

## Too Late for Grace: When a Nation Rejects God

I have absorbed a lot of encouragement from a couple of messages that I preached last week when I was down in Dallas, Texas, and then down at the Ligonier Conference in Orlando, Florida. The messages, of course—some people livestreamed them or some people saw them on YouTube or whatever and suggested that I needed to give that same biblical insight to the folks of Grace Church. And so in thinking about that, and also realizing that we would have to skip Ephesians next week because it's Resurrection Sunday, it just turned out to make sense that we would follow the pattern of Passion Week both this Sunday and next. Then we'll pick up Ephesians in a couple of weeks. So I would invite you to open your Bible to Mark 12, Mark 12; and I want to read this text to you to have it in your mind, and then we're going to consider it in some measure of depth.

This is, by the way, Wednesday of Passion Week. This is Wednesday of Passion Week. The Lord knows He's going to be crucified. He told His disciples that on a number of occasions. And back in chapter 10, verses 32 to 34, He explicitly told them the details of what was going to happen. He said, "We're going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priest, the scribes. They will condemn Him to death, will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again." So they're headed for Jerusalem, and Jesus makes it crystal clear that He will be arrested, He will be condemned, He will be crucified, and He will rise again.

They actually arrive in Jerusalem not on a Sunday, but on Monday, and when they arrive in Jerusalem, it doesn't appear initially that the people are going to crucify Him. Rather, in chapter 11, verse 7, when "they brought the colt to Jesus" on which He rode in Jerusalem, "put their coats on it; He sat on it. And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!'" So on Monday it looked like they were hailing Him as their king.

On Tuesday, however, verse 15 says, chapter 11, Jesus and His disciples "came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it a robbers' den.' The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching."

He knew He was going to die. When He arrived, it seems like that was very unlikely as they hailed Him as King, the one who was coming in the name of the Lord. But rather than bless the nation, He judged them by judging their Temple operation, which was the heart of their religion, and He called it "a robbers' den." And this escalated the hatred against Him that eventually led to His execution on Friday.

There's another incident that happened before the assault on Tuesday—go back to verse 12. On Monday, He comes into the city, and this is how Tuesday began. He "entered Jerusalem, came

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into the temple; after looking around, left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late. On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening."

What did He do to that fig tree? Drop down to verse 20. "As they were passing by the next morning"—the morning after—"they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.'"

Jesus arrives knowing He's going to die. He arrives to accolades. People are hailing Him as the promised son of David, coming in the name of the Lord to establish the kingdom promised to Israel. It all looked good on Monday. On Tuesday, He curses a fig tree, assaults the Temple—and the curse of the fig tree is essentially a curse on Israel. Hosea, Nahum, Zechariah, Old Testament prophets referred to Israel as a fig tree. So this couldn't have been more opposite what we would have expected on Monday. They would have made Jesus a king, and He attacks their religious system and pronounces a curse on them.

The people welcomed Jesus as a king; He came as a judge. The people wanted Him to bless them; He cursed them. The people thought they were the people of God; Jesus described them as the children of the devil. Now on Wednesday, back in the Temple that has been vacated, after walking in and cursing the fig tree, He holds court in the Temple. It is, for at least a day, cleaned out of its corruption, and Jesus gives the parable in chapter 12.

And here is the parable: "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, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 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. And he sent them another slave, and they wounded 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. 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. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. 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"?' 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."

This is a parable of judgment. The point of this parable is in verse 9. Whoever this vineyard is is going to experience destruction. Whoever the stewards of this vineyard are, they're going to be destroyed and replaced; the vineyard will be given to others.

So what you have here: Jesus arriving in Jerusalem in Passion Week is essentially coming not as King, but as Judge. Symbolically, with the fig tree, He pronounces a curse on the nation Israel;

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specifically, with this parable, He pledges the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation. And the Jews should have known that by the way He began the parable.

Look back at verse 1. You will notice there is a quote in verse 1 from Isaiah 5. He starts His parable by quoting Isaiah 5: “A man planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower.” That comes directly from Isaiah 5. He is connecting with the fifth chapter of Isaiah, so let’s go back to that chapter, the fifth chapter of Isaiah. You need to follow carefully to see the importance of this.

Isaiah 5 begins, “Let me sing now for my well-beloved.” And you remember that in the parable, the son was called the “beloved.” So here is a song God is singing in Isaiah 5 to His well-beloved. We know by the parable in Mark that that is His Son.

“A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved has a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it.” Those are the very references that we read in Mark 12. “Then He expected it to produce good grapes” because of the care that He had given in the preparation, as we noted in verses 1 and 2, “but it produced only worthless ones”—beushim, sour berries, inedible.

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, 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?” In other words, “It’s not my fault; I did everything possible.”

So since it produced nothing but sour, inedible berries, “let Me tell you,” verse 5, “what I’m going to do to My vineyard. I’ll remove its hedge and it’ll 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.” Destruction. Total destruction of the vineyard. What’s He talking about? Verse 7: “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.” He’s talking about Israel.

So Isaiah comes along in the eighth century [BC], and God gives him a parable. It’s a parable about a man who plants a vineyard and does everything he can to make it successful. It’s not his fault that the vineyard produced nothing but worthless, inedible berries. Judgment is pronounced upon that vineyard; it has to be completely destroyed because it is nonproductive.

In the eighth century this is reference to Israel, and the destruction is going to come from the Babylonians. And more about that destruction flow—starting in verse 8, with a series of woes. If you look at verse 8, “Woe”; and as you follow down, verse 11, “Woe.” And you’ll see it more and more: verse 18, “Woe”; verse 20, verses 21, 22.

God pronounces judgment in specific ways over specific sins. Why? Verse 16, “The Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness.” God is going to judge. Why? Verse 24, “They have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

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So Isaiah is pronouncing judgment in the form of a parable about a vineyard. God is the one who builds the vineyard. God is the one who puts in that vineyard everything to make it flourish and be productive, and it brings nothing but sour berries. And God is going to destroy it. That's exactly what happened in 583 when the Babylonians came, destroyed Jerusalem and Israel. This is a judgment parable. It is a dirge; it's a funeral song. It's a sad, sad parable.

Now in chapter 6 of Isaiah, Isaiah has a vision of the Lord; and he needs that because he's devastated that God's judgment is coming, and he's the messenger of judgment. So he wants to be sure that God is still on the throne. And God gives him a vision. In chapter 6, verse 1, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted." This is really good news to Isaiah because the way things had gone in Israel, he might have assumed that God had been dethroned. But not so. God is sovereign, and His glory, symbolized by "the train of His robe filling the temple," permeates everything in the vision. His glory extends to the full range of the vision. So He is still on the throne, "lofty, exalted," and all-glorious. Then the angels say, "Holy, holy, holy." So these two very foundational truths about God, He is sovereign and He is holy, are established in the mind of Isaiah.

So whatever's going on in Israel that looks like total disaster and absolute destruction is consistent with God's sovereignty and His holiness. Nothing has gotten out of His control. This is God sovereignly acting in "holy, holy, holy" character. In other words, this is God doing what God has to do. His holiness requires it; His sovereignty allows it.

So when everything is as bad as it can possibly be, when destruction is coming upon the covenant people of God, when Jerusalem and the Temple and the nation will be devastated and destroyed, massacred, slaughtered, carried off to captivity—God is sovereign over that. And God's action in the Babylonian invasion is an expression of His holy and righteous hatred of sin.

So Isaiah in the vision wonders, "What do I do? What do I do?" Down in verse 5, "I am a sinful man. I know that because of the things that come out of my mouth." And yet, he's a prophet. So "one of the seraphim flew" and put a burning coal on his tongue, and he was forgiven and his iniquity taken away. The Lord saved him, you might say. The Lord redeemed him. The Lord cleansed him. So now here is a cleansed, useful prophet.

Verse 8, "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" Famous words. So Isaiah, who saw himself as a man with a dirty mouth amidst a people of dirty mouths—because that's where sin is most easily made manifest, out of your mouth—is cleansed. And God needs somebody to go to this nation that is under judgment, and Isaiah is the only one in the vision. He says, "Here am I. Send me!"

In verse 9, the Lord accepts his offer: "Go, and tell this people. Go tell them." Tell them what? Listen to the message, verse 9, "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." What?

"Go tell them"—here's the message—"it's too late. You wouldn't listen, you wouldn't see, you wouldn't believe; and now you can't." Do you see that? "Tell them it's too late. Tell them, 'You

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can keep listening, keep looking, but you will not perceive, and you will not understand. Your hearts are insensitive, your ears are dull, your eyes are dim, so that you cannot see, you cannot hear, you cannot understand, you cannot return, and you cannot be healed.' Tell them it is too late; judgment is already in motion."

And then, verse 11, Isaiah says, "How long do I do that? How long do I do that?" "Until the cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land." "Just keep doing it until there's not a soul left to speak to. Tell them it's too late. Tell them it's too late." Too late for this people, this nation. "You keep telling them until all the cities have been devastated, until no one is left, it's without inhabitant, until all the houses are empty and the land is desolate, until the Lord has removed them far away." That's the captivity. "Just keep telling them. And the message is, 'You wouldn't believe, and now you can't believe. It's too late.'"

Verse 13. "Why would You do that?": "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it." What is that? There's a remnant. It's too late for the nation, but there is a remnant. He calls that remnant the "stump." He calls it at the end of verse 13 "the holy seed." In the eighth century, Israel could no longer, as a nation, believe; it was too late. But there was a remnant. There was a remnant, a holy seed the Lord would gather.

Fast-forward now to the New Testament, and look at Matthew 13—Matthew 13, and we'll look at verse 10. And by the way, both Mark and Luke make reference to this, not as extensively as Matthew does. But follow this: "And the disciples came to Him and said, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?'" Isaiah had spoken in a parable, and the parable was a judgment parable. "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Listen to this: "Jesus answered them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to them it has not been granted.'" Did you get that? "I'm talking to them in parables because it's too late. They haven't been granted the ability to understand."

Verse 12, "Whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." From now on, what they think they know about spiritual truth is going to be subtracted. "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled," and He quotes right out of Isaiah 6: "You will keep on hearing, but will never understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them." They can't come now.

"They will hear, but not understand. They will see, but not perceive. Their hearts are dull. Their ears can't hear, their eyes can't see, and they can't understand, and they can't return to Me, and I cannot and will not heal them." Jesus pronounces essentially the same curse on first-century AD Israel that Isaiah pronounced on eighth-century Israel.

The remnant was the disciples, verse 16: "Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see

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what you see, and didn't see it, and to hear what you hear, and didn't hear it." It was too late for Isaiah's generation, and it was too late for Jesus' generation. They had their opportunity.

Turn to John chapter 12 as we continue to follow this, which leads back to the parable of Mark 12. But in John 12, verse 37, though Jesus "had performed so many signs before them, they were not believing in Him." They had their opportunity, three years of it. "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" And that is quoted right out of Isaiah 53, verse 1. "For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 'He has blinded their eyes'" —right out of chapter 6—"hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.' These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him."

Even if they wanted to believe, they couldn't believe. That's illustrated in verse 42: "Many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." Even those who were drawn to believing couldn't come. Too late.

So our Lord is pronouncing the same kind of judgment that Isaiah pronounced on his generation. It's terrifying to think of that. The disciples and the few followers, they were the remnant. But apart from that, the nation could not believe because they would not believe. Willing unbelief became judicial unbelief. God fixed them in their rejection.

Go to the end of the book of Acts and in chapter 28. And we all understand that Paul is a prisoner in Rome. "When they set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers"—and these are Jews, as noted down in verse 17—"and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening." So he's giving Old Testament evidence of Jesus. "Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word." Some were saying, "It sounds reasonable, seems believable." Others, the very opposite.

And the parting word is, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.'"'" Again, Paul says to the Jews at the end of his ministry in Rome, "It's too late." And verse 28, after Paul quotes the same passage in Isaiah 6: "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." This is exactly the same thing that Jesus said. This is exactly what Isaiah said.

Turn to Romans 11. And we're almost back to Mark; this is very important. Paul is talking about salvation, salvation of the Jews. Romans 11, verse 5: "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." By election, a remnant. "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

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What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained.” That is just a terrifying statement. Paul is saying again essentially what he said at the end of the book of Acts: “Israel is seeking righteousness, seeking a relationship with God, but it has not obtained it. But those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened.” There’s, in unmistakable terms, the doctrine of election.

And then, quoting the Old Testament, “Just as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not, ears to hear not, down to this very day.’ And David says, ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever.’” Drawn from Isaiah and Psalms. And again, it’s too late, it’s too late. A remnant chosen, verse 7: “Those who were chosen obtained” salvation and grace.

So what we have in this is very important to understand: A generation of people can come too late to Christ. It’s already past the time of grace, it’s too late. That is what was true in the eighth century Israel, first century Israel, and is, no doubt, true of us today, because in Romans 1 it says, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteous of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” When any society suppresses the truth continually, it can go past the point where God will hear; it can be too late.

Now with that in mind, let’s go back to the parable in Mark 12. So we know He starts by drawing back into their minds the reality of Isaiah 5 and 6. But in this parable, the man plants the vineyard, rents it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey. Everybody would understand planting a vineyard, even as they did in the eighth century because it was common in Israel; there were vineyards all over the mountain slopes. “So he went on a journey after renting it out to tenant farmers to an agreed percentage of the harvest.” This was pretty normal. This is an owner who’s going to be gone, and everybody would understand that; commonly done by absentee landowners.

“At the harvest time,” in verse 2—usually if this is a new vineyard it might take four or five years from the original planting. But when it was ready to yield, “he sent a slave to the vine-growers,” the tenant farmers, “to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers.” They owed him that, the vine-growers.

Then scandalously, verse 3 says, “They took him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed.” This is shocking. Now Jesus is talking to leaders. Go back to 11:27. It says there, “He was walking in the temple, and the chief priests and scribes and elders came to Him.” So He’s talking to the Jewish leaders. And by the way, they are the stewards in the parable. They are the tenant farmers, they are the vine-growers. They are the ones who were God’s stewards over His people Israel. The vineyard is Israel, as it was in Isaiah, and the leaders of Israel are the vine-growers; it’s their stewardship.

When the servant comes, “they took him, beat him, sent him away empty-handed.” This is criminal behavior. This is illegal. This is ungrateful. This is vicious. Literally, the verb means to punch him or to hit him. They beat him up, sent him away in pain.

And then in verse 4, He adds another layer of this: “And he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully.” They bashed his head in, is what it

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means, *kephalaioō*, to bash someone's head in. "They bashed his head in, and treated him shamefully," in the ultimate form of dishonor.

Verse 5, "He sent another," and it escalates now beyond bashing his head in after punching the first one. This one "they killed." In fact, in Matthew's account of this parable, it says, "They stoned him to death." "And with many others, beating some and killing others." This is bizarre behavior. This is outrageous behavior. This would have to be shocking to the Jewish leaders.

Verse 6, he's down to only one left, the beloved son. "He sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" A beloved son. One would think they would respect a beloved son. But here, as in so many of our Lord's parables, this is the ultimate shock. He holds something back until you meet the main character, and you face what is utterly unexplained. Stunning.

They killed the son. Verse 7, the "vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!'" With no hesitation, in the story that Jesus told, they killed the son. And then didn't even give him a funeral: They "threw him out of the vineyard." Roadkill.

The question then comes in verse 9: "What will the owner of the vineyard do? What will he do?" And by now the leaders of Israel are outraged at this behavior; and certainly they offered a collective answer, according to Matthew 21. "They said to Him, '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.'" Obviously, he'll kill those evil vine-growers. Surely, "he will come and destroy the vine-growers, and give the vineyard to others." In Luke's account of this, he says they were stunned to the point where they were saying, "May it never be!" "No, no, not possible," strongest negative. They had nothing but respect for the owner of the vineyard. They had nothing but respect for his servants and nothing but respect for his son.

What is this about? Well the one who planted is God, and the vineyard is Israel. The vine-growers are religious leaders, those who were given care over the people—the very ones who ran the Temple operation that Jesus had just assaulted, the very ones who were around Him at the time He taught this. The long journey is the Old Testament era, Old Testament history. So God chooses a people, a vine, a vineyard; turns that vineyard over to the religious leaders of Israel, starting with the patriarchs all the way down to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. And harvest time? That's appropriate seasons when God expects a spiritual harvest. He expects good grapes, Isaiah 5; but He gets sour grapes.

Who are the slaves? Who are the ones He sends? Old Testament prophets sent to Israel to bring the nation to hear from God. Call the nation to produce spiritual fruit and obedience. These slaves are all those whom God sent to His people, calling them to righteousness, holiness, repentance, and obedience—really, from Moses to John the Baptist. And what did they do? Well, the history of Israel tells you. You read the Old Testament: They beat them, they treated them shamefully, they wounded them, they threw them out, they bashed their heads in, they killed them. According to Justin Martyr, Isaiah was sawn in half by his own people. Jeremiah was constantly mistreated and thrown into a pit. Tradition says he was finally stoned to death. Ezekiel was mistreated. Tradition says he was murdered by an Israelite he rebuked. Amos had to flee for



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his life. Zacharias the priest was rejected and stoned. Micaiah the prophet was punched in the face. This is how they were treated—not just rarely treated, but regularly treated that way.

Just the twenty-fifth chapter of Jeremiah, for a moment, and verse 4, ““And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear, saying, “Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the Lord has given you and your forefathers forever and ever; and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.” Yet you have not listened to Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.’

“Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will send Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones’”—and that means grinding, making food—“the light of the lamp. This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”” Isaiah was giving the judgment message, and Jeremiah filled in the details.

In Matthew chapter 23—and just let me read you a section of it, verse 29: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’” This is the generation of Jesus saying, “We never would have killed the prophets.” “So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

“Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” You’re no better than any previous generation.

Now back to Mark 12. Who is the beloved son? This is unmistakable: the same beloved one from [Isaiah 5:1](#). He had one more to send: His beloved Son. “This is My beloved Son,” He said at our Lord’s baptism. “This is My beloved Son,” He said at the Transfiguration.

He is distinct from all other messengers. He’s not a servant, He’s not a slave; He is a Son. “Perhaps they will respect him.” No. No, they murdered Him. “Let’s kill him,” verse 7, “the inheritance will be ours!”

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“They took him,” verse 8, “killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.” Threw Him out of their nation. Could even refer to Him being crucified outside the city. “The inheritance will be ours! Get rid of Him, and we’ll maintain our stewardship over God’s kingdom.” Really?

“What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and give the vineyard to others,” and they would say the same thing. Vengeance will come; it must come, and it did: 70 AD, the death of tens of thousands of Jews. The Temple was never rebuilt, priesthood was never recovered. No sacrifices, no ceremonies, no Sadducees, no Pharisees, no priests, no chief priests to this day—the whole system ended, over with. And the owner will give it to others.

Let me just jump to a conclusion for you. Who are the “others”? The next custodians of the kingdom, the next custodians of God’s truth, the next custodians of the law and the prophets and the covenants and the promises mentioned in Romans 9. Who are the next custodians? The apostles. And the early church met and studied the apostles’ doctrine. Who are the next custodians? The apostles and the disciples of the apostles. They are the new stewards of the kingdom.

And revelation from God will come to them. Jesus tells them in the upper room Thursday night that the Spirit of God is going to come and bring all things to their remembrance and lead them into all truth. They are going to be the custodians of the rest of divine revelation. The apostles and those associated with the apostles were then given divine truth that now is the New Testament. They are the true custodians, and they were faithful. And, by the way, they were virtually all martyred. They became the custodians. And we study the apostles’ doctrine.

Now is that the end of the story? No, that’s not the end of the story. Look at verse 10. The story doesn’t end with a dead son. “Have you not read this Scripture”—I read it earlier, Psalm 118—“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’?” The Son is the stone of Psalm 118. The Son is the stone. And the rejected stone that becomes a chief cornerstone requires a resurrection; and the resurrection is what elicits the statement from Psalm 118: “This came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

Peter picked up on this, especially Peter, [Acts 4:10](#), “Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man,” who he had just healed, “stands here before you in good health. He”—Jesus Christ—“is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone.” And then this great statement: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” The Son who was the beloved, the Son who was killed is the stone.

The Son is the stone: Christ. The one who owns the vineyard is God, and the vineyard is His people Israel. They were brutally blasphemous of Him. They killed the prophets, they killed the Son, and God has to bring in new stewards. Those are the apostles, and they give us the truth, including the Resurrection; and we follow the apostles’ teaching as revealed in the New Testament.

## Too Late for Grace: When a Nation Rejects God

So how does that apply to us? What I was saying in the last week when I was going through some of these passages is that it can be for a generation of people too late. Too late for eighth century Israel, too late for first century Israel. But it can be too late for every nation. Acts 14, God says He allows all the nations to go their own way.

How do you know when a nation passes the point where salvation is possible for a people? Well, Romans 1; we've talked about it. Romans 1, wrath: "God gave them over" to sexual immorality. "God gave them over" to homosexuality. "God gave them over" to a reprobate mind, a non-functioning mind. So when you see a nation deep in sexual sin, pervasively affirming of homosexuality, and the insanity of a reprobate mind, where they make laws to criminalize righteousness and to legalize gross evil, you know that nation's under judgment.

And the message to this nation, our message to this nation, if you say to the Lord, "Here am I, send me," the message is this: It's too late for the nation; we're under judgment. But it's not too late for the elect because, as Romans 11 says, some are chosen; they can believe, they will believe when we proclaim the gospel.

What's our message to this nation? "You're under judgment. It's too late, judgment has been unleashed. You can hear, but not understand. You can see, but not perceive. Your heart may be attracted but hardened by God. But God has His people." So we warn because we don't know who those people are, and we also offer the grace of the gospel; that's our calling. Too late for a nation, not too late for the elect.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. It is not obscure; it is not hard to understand; it is crystal clear. Salvation is by grace; and at the present time a remnant, according to Your gracious choice, is being gathered. What most may be seeking is not obtained; but those who are chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened. It's really a terrifying reality, reminiscent of the Flood, where Noah for 120 years, a preacher of righteousness, warns the world of judgment. And after 120 years of warning there are only eight souls that escape.

This is human history. People harden their hearts so long that they go past a point, and it becomes too late. That is certainly the history of all the nations, and ours as well. But may we cry out with warning of the existing judgment and the far worse judgment to come in the afterlife, and may we call sinners to repent and believe, and tell them there is no salvation in any other than Jesus Christ. He is the Son, the stone rejected, resurrected, and in whom alone is salvation.

Thank You for Your grace to us. And we ask that You would use us to call Your own to Yourself, because they cannot come unless they hear the message concerning Christ. May that be ever on our hearts and lips we pray, for His sake. Amen.