

## Your Final Answer Please

### Mark 12.1-12

Scripture reading: Isaiah 5.1-7

'It's not my fault. She made me do it.' So goes one of the most frequently heard childhood excuses.

I heard this one in Scripture class just this past week. Dylan, a year four student, kept talking to his friend the whole time I was trying to tell the Bible lesson. I warned him once. I warned him twice. The third time, I called him to the front of the room and told him to apologise to me and the class for disrupting the lesson. Dylan didn't apologise; he made an excuse.

'It's not my fault; Bailey made me talk – he's the one who is talking.' I said, 'Dylan, I have had to stop the lesson three times because of you. Each time, you were the one talking.' 'No I wasn't,' Dylan insisted. 'It was Bailey who started it.'

Dylan didn't realise it, but he was quoting right out of the pages of the Bible. What did Adam say when God caught him in the shame of his sinfulness? 'It's not my fault. She made me do it.' And what did Eve say? 'It's not my fault. The serpent made me do it.' God did not then, nor does He now accept this excuse.

We are responsible for our actions.

Today we have the communion table before us. And the question I want to put to you is this: Who is responsible for the death of Jesus? Who killed Jesus?

The first answer that immediately comes to mind is, 'No-one killed Jesus. It was God's will that He substitute Himself as the sacrifice for our sin. At any time He could have delivered Himself, but He willingly and deliberately died for us.'

The theme verse in Mark says this very thing:

Mark 10:45 (NKJV)

<sup>45</sup>For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and **to give His life a ransom** for many."

Jesus was not a victim. He was a volunteer.

With this being the case, are the villains in the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus absolved of responsibility? Can Judas say, 'It's not my fault; God made me do it'? Can Pilate say, 'It's not my fault; God made me do it'? Can Caiaphas, the high priest who engineered the whole miscarriage of justice, say, 'It's not my fault; God made me do it'?

This morning, we'll let Jesus answer that question. He answers it with a parable.

Mark 12:1-12 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup>Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around *it*,

dug *a place for* the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

<sup>2</sup> Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. <sup>3</sup> And they took *him* and beat him and sent *him* away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup> Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully treated. <sup>5</sup> And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. <sup>6</sup> Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>7</sup> But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>8</sup> So they took him and killed *him* and cast *him* out of the vineyard.

<sup>9</sup> "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. <sup>10</sup> Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected *Has become the chief cornerstone*. <sup>11</sup> *This was the LORD's doing, And it is marvellous in our eyes*?"

<sup>12</sup> And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away.

The context for this parable is the Jewish Temple – where Jesus has just chased out the money changers, and is now being tested by spiteful religious leaders. Jesus assigns responsibility for His death before it happens.

Who killed Jesus? They did. I did. We are responsible.

To put it more simply, I quote from Ezekiel 18.20 . . . and this is our sermon in a sentence: **'The soul who sins shall die.'**

We come now to our final message in this series I've titled, 'The Surprising Servant'. There is one question we must all answer: What will you do with Jesus?

Just be aware of this: If you choose against Jesus, you alone are fully accountable for your choice – even if it is within the sovereign control of God. **'The soul who sins shall die.'**

As we examine this parable more closely, we note three actions: God's requisition, Man's rebellion, and God's revenge. The point is sobering: **'The soul who sins shall die.'**

## 1. God's Requisition (Mark 12.1-2)

There are two rights that God exercises as the owner-creator of this property.

### A. Right of improvement

Mark 12:1 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> . . . "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around *it*, dug *a place for* the wine vat and built a tower.

Four improvements are made. First, the vineyard is planted – a wise choice in Israel given the suitability of the climate to grape production. Second, a hedge or stone fence is put around it for security. Third, a wine vat is dug so that maximum commercial value can be extracted from each harvest, and last, a tower is built. This structure, according to John MacArthur, ‘had a 3-fold purpose: 1) it served as a lookout post; 2) it provided shelter for the workers; and 3) it was used for storage of seed and tools.’<sup>1</sup>

The description Jesus gives in this parable corresponds to Israel. God planted the nation in the Promised Land, protected them with the hedge of His covenant, guarded them from on high, and set them up to be productive.

It was His sovereign right to choose a people, and improve them as a nation. That was His first right of requisition. The second was the . . .

## **B. Right of investment**

Not all properties are owner occupied. Sometimes an owner uses the property to generate income. That is the case in the parable.

Mark 12:1-2 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> . . . And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. <sup>2</sup> Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers.

We wouldn’t argue with the owner expecting a share in the harvest – that is fair compensation for rent. In this case, it is actually more than fair. The tenants have done none of the work. Did you know that it usually takes five years for a vineyard to produce? That’s a long time to wait for a return on investment – and the tenants have shouldered none of that expense.

You could say the tenants were given a gift – a first-rate vineyard they didn’t plant protected by a fence they didn’t build and guarded by a tower they didn’t erect. And they have risked no money for the privilege. The terms of their tenancy requires only a percentage of the vineyard’s production. Technically, wouldn’t all of it belong to the owner?

This parable helps us put our life and possessions into proper perspective. All that we have – all that we enjoy – God gave to us as an investment. He is still the rightful owner.

And what does He require in return? Money upfront? Heroic feats of goodness? No. He only requires us to love and follow Jesus with what He has already given us, and to happily surrender a percentage back to Him as He requires.

Sadly, few people recognise God’s ownership or respond in gratitude. Israel is a case in point.

---

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (Mk 12:1). Nashville: Word Pub.

## 2. Man's Rebellion (Mark 12.3-8)

Here we have a description of justice so perverted; we might mistake it for hyperbole. But the parable is real in this respect. These horrible things actually happened in Israel.

Mark 12:3-8 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup>And they took *him* and **beat him** and sent *him* away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent them another servant, and at him they **threw stones**, wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully treated. <sup>5</sup>And again he sent another, and him they **killed**; and many others, beating some and **killing some**. <sup>6</sup>Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>7</sup>But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us **kill him**, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>8</sup>So they took him and **killed him** and cast *him* out of the vineyard.

These servants that were beaten, stoned and killed were the prophets sent by God to warn and instruct His people. On a separate occasion, Jesus accused the religious leaders directly:

Luke 11:47-51 (NKJV)

<sup>47</sup>Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and **your fathers killed them**. <sup>48</sup>In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup>Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,' <sup>50</sup>that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world **may be required** of this generation, <sup>51</sup>from the **blood of Abel** to the **blood of Zechariah** who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, **it shall be required of this generation**.

There are two basic sins at work here.

### A. Sin of Autonomy

Autonomy is the attitude, 'I will do it myself. I will be my own boss.' The tenants were not content to profit from the vineyard – they wanted to control the vineyard. So they rejected every messenger that came from the owner.

The sin of autonomy is rampant today. Are you guilty of the sin of autonomy?

The test of autonomy is the loss of control. How do you respond when you cannot be in control anymore? Can you rest in the Lord and not fight against what is happening?

### B. Sin of Idolatry

Idolatry is a sin much broader than merely bowing down to statues. It is the sin of putting anything before God.

The tenants put money before God. They were greedy. As they themselves said, 'Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'

The sin of idolatry is rampant today. Are you guilty of the sin of idolatry? How important is money to you? Is there something in your possession that you could not live without?

The test of idolatry is loss of possession. How do you respond when you lose something? Can you give it up without clinging? Listen to your attitudes and words. Do you complain about things that are actually God's?

Let's turn that around and think about God – because He is the one losing thus far in this parable. Taken at face value, we might puzzle, 'Why would the landowner keep subjecting his servants – and ultimately his son – to mistreatment and murder? Was he naive? Foolish?'

No. He was, and is, persistently merciful and loving.

Never let it be said that God is not fair. The only credence that can be given to that accusation is that God is not fair to Himself. He endured – and continues to endure – ingratitude, rebellion, and shame. It is all unjust. Yet He remains patient and loving and giving for the salvation of some.

But one day your final answer must be locked in. What will you do with Jesus? The religious leaders answered that question by killing Him. While their deeds worked towards our redemption, they were nonetheless accountable: **'The soul who sins shall die.'**

Now we come to the end of the parable.

### 3. God's Revenge (Mark 12.9-11)

Someone might protest – 'God is love. How can you use the word revenge beside the name of God?' But it is God Himself who says, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay' (Hebrews 10.30). That is why it is actually 'a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10.31).

The revenge God takes is both threatening and insulting.

#### A. Threatening

The punishment fits the crime.

Mark 12:9-11 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup> "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers . . . <sup>10</sup> Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected *Has become the chief cornerstone.* <sup>11</sup> *This was the LORD's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?*'"

The quote Jesus makes from Psalm 118 may seem cryptic to us, but to the religious leaders it was like a slap in the face. They knew this as a Hallel Psalm – predictive of the coming Messiah. The clear implication was that Jesus is the Messiah and they were the prospective murderers – a charge that proved to be only too true just a couple days later.

In Matthew's account

Matthew 21:44 (NKJV)

<sup>44</sup> "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

Is there some area in which you are rebelling against God? Perhaps there is a step of faith you know you should take, but you are dragging your feet. Or perhaps there is a deed of obedience you should do, but you are putting it off – like baptism. Or perhaps there is a lingering sin that you are tolerating instead of forsaking.

Heed the threat, because you will be held fully responsible.

At this point, I want to warn you that the question is not what do you think of Jesus. It is what will you do with Jesus. Our true beliefs are displayed in our behaviour. So if we are not building on the chief cornerstone, we risk being smashed on Him.

**‘The soul who sins shall die.’**

## **B. Insulting**

Mark 12:9 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup>“Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.

Put yourself in the self-righteous shoes of the Pharisees and priests. For more than 1500 years, the Jewish race – your race – has been the exclusive people of God. Now Jesus suggests that Gentiles will take over. That is what He means when He says ‘give the vineyard to others.’

What an insult.

But the Pharisees and priests have no-one to blame but themselves. God did not abandon them; they abandoned God. They are fully responsible.

And don’t think for a moment that you are more secure than they. For if God would prune His chosen people, the Jews, how much quicker would He prune His adopted people, the Gentiles, if we take Him for granted and rebel?

**‘The soul who sins shall die.’**

The time has come for us to face reality. In the gospel of Mark, we have seen who Jesus is – the Saviour, King and God. Now it is time for us to answer: What will you do with Jesus?

We answer that question with our actions and attitudes. If we truly believe in Jesus; if we truly follow Jesus, we will be changed . . . and we will be changing.

But if your loyalties are divided, and you are taking the fruits of God’s vineyard with no genuine submission or obligation back to Him, then be sure your sin will find you out.

**‘The soul who sins shall die.’**

You are fully responsible. The day will come when you’ll stand before God and witnesses and you’ll have to apologise in truthfulness that escaped my year four student: It is all my fault. I made me do it.