

Mark 11:27-12:12 “Loving Enough to Confront”**

Main Idea: In Mark 11:27-12:12 we see two scenes of confrontation involving Jesus. Both teach us much about the Savior and about ourselves.

I. The religious leaders confronted Jesus (11:27-33).

- A. They challenged His authority (27-28).
- B. He exposed their authority problem (29-33).
 - 1. They saw themselves as being okay.
 - 2. They refused to consider their need to change.

II. Jesus confronted the religious leaders (12:1-12).

- A. He told a story about a vineyard (1-8).
- B. He gave the punch-line (9-11).
 - 1. God is taking the kingdom from Israel .
 - 2. God is giving the kingdom to the nations.

C. He forced His hearers to face reality (12).

- 1. The story teaches us about God.
 - ☐He is longsuffering and merciful.
 - ☐He is also just and righteous.
- 2. The story teaches us about Jesus.
 - ☐He confronted sinners because He loved His Father.
 - ☐He confronted sinners because He loved sinners.
- 3. The story teaches us about ourselves.
 - ☐We are born with an authority problem.
 - ☐We are prone to take God for granted.

Make It Personal: What is your response to God’s Son?

When it comes to relationships, there are basically three kinds of people in the world.[11](#) There are peace-breakers, peace-fakers, and peace-makers.

First, there are *peace-breakers*. They are instigators, fighters, combative folks who seem to enjoy stirring up conflict.

Then there are *peace-fakers*. They hate conflict and will do anything to avoid it, including pretending like things

are okay just to “keep the peace.”

Finally, there are *peace-makers*. They understand that peace does not just happen but takes work. Problems must be faced and dealt with. That’s what they do. They, by God’s enablement, work at *making peace*.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).” Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker. It’s why He came into the world as the God-man, so that through His cross He might reconcile alienated sinners to God and to each other. Indeed, He Himself is our peace, as Ephesians 2:14 states. He made peace by removing the barrier of sin through the shedding of His blood.

This is what makes the passage we’re about to study shocking to some people. As we’ll see, Jesus, the peacemaker, was also a confronter. It’s true that sinners loved to be with Jesus, but not all sinners. Sinners who did not see themselves as sinners resisted Jesus. At that point they saw a side of Jesus we hear little about, Jesus the *confronter*.

This morning we’re going to see Jesus involved in loving confrontation. In Mark 11:27-12:12 we see two scenes of confrontation involving Jesus. Both teach us much about ourselves and the Savior.

I. The religious leaders confronted Jesus (11:27-33).

Verse 27 begins, “They arrived again in Jerusalem .” It’s Tuesday morning. Friday, crucifixion day, is coming. Two days before this Jesus entered Jerusalem riding the foal of a donkey to the cheers of the Jews. On the previous day, Monday, Jesus entered Jerusalem , went to the temple, and cleaned house, overturning tables, and putting a halt to the religious farce. It’s now the following day and Jesus and the Twelve once again head back into Jerusalem , specifically into the temple courts. It’s there that the confrontation occurs.

Barclay describes the scenery in the Court of Gentiles. “It was a magnificent arcade made by Corinthian columns 35 feet high. The one on the south was even more splendid. It was called the Royal Cloister. It was formed by four rows of white marble columns, each 6 feet in diameter and 30 feet high. There were 162 of them. It was common for Rabbis and teachers to stroll in these columns and to teach as they walked.”^[2]

It was there beneath those columns that the religious leaders approached and confronted Jesus. In short...

A. They challenged His authority (27-28). “They arrived again in Jerusalem , and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’”

Please realize, they’re not after information. They’re trying to trap the Lord.

Note they ask two questions and both have to do with Jesus’ *authority*. “By what *authority* are you doing these things?” “Who gave you *authority* to do this?” To do what? To turn over tables in the temple. To accuse us of turning the temple into a ‘den of robbers.’ “Who gave you *authority* to do all this?!”

It’s significant that they don’t challenge *what* Jesus did, just the basis of it. They couldn’t deny the corruption that existed in the House of God, nor that what Jesus did was quite necessary. What they want to know is who authorized *Him* to do these things? This was *their* jurisdiction, and they didn’t like anybody interfering with their religious system, corrupt as it was.

Jesus responded to their questions with a question of His own in verses 29-30, “Jesus replied, ‘I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!’”

At first glance we might conclude that Jesus is avoiding the issue. Not so. Jesus didn’t avoid the issue. By His

question He raised THE issue. What is the issue?

B. He exposed their authority problem (29-33). Keep in mind who Jesus is talking to: the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders, the three groups that made up the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. As far as Jewish religion goes, these guys *are* the authority. They call the shots. They determine what's right and wrong for the Jews. They are the standard. They ask the questions and no one questions them.

But Jesus did. He asked them a pointed question. *Was John's baptism from heaven (i.e. from God), or from men? Tell me!*

He's talking about John the Baptist, the God-sent prophet whose job it was to get the people ready for the Messiah. John told His listeners to repent and prove their repentance by the public act of baptism followed by life-change. It didn't phase him who was in the audience, whether Jewish peasants, Roman soldiers, or temple leaders. They all came, and he called them all to repent.

John also pointed his listeners to Jesus, as Mark 1:7 indicates, "And this was his message: 'After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.'" In fact, when the Baptizer saw Jesus he stated emphatically, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)."

No, Jesus isn't skirting the issue. This IS the issue. If someone had really listened to John the Baptist, if in obedience he had gone through the waters of baptism signifying his agreement with John's message, he would have been ready for Jesus. The same authority that sent John also sent Jesus. These Jewish leaders rejected John as a fanatic, thus rejecting the authority of God. It's not surprising then that they're playing the part of prosecuting attorney and judge with Jesus. They've got an authority problem! They refuse to submit to any authority other than their own.

They're not alone. Fundamentally, this is the problem with which we all enter this world. This is God's world—He made it. But we go our *own way* (Isa. 53:6). We want to call the shots. We resist anyone, including God Himself, who interferes with our agenda.

Verses 31-33—"They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'....'" (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Jesus said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'"

Now who's skirting the issue?! "We don't know," the religious leaders said. That's not true. They knew the answer to Jesus' question, but they weren't about to give it. They're lying. They're lying because they don't want the Jewish laity to know the truth about their true feelings concerning John the Baptist. They're *peace-faking*, at least for now. In two days they'll resort to *peace-breaking*.

Why? Why are they so antagonistic with Jesus? Simply put, it boiled down to two realities...

1. *They saw themselves as being okay.* They had their 'religion.' These were *priests*, remember, men who worked in the temple for a living, *chief priests* in fact, men who were the most reputable servants of God—or so everyone thought. And these were *teachers of the law*, men who had studied the Scriptures and instructed others in the same all their lives. And these were the *elders*, the respected authorities of the Jewish people. These men weren't *sinner*s, but *good men*. And that's why they rejected John the Baptist and now Jesus. Good men don't need to repent. Good men don't have a spiritual problem. They are *good men*, and proud of it! Consequently...

2. *They refused to consider their need to change.* That's why, when Jesus asked them a question that forced them to be honest about their corrupt hearts, they gave in to their fear of man and resorted to deception. "We don't know," they lied in order to remain behind their hypocritical masks.

A person who sees himself as being okay will refuse to admit his need to change, every time. That was true of many religious leaders in Jesus' day. That's true of many religious people in our day. Unless you're willing to be honest with yourself, you'll never admit your utter sinfulness. And unless you admit you are a wretched sinner, you

will never admit your need for the Savior. And unless you admit your need for the Savior, you will remain in your sins and consequently never change.

That's why Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for their's is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3)." In order to experience God's kingdom, there's a very simply prerequisite. One must first admit one's spiritual bankruptcy. And that's something Jesus' critics refused to do, to their own condemnation.

Barclay comments, "The whole story is a vivid example of what happens to men who will not face the truth. They have to twist and wriggle and in the end get themselves into a position in which they are so helplessly involved that they have nothing to say. The man who faces the truth may have the humiliation of saying that he was wrong, or the peril of standing by it, but at least the future for him is strong and bright. The man who will not face the truth has nothing but the prospect of deeper and deeper involvement in a situation which renders him helpless and ineffective."^[3]

Kent Hughes tells the following story about an African chief who visited a mission station: "Hanging outside the missionary's hut on a tree was a little mirror. The chief happened to look into the mirror and saw her reflection, complete with terrifying paint and threatening features. She gazed at her own frightening countenance and started back in horror, exclaiming, 'Who is that horrible-looking person inside that tree?' 'Oh,' the missionary said, 'it is not in the tree. The glass is reflecting your own face.' The African would not believe it until she held the mirror in her hand. She said, 'I must have the glass. How much will you sell it for?' 'Oh,' said the missionary, "I don't want to sell it." But the woman begged until he capitulated, thinking it might be best to sell it to avoid trouble. So he named a price and she took the mirror. Exclaiming, 'I will never have it making faces at me again,' she threw it down and broke it to pieces."^[4]

That's exactly what the religious establishment did to Jesus. They wanted desperately to get their hands on Jesus, not so they could see the truth about themselves, but so they could crush Him under their feet and not have to face the condemning truth He revealed to them.

How do you help people who refuse to admit the truth about themselves? It's not easy. Let's watch how Jesus did it. There's an unfortunate chapter break in Mark's gospel that obscures the connection between the two scenes of confrontation. In scene one the religious leaders confronted Jesus. In scene two...

II. Jesus confronted the religious leaders (12:1-12).

Watch how He did it. Verse 1—"He then [right after this refusal to face the truth] began to speak to them in parables." Earlier in His ministry, Jesus used stories to teach truth. Here He uses stories to confront His critics with the painful truth they'd been refusing to face. Mark indicates the Master told them *parables* (plural), but includes only one of the stories in His narrative (we see others in the parallel Gospel accounts).

A. He told a story about a vineyard (1-8). Let's listen:

Verses 1-8—"A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard."

Though foreign to us, this story actually reflects a common scenario in first century Israel . Much of the land was in the hands of absentee landowners who contracted with tenants on a crop-sharing basis.^[5]

That's what a parable does. It's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It uses the known to communicate the unknown. It takes something the hearers can easily picture to help them see spiritual truth they need to picture.

A man planted a vineyard. It's his vineyard, so obviously the fruit will be his. He takes steps to insure there will be fruit, putting up a wall and building a tower for protection. According to Leviticus 19:23-25, a farmer would not use the fruit until the fifth year. He hires farmers to care for His vineyard. They agree on their wages. The terms of the contract are clear.

But in time, they break the contract. They're not satisfied with a percentage. They want the whole thing for themselves. What's worse, they'll willing to take drastic action to satisfy their greedy hearts. They beat servants, not once but repeatedly. They even kill servants. Then worst of all, they conspire and kill the owner's son.

Some parables are difficult to interpret. Not this one. It's so plain that Jesus' hard-hearted critics got the message, as we'll soon see. The owner of the vineyard represents God. The vineyard represents Israel (this is a common image for Israel in the Old Testament; see Isaiah 5). The tenants represent the Jewish religious leaders. The servants are the prophets. The son is The Son, Jesus Himself.

The story of the vineyard is the story of Israel . God formed the nation of Israel for His purposes, to bear fruit and display His glory to the world. He gave Israel everything necessary to produce a good crop. But Israel got it turned around. Israel started treating God as if He existed for them. Israel 's leaders started robbing from God His glory. God sent prophets to them to call for a harvest, but they beat and even killed them. Tradition says Isaiah was sawn in half. Zechariah was stoned to death. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit. John the Baptist was beheaded.

Finally, God sent His own Son, His only and beloved Son, to His vineyard Israel . But those who knew better, the religious leaders, rejected Him. "Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." They chose a vineyard over the favor of the Giver of the vineyard.

And so they took the Son, killed Him, and mercilessly threw Him out of the vineyard. Unthinkable? For sure, but this story is reality. In two days Jesus' critics will arrest Him, put Him through a mock trial, beat Him, and the next morning execute Him.

At this point in the story...

B. Jesus gave the punch-line (9-11). Verse 9—"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." What else can the owner do? His tenants obviously broke the contract. They've spurned his mercy repeatedly. They've killed his son. They did it all thinking he would do nothing in return. They thought wrongly.

Jesus says the owner will take two drastic steps to deal with the tenants of the vineyard. One, He will come and kill them. And two, He will give the vineyard to others.

The Lord supports His punch-line by calling on the very authority His critics prided themselves in knowing, the Scriptures. Verses 10-11—"Haven't you read this scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' ?"

The passage Jesus quoted, Psalm 118:22-23, is part of the Hallel Psalms. It's worth noting that the Jews were singing this Messianic psalm during Passover week. In fact, the cry of "Hosanna!" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" which the people shouted on Palm Sunday, also came from Psalm 118.

So what is Jesus saying? He is making two predictions...

1. *God is taking the kingdom from Israel .* "He will come and kill those tenants." Israel 's leaders rejected God's Son. Therefore, God is rejecting Israel 's leaders. But it goes further. As go the leaders, so go the followers. Israel rejected God's Son, so God is rejecting Israel .

So it would happen. In just forty years, in 70 A.D., the Romans would destroy this city, including the temple, and the nation of Israel would go into captivity. *2. God is giving the kingdom to the nations.* “He will... give the vineyard to others,” Jesus said. In his parallel account Matthew includes these additional words of Jesus, “Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed (Matt. 21:43-44).”

As you read the book of Acts, you discover that’s exactly what happened. For the first ten years, the church was basically comprised of Jewish believers, but then it shifted to the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit began to work with and through non-Jews to harvest His vineyard. God took His kingdom work to the nations.

You might ask, “Is God through with Israel ?” Not according to Romans 11. Ironically, it’s by using the Gentiles that God is going to reclaim and restore fallen Israel to Himself in Christ.

Why did Jesus tell this story? It boils down to this...

C. He forced His hearers to face reality (12). Just like the mirror to the African chief, this parable forced Jesus’ critics to see the truth about themselves. How did they respond?

Verse 12—“Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.”

But this story wasn’t just for the men standing in the temple that day. This story is for us. It teaches us about three very important subjects...

1. The story teaches us about God. The owner of the vineyard sent a servant. The tenants beat him. The owner sent another servant. The tenants beat him. It happened again and again and again. Finally, he sent his son and they killed him. What does that teach us about God? This...

He is longsuffering and merciful.

According to a traditional Hebrew story, Abraham was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man, weary from age and journey, coming toward him. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and then invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink.

The old man immediately began eating without saying any prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?"

The old traveler replied, "I worship fire only and reverence no other god."

When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out his tent into the cold night air.

When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he did not worship you."

God answered, "I have suffered him these eighty years although he dishonors me. Could you not endure him one night?"[\[6\]](#)

It’s true. God suffers long with us. He is so merciful. If He ever treated us as we deserve, for just one split second, we would be without hope.

Martin Luther expressed, “If I were God, and the world had treated me as it treated Him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces.”[\[7\]](#) Thankfully, God isn’t like us.

Charles Spurgeon observed, “If you reject him, he answers you with tears; if you wound him, he bleeds out cleansing; if you kill him, he dies to redeem; if you bury him, he rises again to bring resurrection. Jesus is love made manifest.”^[8]

Indeed, God is longsuffering and merciful. But know this...

He is also just and righteous. This, too, we see in the story. “What will the owner do? He will come and kill those tenants.” Beloved, this is the day of salvation, but if you reject God’s Son, there is no hope for you. You will experience the just and eternal judgment of a holy God. Don’t presume upon His mercy. Come to the ark of safety while the door is still open, for as in the days of Noah, the day is coming when God will shut the door and destroy those who refused His merciful offer.

2. *The story teaches us about Jesus.* Think about why Jesus dared to tell this story in the first place. Didn’t He know it would infuriate the Jews and bring out their worst hostility against Him? Didn’t He realize this story put yet another nail in His coffin? Yes, He did. Why then did He confront them with the truth? For two reasons...

He confronted sinners because He loved His Father. It was His Father’s will that He come to earth, proclaim the truth, call sinners to repent, and then die in the place of sinners. It was the Father’s will that He then conquer death and thereby reconcile sinners to their Maker. Jesus didn’t live to please men, but only His Father. That’s why He confronted sinners, because He loved His Father. In addition...

He confronted sinners because He loved sinners. I love this about Jesus, don’t you? He doesn’t tell sinners what they *want* to hear, but what they *need* to hear, for their good and the glory of God.

My father went to his doctor a couple of months ago. The doc examined a dark mole growing on his chest, eventually removed it, and biopsied it. “It’s melanoma cancer,” he said. “I need to remove more tissue.” Why would a doctor use a knife to inflict pain on someone? Love doesn’t hurt people, does it? You know it does.

I’m thankful for doctors that take dark skin blotches seriously (due to his doctor’s efforts my father’s cancer cells are gone). More so, I’m thankful for a preacher that took my sin blotches seriously and told me the painful truth about my condition. And most of all, I’m thankful for the Savior who took my sin seriously, paying its penalty in full.

Is the Savior confronting you about sin in your life? Don’t resist Him. He’s confronting you because He loves you. Oh, there is no greater love than His!

3. *The story teaches us about ourselves.* Namely, two things...

We are born with an authority problem. It’s why we disobeyed our parents when we were growing up. It’s why our flesh doesn’t like to be told what to do today. We resist any authority outside of ourselves. We want to be boss, even though when we captain the ship it always sinks.

We need to face the facts. We are born with an authority problem. Can we change? We can and must. By submitting to THE authority, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We learn something else from Jesus’ story...

We are prone to take God for granted. God gave the vineyard, Israel, everything she needed to produce a wonderful harvest. But Israel soon began to love the gift more than the Giver.

We do the same. God gives us a family. That’s a good gift for sure, but if our family becomes more important to us than worshipping God, something’s wrong! God gives us jobs and healthy bodies so we can work. Good gifts, yes. But when our jobs become so important to us that we miss worship services, we’ve elevated the gift above the Giver.

Beloved, God gives us good gifts, not so we can worship them, but use them for His glory. J. D. Jones observes:

“The parable insists...that privilege carries with it responsibility. If God lets out a vineyard, He expects fruit. That is to say, gifts and privileges are all for service and use. God expects a return for them. As Dr. Glover says, ‘We have a rent to pay for every privilege.’ It does not matter what the privilege may be. One man’s gift may be wealth, and another’s may be learning, and another’s may be leisure. It matters not; God expects wealth, learning and leisure to be used for His glory, for the good of men.”^[9]

Let’s not take God for granted. Let’s give Him what He desires and certainly deserves. It boils down to this question...

Make It Personal: What is your response to God’s Son?

When confronted by the truth, the Jewish leaders clung to their self-righteousness and rejected the Savior. Let’s not commit the same crime. Humble yourself today. Admit the truth about yourself today. Run to Jesus, not away from Him, today.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] See Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*

^[2] William Barclay, p. 278.

^[3] William Barclay, p. 280.

^[4] Kent Hughes, *Mark*, p. 189.

^[5] Wessel, p. 731.

^[6] Thomas Lindberg.

^[7] Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 97.

^[8] Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 97.

^[9] J. D. Jones, p. 440.