

Mysteries of the Kingdom = Matthew 21:33-44

The Landowner

A reminder of the context is in order as we begin. Earlier in the chapter Jesus cleansed the temple. The next day He cursed a fig tree. After this, He was questioned by the leaders. What authority do you have to do these things? they asked Him. Jesus asks them about John the Baptist. Where did he get his authority? Jesus wanted to know. The question was eluded by the leaders, so Jesus refused to answer them as well. Instead, He tells 3 parables!

Each parable shows how they had rebelled against God's authority. In fact, they show their rebellion was a complete rebellion, because upon closer examination we see that the first parable describes rebellion against the Father, the second parable describes rebellion against the Son, and the third parable describes rebellion against the Spirit.

It is the 2nd parable we turn our attention to here as we see a rebellion against the Son - a refusal to submit to His authority! Now, I would like to tell you this was only true of religious leaders of Jesus' day. While it was certainly true of them, it was NOT limited to them. There is a crisis of authority in both the world and church today. Especially as this relates to the church, this is a crisis of submission to the Son, for HE is the head of the church. I want us to note what we can learn from looking at several things in this parable!

Notice first, the **imagery of the parable**. The imagery of Israel as a vineyard is used often in the Old Testament. Consider Isaiah 5:1-7: 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: [2] 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. [3] And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. [4] 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? [5] 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: [6] 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. [7] 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.

Consider also Jeremiah 2:21: Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?

Let's also consider Ezekiel 19:10: Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters.

Finally, note Psalm 80:8-10: Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. [9] Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep

root, and it filled the land. [10] The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.

In each case, Israel as a whole is pictured as a vineyard. As the parable progresses, though, it becomes clear who each person represents. We see that the landowner is God. As Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s . . . “ The servants sent from time to time are the prophets. And the son is Jesus. Note the attitude of the husbandmen in v. 38: But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. Compare this to what we find in Heb. 1:1-2: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, [2] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” Indeed, Jesus is the heir, but these husbandmen certainly had the wrong attitude toward the heir!

The other husbandmen of v. 41 are those in the church. The church is also described in the phrase “nation bringing forth fruit” (v. 43). This is similar to what the Apostle Peter said in 1 Pet. 2:9:

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The imagery of the stone is interesting to consider too. In v. 42, Jesus is quoting from Psalm 118:22-23. This would have been fresh in the minds of the hearers as many had quoted Psalm 118:26 only a few days earlier when Jesus entered city. In scripture, God is often referred to as a stone: consider Deut. 32:4 and Ps. 18:2 as just two example of many. The stone is also a messianic reference (consider Is. 8:14-15). In rejecting Jesus, the people were in effect rejecting God! Amazingly, however, God turned this tragedy to triumph for this same stone became the chief cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:19-21). Triumph, that is, for those who will trust Him. For those who reject, though, “whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matt. 21:44 - a clear reference to Dan. 2:31-35). Nowhere is this better put than at end of v. 42 - “this is the Lord’s doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.”

Notice also the **intensity of the parable**. The parable builds from the past to the present and even extends into the future. And in each case the actions become more and more hostile as the intensity builds. Jesus begins with a little history from the past. He describes servants sent who are beat, stoned and some even killed. In the days of Elijah, Jezebel murdered the prophets by the score. During the reign of Joash, the people murdered Zechariah, son of Jehoiada. Tradition says Isaiah was sawn in two. The author of Hebrews says,

others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: [36] And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: [37] They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; [38] (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Heb. 11:35-38).

Anybody ready to apply for the job of prophet? Friends, we should expect no less - Jesus even told us so in John 15:18-20: If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. [19] If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are

not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. [20] Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

It pains me to see people who think the Christian life will be one of luxury and ease with no problems or no persecution. There are many preachers today who teach such! But Jesus didn't teach that - and we deceive only ourselves if we follow that lie. Jesus said the Christian life was one where a cross had to be taken up daily! And He was the supreme example of that.

In fact, in the parable, Jesus moves from history of the past to prophecy of the future. Notice vv. 37-39: But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. [38] But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. [39] And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

Here we see the supreme example of intense hostility - hostility toward the very Son of God. But how amazing is the wisdom of God. It was in this hostility of others towards His own Son that God dealt with your greatest problem. What appeared to be tragedy was turned to triumph. I read about a janitor at St. Peter's Church in London. One day a young vicar discovered that the janitor was illiterate and fired him. Jobless, the man invested his meager savings in a tiny shop, where he prospered, bought another, expanded, and ended up with a chain of stores worth several hundred thousand dollars. One day the man's banker said, You've done well for an illiterate, but where would you be if you could read and write? Well, replied the man, I'd be janitor of St. Peter's Church in Neville Square.

Much like this janitor, God used the seeming tragic consequences to work a triumphant ending, only on a much greater scale. But the future prophetic element of the parable extends past the death of our Lord. Notice the judgment the leaders pass on themselves:

When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? [41] They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Matthew 21:40-41

Indeed the day DID come when God "passed the torch," so to speak, to the church!

Notice finally, the **implication of the parable**. Our temptation is to see this purely in historical context. Jesus was speaking to Jews. They're the ones who rejected Him. Indeed that's true, and we must understand it in historical context as we have sought to do. BUT, I believe the application goes way beyond that! I believe the implication is that what was true of Israel can just as much be true of us as well. As He planted Israel in the land, has He not planted us here? As Americans? In our neighborhoods? Has He not fenced us in? We are a nation with great military might. We enjoy freedoms unparalleled. Has He not built a watchtower in our midst? We have Christian radio, TV, and churches to shine the light. Has He not sent servants to us to collect the fruit of His work? Who among us has not been challenged to serve God and bear fruit?

Friends, the answer to all these is YES, YES, YES. Just as God did these things for Israel, He has done them for us. The real issue, I believe, is have we, like Israel, been faithless? I think we have. This is evidenced by the secularization of our country. We now live in what sociologists are calling a post-Christian culture. In 1960, 70% of Christians lived

here and in western Europe. In 1990, 70% of Christians live in 3rd world countries! As a nation, we have largely failed! But that need not be true of us as individually or corporately.

Have you noticed how opposed our nation has become to Jesus? Perhaps that is most clearly seen in our public schools. When I lived in North Carolina, we had a neighborhood friend who for while was a teacher's aid in the school system. One of his responsibilities was to take the students to gym. One day while there he had to lead them to do yoga and Hindu chants. It was religion, pure and simple. When he complained, he was told it was cultural appreciation! He asked about having an assembly and bringing in a preacher to talk about Jesus. The administrators just laughed at the idea! As he effectively argued the hypocrisy of their position, their laughter turned to derision and even threats!

Friends, this world today is in rebellion to the Son - Jesus - the Head of the Church! Notice again the answer of v. 41: They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. That certainly held true the 1st time. He did let out to others - the church! But the day is coming when the lord of the vineyard will return once more. The result then is revealed to us in Rev. 19:11-21:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. [12] His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. [13] And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. [14] And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. [15] And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. [16] And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

[17] And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; [18] That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. [19] And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. [20] And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. [21] And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Folks, it is a dangerous thing to resist the authority of the Son of God! Jesus said in Matt. 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me." Not just ecclesiastical, political or moral authority, but ALL authority. Have you submitted to the Son's authority?