is the disregard of people to God's message and their rebellion against him in this life.
- ◆ The son of the owner is Jesus the son of God. In Mark's Gospel Jesus is repeatedly called the "Son of God". Even the demons address him as the Son of God.
- ◆ The killing of the son and the throwing him out is disbelief, pictured both their refusal to follow Jesus, and later in their crucifixion of him. It's people saying, "Get off my back, God. I want to do my own thing."
- ◆ C. Here's another clue for reading parables: pay attention to surprising things. What's surprising here is that Jesus clearly has authority of some kind (he just earlier chased everyone out of the temple single handedly), and he reads their minds! (11:18 says they planned to kill him so he told them this parable; about them planning to kill him!) They know he's talking

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about them (12:12) So, you would think that their reaction would be something like “Oh my goodness, this guy even knows what we’re thinking! We are in trouble now! I wonder if he knows I just thought that? I wonder if he knows that I wonder if he knows that I just thought that!”

◆ *So what we have here is a revealing parable that confronts the listeners with the clear fact that God is the owner of his people and their world, and that Jesus is his Son, and that they miss this at their own peril and destruction.*

◆ ““What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” Mark 12:9, NIV.

◆ There's another absurd, or surprising part of the parable: their assumption that they will get the vineyard if they kill the owners son. What are they thinking! That the owner will run away and hide?

◆ Here's my question: how do these leaders of Israel make such absurd choices in the face of the direct claims and evidence of God? And do we do this?

◆ **1. My rejection of God's ways is absurd!** It is indeed unthinking for me to reject God in my life. It is senseless, after all, for I am merely a tenant on the earth, with everything provided for me and my living by the wealth of a loving owner! Think of it. The tenants don't clear the land. The tenants don't build a wall to keep our wild animals, opossums, raccoons, deer, bears, etc. They didn't have Menards pre-fab fencing either. If you've been to Israel you know that they made everything out of rocks and stone, even the



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walls of the houses! **(PICT)** The tenants didn't construct a watch tower, which doubles as a place of safe-keeping for produce. The tenants didn't set up a wine press, an on-location processing line so that grapes became wine. (A wine press consists of two vats carved in solid stone; one higher where the grapes are trodden, with a spillway to a lower vat to collect the juice. **pict**) So you get the idea, right. Quite a bit of loving planning and



expectation went into this vineyard. It was no weekend pass-time. And that is Israel, God's people. That's us, his family.

◆ Meditation on this reality shines a light that makes your and my rebellions and flat out disagree-ments with God absurd, doesn't it? It's like a child telling his father, "No, I'm not going to wash the car. You can't make me." Yes he can. He can level all kinds of consequences on you at a moments notice! He does not have to feed you Cheetos. You can live on rice and beans. He does not have to sign you up for baseball, or take you on vacation, or clothe you with the latest styles. He can make you. He can make your life miserable. Yet at the same time he doesn't want to. Look at the owner of the vineyard! His first emissary is beaten. Why doesn't he just show up in force and can those farm hands. You don't beat my guys up! Yet he keeps giving them chances. That's God with you and me. That's his word preached to me. That's his prophets sent down through history to my country urging us to turn back. That's his Son, who walked and talked with human and died for their sin, rather than destroy all of humanity forever.

◆ Perish the notions that I should claim dictatorship over my own life!  
It's absurd!

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### ◆2. My un-receptivity of God comes on in dangerously subtle ways.

Being unreceptive to God means not seeing how absurd it is for me to ignore him. And this is dangerous; to close your heart, or eyes, or mind to the leadings of God the owner. How does that happen? In *The Magician's Nephew*, a novel from C. S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia series, Narnia is created when Aslan—the lion who represents Jesus—sings it into being. The creation song reveals Aslan's majesty and glory. It is a grand "call to worship!" The children somehow have been transported to another world, or maybe dimension, because nothing is created there yet. They actually get to see it come into being. But there is one along, Uncle Andrew, who refuses to hear the song, and the consequences are staggering.

◆“When the great moment came and the beast spoke, he missed the whole point for a rather interesting reason. When the lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And he had disliked the song very much. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel.

◆Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a lion ("only a lion," as he said to himself) he tried his hardest to make himself believe that it wasn't singing and never had been singing—only roaring as any lion might in a zoo in our own world.

◆"Of course it can't really have been singing," he thought, "I must have imagined it. I've been letting my nerves get out of order. Who ever heard of a lion singing?" And the longer and more beautifully the lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring.

◆Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to. And when at last the lion spoke and said, "Narnia awake," he

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didn't hear any words: he heard only a snarl. And when the beasts spoke in answer, he heard only barkings, growlings, bayings, and howlings.”

◆B. We do behavior modification on ourselves! With our own minds. We prefer advantage over truth, right? We call that political correctness.

That's what's going on in verse 33.

◆*“Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism-- was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven’, he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’....” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”” Mark 11:29-33, NIV.*

◆The fall out of political correctness is that truth becomes hard to see. So today our rappers rap about using women sexually and being gangster and we call them “artists”. Our children bypass basic science and swallow that nonsense that you can choose whether you’re a boy or a girl. Bullying is a popular lament in our media, and moral differences are relabeled as discrimination and hate, which brings us to a hypersensitive culture, but not to truth. To feelings. On the news last night headlines were something like “The new bully is the school itself! It’s called lunch-shaming!” Here’s the scenario: some kids won’t, or don’t, or forget to, or can’t pay for their lunch. So then the school gives them free lunch but it’s a different menu. Now they look different and that is “shaming”. (Now there may be differing

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circumstances on this. And there are probably other abuses that take place. I'm referring specifically to giving an alternate lunch and calling it "shaming.") We have become hyper-sensitive as a culture! We want to pretend facts are not facts. We want to be responsible or irresponsible. We want to say what we want without consequence and we want everyone to like us and provide for us. We want to own the vineyard and disregard the owner.

◆ It comes on quietly, doesn't it? We might not agree with evil choices, but we don't fight them. We watch them on TV. We pretend they don't matter. We don't disagree with holiness, but we don't try to be holy either. We complain about the government but we don't write our Congressman, or give to groups that do. We don't read the news, or sign petitions, or maybe even vote. And all these little things cause our spiritual ears to close, and in the end we wind up making absurd disagreements with the owner though we are merely tenants.

◆ The eventual consequence? We openly chose falsehood over truth because like the religious leaders of Jesus day, our empire is more important to us that the God we claim we are building it for.

◆ "Take a day of rest and worship," says God. We say, "Nice suggestion but you, God, do not realize know what it's like in this vineyard. This porch needs fixing, and grandma can't be left alone."

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◆“Let there be no filthy language from your lips,” says God. To which we nod, “Yep, that’s right.” and then talk like a sailor on the job.

◆“Keep the marriage bed pure” says God. And we come back, “But it feels so beautiful and right.”

◆**Conclusion:** I wish Russel Vought had replied to Bernie Sanders this week like Jesus did in our text. Sanders asked if his faith wasn't islamaphobic because it maintains Muslims are lost, condemned. Let me ask you a question, Mr Sanders. If your son was hooked on cocaine, would you tell him it was a destructive habit? Would you say that you were being cocainophobic? Wouldn't that be disrespectful of you sons beliefs?

◆Being unresponsive to God starts quietly in the land of no judgement making and worship of neutrality. It grows into direct contradictions like Christian kids who sit through chapel but get drunk in basements. Or Christian fathers who are upset that their daughter isn't a virgin, but are proud that their son isn't. Or mothers who tell their daughters, “I have to do this, but don't ever follow my example.” It's interesting that in that same Old Testament passage of Isaiah where God pictured his people as a vineyard, a little later in the chapter it says this:

◆*“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.” Isaiah 5:20-23, NIV.*

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◆ Is Jesus, God's Son calling to you? Do not reject the Son. Do not get to where you do the absurd thing of rejecting the owner. We are tenants, and tenants only. All we have is given by a patient God. As David put it thousands of years ago.

◆ *"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you." 1 Chronicles 29:11-16, NIV.*