

The Wicked Tenants

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[0 : 00] First one, he began to speak to them in many parables. We're starting a new chapter today as we're journeying through the gospel of Mark, but we haven't exactly left the circumstances and context of chapter 11.

Remember, this is now Jesus' third day coming to Jerusalem from Bethany. This is the final week leading up to his crucifixion, and his time in Jerusalem thus far in this week has been dramatic, to say the least.

Remember the first day, Jesus rides on a donkey into the city, and there are crowds of people that are shouting his praises, indicating that their belief is that he is this Messiah King.

And though they were confused about what his purpose was, they were acknowledging really in quite a grand way that would have gotten the attention of all the people and residents there of the city of Jerusalem.

It's quite a dramatic entry that he makes as he makes his way to the temple on day one. And he looks around and he sees what's happening, and then he quietly leaves the city, only to come back the next day to even more drama, which involved Jesus clearing the temple of all the people and the animals that were desecrating it.

[1 : 19] Of course, we spent a lot of time talking about that. There was the cursing of the fig tree. Now we're in the third day, which we studied at the end of chapter 11 last week, began with Jesus being confronted by a delegation of men from the ruling body of Israel, the Sanhedrin.

We're told there were chief priests that were a part of this group. There were scribes who would have been the lawyers as a part of this group, and then there were elders a part of this group as well. And they approached Jesus with a confrontation, demanding his credentials.

What gives you the right to teach what you're teaching? What gives you the right to act the way you're acting? And of course, their challenge was meant to be a trap.

They wanted to trap Jesus in his words in order that they might have justification, at least public justification for his execution. That was really the purpose in the confrontation.

They were trying to bait him into a conversation to which they could point to his words and say, see, he's blasphemous and he's worthy of death. And as we would expect, Jesus responds with incredible wisdom and affirms his identity, gives the reality of his credentials and his authority without actually giving the jealous rulers reason to accuse him.

[2 : 47] He just masterfully handles these men. Well, then we get in here to the first 12 verses of chapter 12, and we haven't left that conversation. Jesus is still talking to that same group of men, that delegation from the Sanhedrin, except now he diverts his attention away from them to the gathering crowds that are around them and beginning to come and to listen to him teach.

And he opens up by giving this parable. I remember back from chapter four, Mark really limits his record of Jesus's teaching and parables to that chapter, except for this circumstance, this instance. If you remember back to chapter four, what a parable is. Parable is a story that uses commonly understood situations, commonly understood ideas in order to communicate a vital spiritual truth. The word itself, parable, is made of two Greek words that we put together. It means to lay beside. It's literally a comparison. Jesus used these stories to lay them beside the vital truth that he is trying to teach.

And so it was a comparison or an illustration that Jesus would give. And he frequently taught through parables. If you go through Luke's gospel, you'll see many, many parables that Jesus taught, even in this instance, in addition to this one.

[4 : 13] But his stories always had the kingdom of God in view. Jesus, when he taught his parables, he wasn't teaching moral lessons.

That's not what it was about. And we can be guilty at times of taking the stories that Jesus told and making of them what Jesus didn't intend for them to be made.

For instance, even the culture around us understands the story of the prodigal son. And if we're not careful, we'll go to a parable of the prodigal son, and we'll draw all kinds of moral lessons about how we shouldn't demand our inheritance too early, and we should respect our parents.

But that's not the point of that lesson. We could go through it, and we could talk about brothers shouldn't be against each other, and shouldn't be fighting one another. But that's not the point of that parable. Jesus' stories always had the kingdom of God in view.

He's not teaching moral lessons. He's teaching the truth of eternal salvation. And this parable is no different. It has the kingdom in view. But this particular parable, at least as we look at Mark's gospel, is unique in that it's what we call a judgment parable.

[5 : 27] It's really closely related to the cursing of the fig tree that we studied in chapter 11.

Remember, the fig tree wasn't an acted parable. It wasn't something Jesus said.

It was something he did to draw that comparison to the dissolution of the temple and its worship, right? We understood that. Well, this is really the spoken version of that enacted parable.

When Jesus cursed the fig tree, he's demonstrating what he's doing in the dissolution of the temple.

When he gives this particular parable, he's speaking judgment against the spiritual leaders.

So do you see how this is progressing in the Passover week as it's leading to his crucifixion? Jesus lays the axe to the root of the tree, as it were, to the temple worship and the corruption that was there.

He's not reforming it. He's replacing it. And now we take it a step further. Now that he's accomplished that and he's got that message across, now he's dealing with the spiritual leaders or so-called spiritual leaders themselves.

[6 : 28] He's laying the axe to the root of the tree of the spiritual leadership of Israel. And he's doing away with them as well. So the parables are similar. And as these days leading to his crucifixion are progressing, Jesus made abundantly clear that he himself was the representative of the kingdom.

He was replacing the temple. He was doing away with the old structures. He was the new covenant embodied.

And that's what he was ushering in. And he was making that clear as we march through these texts here at the end of his life. Just as we saw at the end of chapter 11, it would be a mistake to pass this story off as largely irrelevant to our modern life.

The point of this lesson is that those who reject the Son of God face eternal judgment rather than eternal life.

And Jesus' words may be particularly directed in that moment at the spiritual leaders, but they're just as true for us. Just as the Father judged the hardened hearts of the leaders in Israel, so will he judge each of us that deny and reject the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 54] And that's the point. He's doing away with the leaders because they rejected the Son. He'll do away with us when we reject the Son as well. So let's work through it. Number one, notice the scandalous story.

The scandalous story. Now, the effectiveness of this parable is the fact that it is so shockingly outrageous.

As the story continues, if you just read it slowly and really take it kind of statement by statement, when we read a story like this, we read it almost woodenly, right? But imagine you are there in the temple listening to the master teacher, the greatest teacher to ever live, how he might have communicated these words to the group.

As they're hanging on his every word, as every statement comes and the story develops and progresses, you can see how the outrage for the hearer begins to grow and develop, and maybe even anger begins to develop as he tells this story.

And the point of the parable is that it was being played out in front of them in real life. It's very much like the story that the prophet Nathan told King David when he sinned with Bathsheba.

[9 : 10] Do you remember that one? It was the whole story about the lamb and the rich man stealing the poor man's lamb and all those kinds of things. You remember what happened with David in that? As the story progressed, he got more and more angry, so that by the time he gets to the end of it, he passes judgment.

And he passes judgment on that man. He must be killed for this wickedness that he has committed. And what does Nathan say? You're the man, David.

This story is about you. And that's what Jesus is doing here. He's telling this story and he's building the outrage among the people. And then he's going to ask them a question. He's going to say, what will the owner of the vineyard do?

Matthew tells us that they answered first. And they said, he's got to kill these wicked men. And the people pass judgment on themselves.

And Jesus essentially says, you're the man. You're the man. That's what's happening here. There's a few things that I want to break down with you as we go through the story, okay? Number one, I want you to see God's people.

[10:13] God's people. Verse one, a man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the wine press and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country.

Tenant farming is the context of this story, which is the process of working a particular piece of land that belongs to another person. And at the end of the year, you would pay an annual yield to the owner of the land based on the fruitfulness of the crop.

It's not really all that uncommon for these same type of arrangements to be used today. They were very prevalent in Israel at the time of Jesus's life. So the story that Jesus is telling here is not a riddle.

Everybody listening to him understood the story itself. They would have understood exactly what Jesus intended as far as the story itself is concerned. They understood this idea of tenant farming. In this case, a wealthy ruler pours an incredible amount of capital into establishing a vineyard. And the intent would be to produce wine that would then go to the market and would be sold and they would turn a profit.

[11:31] And I want you to notice in this story, the owner of the vineyard does everything necessary to set the vineyard up for success. He does it all.

He comes to the vineyard. He clears up all the land. He builds a hedge, probably of stone around the vineyard. That would be a protection, protection from intruders, protection from animals, anything that would come in and devastate the vineyard.

He carves out of boulders a wine press, two levels of a wine press, so that they could actually take the grapes that they harvest and crush them and harvest the wine and put it away.

He built a tower. It would have been used for shelter and safety and storage. He did everything that was necessary to do in order for the vineyard to be fruitful and effective and to produce a profit.

And once the vineyard was prepared, the owner leased it to the care of tenants, and then he left the country. Now, like I said, at this point, the people would have easily understood the imagery here, not only of the story, but of who Jesus intended the story to represent.

[12:43] It was a representation of God and his relationship with his people. Israel was routinely symbolized in the Old Testament as a vineyard.

And in this case, Jesus is even borrowing from Isaiah chapter 5. Let me read it to you. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it, and he hewed out a wine vat in it, and he looked for it to yield grapes.

You see where Jesus is borrowing here. He's intentionally getting them to think back to the nation. But it yielded wild grapes. And then he applies it specifically, Isaiah does.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there for me to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?

[13:40] And when I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it then yield wild grapes? These people understood the symbolism. They understand, okay, Jesus is telling a story about Israel.

This is a story about God's relationship with his people. And just as he says in Isaiah chapter 5, God says, I've done everything. Jesus says, I've done everything that was necessary for the vineyard to be safe and to be fruitful and to be everything that I desire for it to be.

And as the people listen to Jesus speak, they could have even looked up where they were on Solomon's porch there in the temple. They could have seen above the gates an elaborate, intricate, carved vine, grape vine.

Herod had put it there. It was made out of precious metals. It was carved into the rock and wealthy people would come by and they would add their own fine jewels to it and encrust it. This was very

clear to them.

Jesus is talking about God and his people. The interpretation was unmistakable. God is the owner. His people are the vineyard.

[14:49] And the religious leaders are the tenants who are responsible for its care. Okay? We see God's people. Number two, we see God's patience. God's patience.

Verse two. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

And again, he sent to them another servant. This one, they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. So he sent another. Him they killed.

And so with many others. Some they beat. Some they killed. So this is where the outrage of the story begins. This is where the drama begins to build up.

And from what I understand, these types of conflicts between tenants and landowners weren't necessarily uncommon in Jesus' day. Making it an illustration that everyone could understand.

[15:51] But it also wasn't an acceptable practice for what these tenants were doing. This was outrageous. Shocking. It takes five years for a brand new vineyard to begin to have a fruitful crop.

In fact, the Old Testament law had even said that you must wait five years before you do any kind of harvest when you're planting a new vineyard. Jesus would have had that. That would have been in the understanding of the people's minds as he told this story.

Five years is just enough time for these tenants who hadn't seen the owner for five years. They've poured in their blood and sweat and tears into this process. Just enough time for them to think this belongs to us, not to him.

We're the ones doing the work. We're the ones doing all the care. This is for us. And when the owner sends a servant to collect his percentage of the produce and wine, what do the tenants do? They beat him. They beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Can you imagine, Dwight? You send people with your farm. You're ready for a harvest.

[16:56] And you send somebody to go and get the harvest of Christmas trees. And the people that you had hired to care for them, instead of giving them the trees that you wanted, beat them instead and send them back.

Andy might deserve that. So what does the owner do? He does what any normal person would do. He sends a band of security guards to go and deal with the problem. He's got tenants that aren't listening. They're not obeying. It's time to be dealt with. But that's not what this owner does.

He sends another servant. He sends Gus this time. Gus goes to collect. This guy, Jesus says, they beat his head in.

They humiliated him and then sent him away. So what does the owner do? He sends Clementine. He sends Clementine.

[17:55] This time it escalated. They murdered him. Murdered this one. Surely, this is a capital offense now. These men are worthy of death now, according to the law.

Surely, the owner is going to send armed guards. He's going to send an army to deal with this. He's going to bring them before the judge. They're going to deal with this the right way. But that's not what he does.

He sends more and more servants time and time again, over and over and over and over. He sends servant after servant after servant after servant. And again and again, they either beat them or they murder them.

On and on it goes. They had lost all concern for the owner and his wishes. They decided to do things their own way.

They wanted to keep the prophets for themselves. It was outrageous. And the servants in Jesus' story represent all of those prophets we read about in the Old Testament.

[19:00] All of those men, and sometimes women, that God would send to the nation, proclaiming judgment, preaching the gospel, preaching the word. And what did the people do?

Instead of responding in repentance to the truth of their corruption, they beat, humiliated, and murdered the servants that God sent.

The New Testament bears witness to this over and over again. Hebrews 11. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned. They were sawn in two. That tradition says that was Isaiah. It was literally cut in half because they didn't like his message. They were killed with the sword. They went on about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, the writer says, of whom the world was not worthy, wondering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.

The writer of Hebrews is saying this is how the Jews treated the servants of God. They did all of these things. Jesus said it in Luke 11. Therefore, also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, Jesus says, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

[20 : 30] Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Remember Acts 7, last week we read it in Stephen's message. What did he say when he got to the end? Boldly he says, You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.

But don't be confused. The wicked tenants in this story serve to show us something remarkable, not about their wickedness, but something remarkable about the owner, God, the owner of the vineyard.

Look, their wickedness, honestly, their wickedness is not that surprising. It's a shocking circumstance. We're not surprised by that. That happens all the time. We see that in the news today. Wicked people, wicked people trying to abuse others, trying to gain everything for themselves.

We see it happening right now before our eyes. The wickedness itself is no surprise. What's surprising is the owner. After the treatment of the first servant, a wealthy ruler such as this one would have sent that group of armed agents, but that's not what he did.

[21 : 52] The Lord sent servant after servant to give these tenants another opportunity to do what was right. And I want you to please see the incredible grace and patience of God.

It is within God's divine right to immediately and utterly consume every person who defies him, every person who denies him, every person who sins against him.

In that moment, it is his divine right to consume us all. But his divine patience sends us messenger after messenger after messenger to call us to repentance, to call us to forgiveness.

What is this about? This is about the loving, long-suffering, and patience of our God. Jesus himself said in Matthew 23, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing.

Despite the fact they killed the prophets, despite the fact they stoned, again and again, Jesus says, I have stretched out my hands to you. I have stretched out my hands, Romans chapter 10, to a disobedient people.

[23 : 22] Romans 2. Do you suppose, old man, that you will escape the judgment of God? Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Paul goes on. But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

What do we see about this story? God is patient and he is long-suffering and he continues to see us send us messengers, but don't think that those messengers will continue to come over and over and over.

Eventually, they stop coming. Eventually, what comes is the righteous judgment of God. The truth is, God's been sending some of you, many messengers.

You've been getting a lot of messengers. It might be in the form of a pastor. It might be in the form of a godly spouse. It might be in a child who seems to care more about the things of God than your heart seems to care about.

[24 : 35] It may be in a co-worker or a friend that's trying to encourage you in the things of the Lord. And over and over, God's sending you messengers, sending you servants that are here to try to tell you the truth.

And what is his purpose in that? That he might lead you to repentance and faith. It's only due to the patience of God that you're still alive, that you have any blessing at all in your life.

And this patience is meant to bring you real life, eternal life. But his patience doesn't endure forever. As long as you continue rejecting him and denying him, you are storing up eternal wrath for his coming judgment.

And I will tell you this morning, don't waste the patience of God. Don't waste the patience of God. Number three, God's love.

Verse six, he had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying they will respect my son.

[25 : 51] Those tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

This, of course, is the climax of the parable. Again, the people would have expected the owner to send an army. He sends a son.

What farmer would do this? What farmer would do this? Who would send his only son to such wicked, vile men?

Don't forget the backdrop of the story. This whole conversation started because of a confrontation that these leaders had with Jesus about his authority.

And in the parable, it's the inerrant authority of the son that leads the owner to send him to the vineyard. James Edwards said it this way.

[26 : 50] I think this is helpful. In sending his son, he appeals to the right of law. For the son was the only person, save himself, who possessed legal claim over the vineyard.

This is why the owner says they will respect my son. The son goes as the father's representative with the father's authority to do the father's business to the father's property to claim the father's due.

Do you see? Do you see how the story was so obviously about these leaders who had questioned Jesus? That's the connection here. Notice that the tenants were entirely aware of the son's identity. They couldn't say, well, we thought he was a fake. We thought he was somebody just pretending to be a son. No, it was the very fact of his identity that led them to want to kill him.

They thought delusionally. If they could just kill the son, kill the heir, they could have the property. They could have the land. All the prophets would then be legally theirs. It was because they knew who he was that they killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

[28 : 06] And so it was with these chief priests and scribes and elders. They weren't ignorant of Jesus's identity. It was the very fact of his identity that led them to pursue his execution.

And this was all foundationally a struggle of authority as it is for every one of us. We fight against the lordship of Christ in our lives. But Jesus knew exactly what was in their hearts.

And he exposed them here. Exposed them. But again, the main takeaway is not the wickedness of them killing the heir. It's the indescribable love of the owner.

Why would God send his son to these vile people? Because of love, he did this. And notice what the son was sent to do.

He was not sent to arrest the tenants. He was not sent to condemn the tenants, despite what they had done. He was sent to convert them.

[29 : 12] And if they had only listened to the son, the owner would have forgiven them for all the evil they had committed to all of those servants who had come before. And this was the purpose in Jesus's first coming.

He did not come to condemn. He came to convert, to lead us to repentance, that he might save us. And he said as much. John 3, 17.

God did not send his son to the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. That's why he sent the son.

Do you see the incredible patience of God, but the incredible love of God? That's why he sent him. Then we see God's judgment.

Verse 9. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

[30 : 13] Like I said, Matthew revealed that Jesus actually asked this question and then gave the crowd a chance to respond. They actually gave this answer and then he affirmed it.

Let me read it to you. Matthew 21. They said to him, he will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.

That was the people that gave that answer in Matthew's gospel. And here we see in Mark's gospel, Jesus affirmed their answer. You're right. That's exactly what the owner is going to do.

Jesus, the master teacher, had the people right where he wanted them. Their outrage had reached its limit as they condemned the wicked tenants to a brutal execution.

And the people ultimately prophesied judgment against the spiritual leadership of the nation. And the delegation of representatives who were there knew it.

[31 : 21] And Jesus affirms it. Yes. He will destroy these tenants. And he will give the stewardship of the vineyard to another group of people.

Now, I want you to imagine you're in the, probably the Solomon's porch, probably the court of the Gentiles is where this is taking place most likely. And I want you to imagine that you're in the crowd listening to Jesus tell this parable.

And when he gets to the end here and he says, yes, you're right. The owner is going to come and he's going to destroy the tenants. And then he's going to give it to others, Jesus says. You can only imagine, picture with me, Jesus motioning over and looking at those 12 apostles sitting next to him. Because that's exactly who he gave it to. The vineyard here isn't simply the nation of Israel. It is the grand scope of all of God's people.

It's the grand scope of all of God's people. We call that the church. And who is it that Jesus gives his authority to? He takes it away from the spiritual leaders in Israel.

[32 : 25] And he hands it over to these 12 ordinary common men who he used then to go and impact the world in a magnificent way. That's what's happening.

The responsibility of caring for this precious vineyard was given to the apostles. And it continues today with all who continue in the apostles' doctrine.

That's us. That's us. We have the responsibility and stewardship of this vineyard, this kingdom. And it's worth noting here that the judgment in this parable is not against the vineyard.

It's against the tenants. Remember, the owner secured the fruitfulness of the vineyard. It was going to be fruitful. It was going to provide what he determined for it to provide.

That was settled. The judgment, he doesn't come and destroy the vineyard. He just gives it off to someone else. He has secured the fruitfulness of it. The leaders were supposed to tend to the vineyard for God's glory.

[33 : 34] Instead, they chose to exploit it for their own gain. And the same kind of exploitation happens in local churches today. Proud church leaders exploit God's people for their own benefit.

But listen, we can come to this parable and we can rest assured, God's perfect justice and judgment will come against all who abuse and attempt to exercise their own authority over God's vineyard.

And I've had some conversations with some of you this week at this idea of authority from that last passage. Something we didn't get to last Sunday was this. Jesus has all this authority, but he also delegates that authority.

Do you understand that? Remember when he sent the disciples out on their mission? He did it twice in his ministry. At least that's recorded for us. Remember, he gave them authority of that same word.

He gave them authority to cast out devils. He gave them authority to preach the gospel. In the Great Commission, Jesus says, All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Because of that, I am now giving you authority, he says, to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

[34 : 47] Baptizing them, teaching them, disciplining them. That's what Jesus did. It's a delegated authority. But listen, what we do with that authority, it's not our authority. It's not for us to determine to do things the way we want to do it.

It's not for us to run the church the way we want to run the church. It's not for us to live the life the way we want to live the life. He doesn't give us authority. He delegates his own authority to us.

But what these churches, some pastors, what these men in this parable were doing, is they were exploiting that authority. They were using their own authority instead of serving the authority of God. And God will judge that. Well, that's the bulk of it, right? The scandalous story. Number two, look at the supporting scripture. Don't be scared by number two. I'm almost done, I promise.

Verse 10. Have you not read in the scripture, Jesus says? This is where, he's driving the point home now. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

[35 : 53] This was the Lord's doing. It's marvelous in our eyes. Psalm 118. Like any good preacher, Jesus anchors the point of his parable to the scripture.

It wasn't just an illustration of his current circumstance. His parable symbolized the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Psalm 18 was one that they would have already used a number of times that week in Jewish worship for Passover.

It was one of the Hallel Psalms. So when Jesus says, have you not read the scripture? He's not asking them, have they actually read it? He's bringing to their attention. You've been reading about this all week long.

This has been a part of your worship and you've been blind to it, he said. It's the same passage that the people shouted in praise as he rode on the donkey into the city. They were aware of this.

It was fresh on their minds. Jesus was letting them know that it was being fulfilled before their very eyes. And the apostles used the same text over and over to preach the gospel.

[37 : 06] Acts chapter 4 in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else.

For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. And he appeals to Psalm 118. Paul does the same thing in Ephesians chapter 2.

Peter does it again in 1 Peter chapter 2. And he actually verbatim quotes Psalm 118 all over again. This whole conversation began with the leaders demanding the source of Jesus' authority.

Is there any question now as to whether he answered them plainly? Yes. Of course he did. But he didn't just say that he was the Messiah and the Son of God.

He didn't just say it. He proved it with the Bible. He proved it with the Scriptures. The one who wrote the Scriptures still appealed to those Scriptures to prove his own identity and to preach the gospel.

[38 : 21] And if Jesus himself found that to be the necessary method for preaching the truth, who are we to set our Bibles on the nightstand and go about trying to convince people of the gospel in any other way?

What is the purpose of our worship? What is the driving force of what we do Sunday by Sunday? It is the Word of God. What is the driving force of our evangelism?

It's the Word of God. We see the supporting Scripture, Jesus himself appealing to the Word of God to perform his ministry and to preach his truth. And we must be committed to the same thing.

We must be committed to God's Word, and we must be faithful to let it guide everything that we do. As we go to the world, we must appeal to the authority of the Bible.

Not our own intellect or observation. The Bible. Number three, the stubborn reaction. Verse 12.

[39 : 20] Before we read it, I just want you to see again the graciousness of Jesus here. Look at all he has done for these men in this conversation.

You go back to chapter 11. He leads them to John the Baptist. And he says, He says, Think, men. Think about John. Think about his ministry.

What does that say about who I am and my authority? He's helping them. He's helping them. And then he gets to this parable. What's this parable about? He's trying to open their hearts and their minds to the truth.

He's helping them. He's even using the crowd. He's saying, Men, even they understand this. Even they understand what you're doing is wicked and vile and against God.

You see the graciousness in how he's teaching them? He's not denying their judgment. But you see what he's doing and leading them? Surely, surely at this point, they will confess their guilt and cry for mercy.

[40 : 28] Surely at this point, that's what they'll do. Verse 12. And they were seeking to arrest him. That is, that's the reason they had come to have the conversation to begin with.

They had come seeking to arrest him, but they didn't because they feared the people. For they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So what did they do?

They sang, just as I am. And they got down on their knees and said, Lord, have mercy. No, they walked away. They walked away. It's not that they didn't understand.

It's not that they were ignorant of the truth. It's that they were so hard-hearted toward God that they rejected the truth out of pure spite. They knew it was true.

They just didn't care. They wanted their way. Luke 16, Jesus said that even, they were asking for a sign. And Jesus said, even if someone died and came back from the grave in resurrection, you still wouldn't believe because you're a bunch of hard-hearted people, men.

[41 : 40] And guess what happens later this week? Jesus dies. Three days later, he resurrects from the grave. And guess what the men do? Did they deny his resurrection?

Nope. Nope. They just covered it up. They covered it up. They knew the truth. They just didn't want to accept it.

So they deceived themselves into believing that it wasn't real. And they did the saddest thing that anyone ever does. They left him and they went away.

Spurgeon said, you've heard me quote this before, the same sun which melts the wax hardens the clay. And the same gospel which melts some persons to repentance, hardens others in their sins. And what we see being played out in chapter 12 is Jesus teaching the truth, these men understanding that truth, but the gospel itself hardening their hearts so that they walk away.

[42 : 45] And the passage is finally and fundamentally about what people do with the sun. And that's ultimately what it's about. The undeniable truth is that those who believe in Jesus receive forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, eternal life, eternal peace.

But all who reject the sun will face the eternal judgment of God in hell. And every single one of us in here are faced with two decisions as we listen to that and as we see this in the scriptures.

Sinclair Ferguson said it this way, when God's word searches out men's motives and exposes their hearts, two reactions are always possible. Men may see themselves as they really are, repent of their sin, and turn to the Lord.

We might think that would be the inevitable response to Jesus' own preaching. But another kind of response is possible. We can harden our hearts against the one who exposes our need and resolve with unmitigated bitterness to be rid of his influence.

So what's your response? Will you turn from sin and to the Lord? Or will you continue to harden your heart in a desperate attempt to rid yourself of his influence of truth?

[44 : 10] Well, let's take a look at that.