



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Suffering Savior, Mark 12:1-12

"The Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] ...the studies that we're going to attempt and are grateful to Thee for this opportunity to again look into the Scriptures. And we pray that as we do we may be guided by the Holy Spirit so that we understand the things that Thou wouldst have us to understand. Give us direction and may the Scriptures speak to us in a personal way. May not only our minds be challenged but may our spirits also be stirred by the Spirit to more obedience and dedication, devotion to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

May his Lordship impress itself upon us. And may we respond accordingly by divine grace. For we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] For our study tonight, which is "The Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants," I want you to turn with me to three passages and first of all let's read the passage in Isaiah chapter 5 because it is in the background of some of the things that we will read in the New Testament. And I would like for you to keep it in mind as we move through The Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants.

So will you listen now as I read Isaiah chapter 5, verse 1 through verse 7,

"Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." (You know, it's an interesting thing to realize as you read the New Testament account of the parable that we're going to look at to discover that the terms that our Lord uses in telling that little story are terms that are derived from the verses that I have just read. So it is evident that our Lord had read this passage, and not only had read it but had pondered it so that on the spur of the moment he was able to give this parable in terms derived from this chapter. It is a beautiful illustration to us of the importance of reading and studying the Scriptures. It is something that our Lord himself did. Now let's finish the little story in Isaiah 5, verse 3.) "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

Now notice that this parable is a parable of judgment and our Lord is going to make that use of it when he tells his parable of the householder and the tenants. Now let's look at Psalm 118, Psalm 118. And we'll just read two verses of Psalm 118. You'll recognize as you read through the New Testament that this is one of the psalms that our Lord Jesus and the New Testament writers cite from, 118 verse 22 and 23, "The stone

which the builders refused is become the head of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

And now we turn over to the New Testament to our passage which we are going to attempt to expound tonight, Mark chapter 12, verses 1 through 12. Mark 12, verses 1 through 12,

"And he began to speak unto them in parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.' And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?" (Now in the East if you shout out, in the midst of a meeting such as this, a rhetorical question they tend to answer and not remain like dummies as you do over here [Laughter]. But over there they answer. And Matthew says they did answer and so I am taking this as being the answer of the crowd rather than our Lord's answer of his own question. So,) "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this Scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way."

From the time Thales, the first great Greek philosopher, to the time of Freud, the last of the great classical philosophers of history, men have groped for an understanding of ultimate reality. The Germans call it by the word "weltanschauung", or "worldview". But 20th Century man has shouted no "Eureka's". He has not found the solution to the problem of ultimate reality. James Joyce has said, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to escape." And Henry Ford, who was no philosopher of history, said, "History is the succession of one damned thing after another." [Laughter] And I think many of us have, as we have looked at history, surmised that the inventor may be a little closer to the facts than some of our great philosophers.

One of the reasons that the great philosophers and the inventors have not found the solution to the problem of ultimate reality is that they have neglected the Jew. The Jew is like a human Gulf Stream in the midst of the ocean of humanity. It is a lonely river in the midst of the ocean of mankind. Its springs are in the gray dawn of world history and its mouth is in the shadows of the eternity that is to come.

God said through the heathen profit Balaam that they are a people that shall dwell alone. And they have dwelt alone. And they are dwelling alone today. I know that you say, "Well there are some Jews that I know of who have been assimilated." That's true. There are some. But the Jews are still with us. The Israelites are still with us and wonder of wonders they're on the front page today. One can understand the Christian Hebrew Adolph Saphir's words when he said, "The history of Israel is the history of a miracle, even as it is the miracle of history."

Some time ago I took a book on philosophy of history by Bruce Mazlish, professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I took it from the shelves, bought it, went home to read it, and as I was thinking about some of these things it suddenly occurred to me, 'Well I wonder what Professor Mazlish had to say about the Jew.' It is a book on philosophy of history and he has sought to interpret the philosophy of history of men like

Vico, and Voltaire, and Marx, and Spengler, and many of the great classical philosophers of history, including Freud. And so I turned to the back and looked and discovered that so far as the man who made up the index was concerned there was no reference whatsoever to the nation Israel in a rather substantial book in which the philosophy of history was being discussed.

Now as I read through the book I did find two or three references to Israel and the Jews, but they were somewhat incidental. And I do not see how it is possible for a person studying philosophy of history to neglect the Jews if he hopes to find any solution to the problem of weltanschauung that enables us to understand the facts of human history.

The other great reason for man's failure to discover a clue to ultimate reality is related to that and that is because man has failed to understand Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God. And because they have failed to recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God, they have failed to understand their own history. We cannot possibly understand our history if we do not understand who Jesus Christ is. I think in this parable that we're going to study tonight we have some light, not all the light, for this parable does not tell us much about the future. We have some light, however, on both of the questions that we have been discussing, this parable of the rejection of the son.

In one of the great classical and also one of the great contemporary works of reference there is an article by Professor Hans Conzelmann, a very prominent New Testament scholar today, on Jesus Christ. And in Professor Conzelmann's article in R.G.G. which is this classical reference work, all New Testament scholars, in fact all biblical scholars, know about R.G.G. In this article on Jesus Christ, Professor Conzelmann, one of our great New Testament scholars, has said, "Jesus Christ never called himself Son of God, nor even Son of man. As a matter of fact," Professor Conzelmann says, "Jesus Christ was only a great teacher and miracle worker."

This afternoon I opened up another book in which there was a very lengthy discussion of the titles of our Lord Jesus in the New Testament, a book on New Testament Christology, and as far as I can tell this author also, and also a German, this author also says that Jesus Christ never called himself the Son of God, never thought of himself as the Son of God. So we want to look at this little parable tonight and we want to keep that question in the back of our minds, "Did Jesus Christ think of himself as the Son of God?" as we read it and study it.

Now we want to look at the parabolic story and this is the outline that I will be following, that was my introduction. So we are at the parabolic story related, Mark chapter 12, verses 1 through 8. And if you have your pencils and you have a little piece of paper, write down Matthew chapter 21, verse 33 through 46 and Luke chapter 20, verses 9 through 19, for these are the other two accounts of this same parable in our synoptic gospels. And the one in Matthew is particularly important because it is given in more detail than the one in Mark, and I will be referring to one or two things from the Matthean account as we go along.

So the parabolic story related. Now you know, when you study the Bible one of the first things you must do is to notice the opening words of the important paragraphs. Now this paragraph begins, "And he began to speak unto them by parables." What is the most important word in that sentence? Well, the most important word is not "he". The most important expression is not "he began to speak". The most important word is not "parables". The most important word is "them".

To whom is our Lord speaking? Well now if you look in the context just back of this account you come ultimately to verse 27 where we read, "And they come again to Jerusalem and as he was walking in the temple there come to him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders."

So the first thing we want to notice is this little parable is a parable that was told by our Lord to the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And remembering the

passage that we read in Isaiah chapter 5, the background of our Lord's words is the parable of judgment recorded by the Prophet Isaiah under the inspiration of the Spirit in that chapter.

Now if you compare these two, that is Mark chapter 12 with the passage in Isaiah, you come to these conclusions, that in these parables, the one in Isaiah chapter 5 and the one our Lord tells, the owner of the vineyard is God. The owner of the vineyards is God in both accounts. Second, the vineyard is designed to represent the nation Israel. But the nation Israel as a theocratic nation, that is as a nation under God who is the ruler. This of course is the kind of rule that we ought to have. We shall never have a satisfactory government as long as we have Democracy, because Democracy is ruled by the people.

Now ruled by the people is one of the worst forms of government that you could possibly have except all those other forms of government we have had, as Winston Churchill once said. What we really want to have is a theocracy. Now when we think about the nation Israel, Israel was ideally a theocracy. So we think of the nation Israel then as the vineyard but as a theocratic nation. As the proprietor of kingdom of God among men. As the repository of divine revelation. As the teacher of the truth to men. So the vineyard is Israel.

Now the passages in the Old Testament that make that plain are passages such as Isaiah chapter 43 in verse 12, "I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, them that there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God." Israel was a witness of God.

In the New Testament we read that Jesus said to the disciples and his followers, "Ye are my witnesses," but that was not the first time that he had said that. He had said that to Israel the nation. They were the repositories of divine revelation and they are the proprietors of the kingdom of God. In just a few verses from Isaiah 43:12 in verse 21 the prophet wrote, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise."

So the owner of the vineyards is God, the vineyard is Israel as the theocratic nation proprietor of the kingdom of God, the husbandmen, or the tenants, for that is the meaning of the term husbandmen in our language, the tenants are the leaders in Israel. That is evident because of what we read in verse 12 of chapter 12, "They knew that he had spoken the parable against them." So the husbandmen, the tenants, are the leaders in Israel. It is into the hands of the leadership in Israel that God had committed the kingdom of God.

Now, there are a couple of things that appear in our Lord's parable that do not appear in the Old Testament. The husbandmen is one thing, also the servants whom the Father, or God, sends to obtain the produce from his vineyard. Now the servants are the prophets. It is evident from the way they are treated that they are the prophets. And finally the son and heir is our Lord Jesus Christ. That is evident from the interpretation that is given later.

So our Lord then had advanced the figure of Isaiah chapter 5. He has taken the Old Testament in its background but he has constructed a unique parable in which in a sense he has taken two or three steps beyond the Prophet Isaiah. Why has he done this? Don't answer. I'm going to tell you. He has done this, I know you're trying to prove to me you're not dummies, but you cannot prove it because I already know that as a fact [Laughter]. Now the reason he advances is because he is giving this parable from a point in time, many hundreds of years beyond the Prophet Isaiah. And so as the Old Testament revelation progresses it unfolds and there is more and more unveiling of Messianic truth. And so it is only to be expected that our Lord, taking the same kind of parable of judgment, should in the light of the historical situation in which he found himself add features to it in order to sharpen the picture that is given in the word of God concerning the place of Israel.

Now the parable is very simple, and he says, he outlines for us, in verse 1 the planting of the vineyard. And then capitol B, the renting of the vineyard to the tenants.

This is beautifully suggestive of a rich and visible God who owns a lot of property. In fact, he owns so much that he cannot stay on his land. He lets out his property to tenant farmers and then he himself goes off into a far country. The picture is of a God who now sits in heaven and he has given his property into the hands of others for them to produce fruit from it.

Then at the proper time when he should expect his vineyard to product grapes he begins to send his servants in order to obtain some of the produce. And instead of being wonderfully received by those who are renting the property from the owner we read in verse 3,

"And they caught the servant, they beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some."

Now you know a lot about the Old Testament history and you know that they beat Jeremiah, the killed Isaiah by sawing him in pieces, they stoned Zachariah, and you can just generally picture the prophets being treated in similar fashion. It has never been a healthy thing to get up and expound the Scriptures to ordinary types of people. And I'm not so sure that it really is a healthy thing in the 20th Century. Although it's been relatively healthy around Believers Chapel up to the present moment, but who knows what is to happen in the future. It has never been a healthy thing to get up and tell the truth plainly. And the prophets are here to testify of that.

Well having sent the servants, finally the owner of the vineyard determines that he will now send his last and most valued representative, "Having yet therefore one son," the great text says. Still yet one, a beloved son. That word "beloved" is a word that really means something like only in this context. It is the term that is used in the great

translation of the Old Testament for Isaac when Abraham took him up to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. So having yet therefore one son, an only son, he sent him also last unto them saying, "They will reverence my son."

There are two things I want you to notice here, and the first is this, it is evident from the telling of this parable by our Lord if we are to evaluate his own opinions concerning the servants as over against the son that by the way he tells it he considers the son to be of considerably greater significance and importance than the servants.

Now when we think of the fact that the servants were the great prophets of the Old Testament, what he is telling us is simply this, that the son is greater than the prophets. Now already we are beginning to have a clue as to the answer to the question, did Jesus Christ consider himself to be the Son of God? And furthermore, did Jesus Christ consider himself to be the Son of God in the sense that he himself is worth more than the great prophets of the Old Testament? Does he consider himself of infinitely more significance than they? And it is evident from this that the answer to that so far would be yes, he considers himself to be greater than the prophets. A greater than Solomon, is here. A greater than David, is here.

Now there is one other thing that I want you to notice before we pass on, it has to do with the sad tragic side of this parable because when the son is sent rather than being welcomed he is, as you can see, slain and cast out of the vineyard because those who had the vineyard said this is the heir and if we can get rid of him then we will have the whole thing for ourselves.

When Paul writes about the coming of the Son of God in Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, he says, "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

Now that is the great commission. Matthew chapter 28 is not the great commission. This is the great commission and it occurred at the fullness of time. And so

this is the background of what we are reading about here in Mark chapter 12, the son has come at the fullness of time in order to obtain produce, to obtain the fruit, of the theocratic possession and preaching of the kingdom of God, of the truth of God, by the theocratic nation. He expects to have fruit, he expects his truth to be proclaimed, and he expects also fruit from the proclamation to be his. But it's a sad, tragic story that we read, the son comes and he is slain too, just like the servants.

Now this also tells us one other thing, this tells us that this is only a parable. If there is anything that says this is just a parable, it's this. Because, you see, the parable says that the owner of the vineyard, the Father says, "They will reverence my son." Now we know, of course, that God knows the end from the beginning because he has decreed the end and the beginning. He works all things according to the counsel of his own will.

Now I know you're going to think that I'm being repetitious, but you have to be repetitious in order for the truth to sink in to some people's minds, God is a sovereign God. So I will repeat it, he works all things according to the counsel of his own will, and whenever I get an opportunity we're going to have that truth passed before our eyes. I hope I won't bore you quite as much as the Baptist preacher who preached constantly on baptism.

And finally the elders, the deacons, became so disturbed over it that they went to him and said, "Look, you've been preaching for months, and months, and months, and the only thing you can talk about is water baptism. And if you don't do something about it we're going to have to get rid of you." So they reached a meeting of minds and decided that he would stop his preaching on baptism and begin his preaching in the Book of Genesis. And so he began, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Now he said, "It is evident to everybody that when God created the heavens and the earth that he created the waters, and furthermore the waters make up three fourths of the heavens and the earth."

And that brings me to the subject for this morning [Laughter]. So I want you to notice that when we read here, "They will reverence my son," that we're talking about a human owner of a vineyard and not a divine owner. Because the divine owner knew from eternity past that Israel would not reverence the Son when he came. So that is evidence that what we have is a parable and only a parable. So in our telling of the story we must not forget that we are telling a parable.

In the 7th and 8th verses we have the slaying of the son. Matthew says, "When they saw the son," and the Greek word used to translate which is translated "they saw" is a Greek word that ordinarily means to "see with perception". It is the word that is used when the disciples looked into the tomb of our Lord and they saw the truth of the resurrection. So it is a word that means to "see with perception". And so when they saw the son they said, it is, by the way, the exact expression, that is used of the brothers of Joseph in the Genesis chapter 37 when he saw Joseph coming. They saw Joseph, and then of course, they thought they were slaying Joseph. That is all illustrative of what the brothers of our Lord did to him when they saw him.

So when they saw him they said, this is the son and so they slew him and cast him out of the vineyard. It is, I think, also interesting that when they, when we read in Matthew that they saw him they knew he was the son and they surmised as a result of that, they inferred from that, that he was the heir. So I think that we can say Israel had some understanding of our Lord's ministry, and furthermore, of his person when they crucified him.

Now it is true, of course, that they also crucified him in ignorance. So the knowledge that they had of our Lord was a deficient knowledge. Now, when we talk about faith, remember, we're talking about an act or an attitude that is made up of three parts, remember? Faith is made up of *notitia* which means what? Answer, knowledge, good. One person knew it. *Assensus*, which means what? Scared to answer now, aren't

you? Assent, right. And then it is made up of *fiducia* which means trust. Our fiduciary institutions. *Assensus*, our English word assent. *Notitia*, notice, knowledge.

When a man has faith he has notitia, assensus, fiducia. Now that means he can have a lot of knowledge and not have biblical faith. A man may know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and not be saved. A man must know, must give assent, be convinced of the truthfulness of the message that he knows, and then there must be a committal to the person concerning whom he has this knowledge.

Now I've used the illustration more than once of a boat that is about to sink with captain and three mates still aboard. There is a little island off to the side and there is one boat left and the captain says, "I'm going to stay with the boat." He says to the three men, "There is one boat left, it's enough to get you three to the island and I command you to go." One man says, "I don't think it will get us there, I'm not going." He heard the message, he does not accept it. The second man said, "I heard the message and I am convinced that it will take me there but I'm not going." The third man says, "I hear your message, I am convinced that it is true, and I'm going, goodbye." And he is saved. Now he's the only one saved because, you see, it is possible to have knowledge and not be convinced of its truth.

I may proclaim to you, "Christ died for sinners, you are a sinner." But that's not enough to save you. You may even, you may say, "I don't accept that. I don't think I'm a sinner. I heard Dr. Johnson say I was but I don't accept it and I don't think Christ died for sinners." Or, so you're lost. Then the next man may say, "Yes, Christ died for sinners, I'm a sinner, but I'm convinced of it, but I do not wish to be saved." And then there's the person who hears the message, is convinced of its truthfulness, and who accepts it for himself. It's only the third that is saved. Our churches are filled with all three kinds of people. There are people who hear the message over and over again and they can repeat it but they don't believe it.

And then there are those who hear it and repeat it and are convinced of its truthfulness but they've never really responded. They are not born again. You can tell by looking at them that they have never had a transforming experience. They may have joined the church. They may have become givers. They may be, even, tithers. They may be among the deacons, among the elders, but when it comes to a real hard appreciation of the things of God that has meant a change of life, they don't have it. Talk about grace, they don't know what you're talking about. Talk about the great doctrines of the faith, they don't really know what you're talking about. There just is not a new nature. Their language, why you can tell, they have the wrong accent. They don't speak like they belong to the Promised Land. They don't speak like they are citizens of the New Jerusalem. They talk simply as if they were citizens of Dallas. There has not been that change.

Now these men, they had knowledge. They saw the son. They said, "This is the heir," but they crucified him. Now the question our Lord asks as he has finished his story is, "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?" He compels them to be the jury and compels them to be the judge. So I could say to you, "Well what are you going to do about the gospel?" That's essentially what he is doing. And they answer, and it's a kind of spontaneous verdict that condemns them. Matthew, they say there, he will miserably destroy those miserable men. They've got it right, exactly right.

And now our Lord interprets the story with a text from Scripture. Remember, they didn't have the New Testament and so he cites a passage from the Old Testament in order to enforce the lesson of the parable. Now, there are differing views about this 9th verse, "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and he will give the vineyard unto others." I should say something about that before I look at that text. I don't know whether this is on my, I think it's on the outline. Yes, two views.

There are two views about this little expression, "And he will give the vineyard to others." One view is that that "others" is a reference to a future generation in Israel that shall be on the earth during the time of the great tribulation period. Can you see that still? Yes. Now over in Matthew, will you take your Bibles and turn over to Matthew chapter 21? Matthew chapter 21, in verse 43, Matthew gives a fuller account of our Lord's words of interpretation. In chapter 21, in verse 43 we read, "Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

The point at issue is, what is the nation bringing forth the fruits thereof? Jesus said the kingdom of God is going to be taken from these leaders in Israel and is going to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof. Mark says simply, "Shall be given to others." So some say that this "others" or this nation bringing forth the fruits is a reference to the generation of Israelites that shall be on the earth during the great tribulation period. For it is they in Israel who shall be believers in the Messiah by the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand, and it is they who shall go out over the earth preaching the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, then the Jews will really be for Jesus. And they will have a magnificent evangelization campaign and many out of every kindred tribe, and tongue, and nation shall come to faith in their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. And so some have said that our Lord is saying simply that, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and then skipping over the present day gentile salvation period, he speaks about the nation and the generation of the nation that shall be on the earth during the tribulation period of time.

Now that is all truth. The question is, is it the thing that our Lord is speaking about here? And I do not think it is. I think that when he says that he is giving the vineyard to others and when he says the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof, that he is talking about the gentiles. He is saying, in effect, because of your disobedience I am going to take for a time the

proprietorship of the kingdom of God out of your hands because you have been disobedient in your fiduciary relationship. I am going to commit the kingdom of God into the hands of gentiles, as we know it today the church of Jesus Christ, and they are going to be the depository of the truth of God, and they are going to have the responsibility of proclaiming the word to the four corners of the earth.

Now Paul and Moses combine in telling us the reason God did this is because he wanted to provoke Israel to jealousy. So any of you gentiles in this audience who think that God has given the kingdom of God into your hands purely because he doesn't like the Hebrews and he likes Gentiles, let me assure you that that is not the truth of the word of God. As a matter of fact, Moses said that I'm going to provoke you, Israel, to jealousy by a foreign nation, foreign peoples. Paul says the same thing. He says that the gospel has come into the hands of the Gentiles today not simply because God loves gentiles, but because he's anxious to obtain the obedience of Israel. And so he is going to provoke Israel to jealousy because, you see, the key to world salvation is Jewish conversion. And so what he is going to do, what he is doing in the present day, is the gospel has been committed into the hands of Gentiles in order that they may be the depositories of the truth, preach the gospel to the four corners of the earth, provoke the Jews to jealousy, bringing them to faith in Christ so that through them the whole of the inhabited earth shall be one to the gospel of Christ.

Now that is very broad and there are many qualifications that I would have to make of that, but I don't want it to die the death of a thousand qualifications at the present time. That is essentially what God is trying to say and our Lord is simply referring here at the point in history where the change over takes place that the kingdom of God is taken out of the hands of the Jewish people and is going to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Now the reason that I think this is the interpretation is this, in that Gospel of Matthew the term used is the term "ethnos", which means "nation", we get our English

word "ethnic" from it. Now "ethnos" may refer to Israel in the New Testament, it does in the Gospel of Luke. You can speak of Israel as an *ethnos*. But in the Gospel of Matthew, Israel is never spoken of as an *ethnos*. That would be a unique usage. Furthermore, Matthew uses another term *genea*, which means "generation".

Now if he had said, "Given to another generation," then I would be inclined to say he's taking the kingdom of God out of the generation on earth at our Lord's time and he's giving it to the generation that shall be on earth during the time of the tribulation. But he didn't use the term "generation", he used the term "nation". And furthermore, in Peter in his first epistle chapter 2, verse 9, he speaks of the Gentiles who have been converted as a "holy *ethnos*". And then Paul in Romans chapter 11 tells the story of the olive tree. And he talks about the root, the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs. He tells about the trunk of the tree and the branches, which were Jewish, as the promises of God developed in the Old Testament, and the believers of the seed of Abraham developed that tree, that olive tree, grew but it became disobedient and so God had to prune the olive tree and he cut off the branches, the natural branches, the branches of the olive tree.

And he grafted in unnatural branches, Paul says, he grafted in the gentiles but he warned them. He said you see, the God who cut off the natural branches off of the olive tree, that God is a God characterized by goodness and severity. And he has acted in great goodness toward you but he will act in severity if you do not abide in faith. Because after all, he says, if he is able to cut off natural branches and graft in unnatural branches, how much more is he able to take natural branches and graft them back into their own olive tree, it's Israel's olive tree. It's not the gentiles olive tree, never forget that.

So you gentiles, all you are, are grafted, unnatural branches in the olive tree that belongs to Israel. You've been saved by grace. Grace, do you get it? So he says it's going to be taken and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits. And the fruits are the things that God has obtained down through the two thousand years of Gentile mediation of the gospel. One of those lovely pieces of fruit, one of the loveliest of the grapes, is a

fellow by the name of S. Lewis Johnson Jr. [Laughter] And so are you if you are a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, now our Lord recites the Scripture. I don't have time to talk about that Scripture except to say this, it was Luther's favorite psalm. It has been called a String of Pearls, Psalm 122. The reason for that is because it seems that the verses are independent of one another. I don't agree with that, but nevertheless some interpreters have called it a String of Pearls for that reason. Go home tonight and read Psalm 118 and see if you think it's a String of Pearls.

The Old Testament context is, I think, fairly plain. It's a king's hymn of thanksgiving because he's been delivered from death and given a wonderful victory. And so he comes with his army to the gates of Jerusalem and he's shouting praise and thanksgiving because he was at the point of death and he has been marvelously delivered and given victory over his enemies and so he's going through the gates of the city of Jerusalem, giving thanks to Jehovah for the mighty victory that has been accomplished. And he says, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the head of the corner."

Now he is, of course, speaking typically, this psalm does not have a human author listed. It may have been a Psalm of David, if so, of course, it is a beautiful type of the greater than David, our Lord Jesus. But it is a typical psalm, that is it is a psalm that was written out of some earthly experience but it looks forward to the great victory that the Messiah will accomplish. Now Israel was nothing among the nations of the earth. When the nations of the earth thought about establishing a kingdom they never thought of Israel as being involved at all because it's such a little country. So the great nations of the earth had been Egypt, Syria, Babylonia, meddle Persia, Greece, Rome.

Now you recognize the prophecy of Daniel and the prophecy of the great kingdoms of the earth. Israel was accounted as nothing. When the men of the great men of the earth have gathered together and talked about universal dominion they never talked about Israel being head over the nations. Nor do you. You sit down and say,

"Who's going to be the next great world government? Will it be Russia? Will it be China? Will it be the United States? Perhaps some nation we don't know about, some great big nation like Brazil?" But which of you would ever say, "It's going to be Israel." Israel, that little place over there? That be swallowed up by eighty hundred million Arabs any day? Israel? Well that's the stone that the builders of kingdoms rejected. But the same will become the head of the corner. And, of course, the reason is because the great king shall come out of Israel. He's the stone that the builders have rejected. He will be the head of the corner.

Now you can see our Lord is giving a great deal of instruction to these chief priests and elders and scribes. He's saying, "Don't you know your own Scriptures? Don't you know in the Old Testament when it talks about Israel, the stone rejected? It's going to become the head of the corner? Don't you see if someone in your midst right now through whom that great prophecy is going to come to pass? He was just giving them as much of a hint as he possibly could, beware of what you do to me." That's why I quoted the text.

Now, so it's a clear warning to Israel's leaders that the one they are rejecting will be exalted by God in victory. Well, the shoe pinched because they were fearful. They sought to lay hold of him but they feared the multitude because they knew that he had spoken this parable against them and if they did anything to him the multitude would react.

Well now I'll have five, six minutes. Let me say just a few words by way of conclusion. First of all it is evident that Israel is accountable for her stewardship. And because Israel has failed in her stewardship she has come under judgment. It is also evident from this by application that the church of Jesus Christ is also accountable for its stewardship. And if the church of Jesus Christ fails in its stewardship, the church shall be judged. Now we don't have to look far to know that the church of Jesus Christ is failing

in its stewardship. I heard a preacher say not long ago, and I think he spoke accurately, that all of our great denominations today are largely in the hands of the liberals.

When I went to Europe last year in the spring I read a great deal of contemporary theology and then this fall I sat in on a number of classes in one of the outstanding divinity schools of Europe. And the one great doctrine that seems to be implicit in the theology taught in the great theological faculties of Europe is the doctrine of Universalism. Everybody is going to be saved ultimately. Do not talk about some being saved and some being lost, all shall be saved.

Why, if that were the gospel there is no sense in preaching at all. Who counts the billows if the shore is one? We are responsible to preach the gospel because men are lost. It's not that everybody's going to be saved, it's that everybody is going to be lost if we don't preach the gospel.

Now, we are accountable for our individual response, too. We cannot say, "You know, well, I do believe in preaching the gospel," and then, "I believe that men are lost and so we get on our knees and say, 'Oh Lord, please use me in an advisory capacity.'" We are each of us custodians of the truth that we have. We are each of us theocratic individuals who have a truth to proclaim. And as Christians we shall come under Christian judgment if we fail in our stewardship.

Now I said as we began, this parable has to do with the question did Jesus Christ consider himself to be the Son of God? Now you can see from this parable that Jesus made the claim that he was the Son of God. He said, "The owner of the vineyard had one son, an only son, a beloved son." In other words, the owner of the vineyard who is God has one son, a unique son. He is the son and he is the heir. Even if it is true that Jesus never explicitly said in a statement, "I am the Son of God," it is evident that he regarded himself as the Son of God.

Gustaf Dolman, one of the great German scholars of a generation or so ago said, "Jesus never applied to himself the title Son of God, and yet made it indubitably clear that

he was not merely a, but the Son of God." We can only find truth in Christianity. Why are you not a Buddhist? Why are you not a Mohammer? Why are you not a worshiper of the green snake god, or something like that?

Well there are people who say the reason you're not is because you were born in the United States. Well if there's anything that is ridiculous it's that because this country is not only not a Christian country, it's never been a Christian country. Never been, you hear that? Never been. Just go back and look at the history of the United States. Read our Constitution. Read our Bill of Rights. It is not specifically Christian. There're great things in both of these documents, but they are not uniquely Christian. Oh, there may have been a little colony that landed up there long before the United States came into existence, which was largely made up of Christians, this country's never been a Christian country. We haven't studied American History. That's not why you're a Christian.

You're a Christian because you have certain views concerning Jesus Christ, don't you? I must agree that Islam, Mohammedism is a higher religion than belief in the green snake god, and Buddhism is a higher religion than the devil cult of Australia and Aborigines. But the one thing I want to know is the truth, not which is better than another. There is a quicker way to discover whether Christianity is true or not.

Did you know that Christianity is the only system of truth which has a founder who claimed to be God? Did you know that? That's unique about Christianity. Hindus don't have such a religion. Mohammedans don't have such a religion. They think he was a prophet. Taoists don't have such a religion. Zen Buddhists don't. And the worshipers of green snake god's don't claim deity for the green snake god.

There is one system of truth who's found a claim to be God and that is Christianity. And that simplifies our search because it all comes down to this, was he what he claimed to be? And if he is then we must worship him. If he isn't then there's no reason to worship anything among the great religions of the earth.

Now let me just remind you of some things. If we talk about the deity of our Lord Jesus we could talk about a lot of texts of Scripture but we could look at the witness of his miracles. Other people worked miracles but our Lord's miracles threw the work of the prophets into the shade. Notice the impressiveness of his commands. Notice the power that he exercised when he performed his miracles. Other people healed through God. Peter said, "Annius, not I the pope heal thee. Annias, Jesus Christ healeth thee." His power was derivative, but our Lord spoke out of his own authority. He conveyed the sense of the presence of God in the midst of men. When he performed his miracle in the presence of Peter, Peter fell down before him and said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He felt the God of Israel was in that boat with him.

Notice the witness of his sayings. He's the supreme revealer of truth. He's familiar with the scenery of the invisible world. He knows all about the angels. He knows that he can call upon angels. He knows about the angels of the little children. He knows that God knows the number of hairs on your head, even you young people with all that hair you've got. He knows the number of all the hairs on your head too. That's no problem to him, you're not challenging his omniscience when you let your hair grow down like this. See I know, I see that new crop, I know the precise number, he doesn't need a computer to figure it out either.

And then there is the witness of his claim to forgive sins. That's the prerogative of God alone. He can say, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the earth." Jesus Christ stood between men and God, he did not stand with men before God. A word spoken against him could be compared with a word spoken against the Holy Spirit. He and the Holy Spirit were comparable. He was greater than the temple, he said. No prophet could say that. He never said to the disciples, "Come on, let's have a prayer meeting," did you ever notice that? He never said that. When he prayed, he prayed by himself. He didn't say, "Let's get down on our knees and pray together," he prayed, but he was different. He gave them the Lord's prayer, he never used it.

"The Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants" by S. Lewis Johnson
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There is a line between our Lord and the disciples and the apostles that is delicate but firm. It's often as fine as a hair, for he is truly man. But it is also as hard as a diamond, for he is as the Centurions said, "The Son of God." And my friend, if he's the Son of God there's no response but the response of worship. May God help us do it. Let's bow together and pray.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this great truth of the Sonship of Jesus Christ, Son of God, because he possesses the nature of God. Lord, help us to worship him. For Jesus' sake. Amen.