

Week 2

The Parable of the Tenants, Matthew 21:33-46

A Parable, Video, Scripture & Lesson

Opening Discussion Questions:

Pick 1 of these questions and share your answer with the group!

1. What is the most fruitful activity a Christian can engage in doing?

- What is the most fruitful activity a Church can provide opportunities for the community to do?
- When was the last time you felt compelled to accept Jesus' invitation to serve, share the Good News, advocate for transformation in the world, etc.?
- In what ways are YOU bearing fruit? Who might confirm this answer?

2. Jesus is not only our Savior, but the Master Storyteller. At first read, most of his audience likely thought that this story was directly related to agriculture or a specific harvest of actual fruit.

But re-read the last 2 verses: the Pharisees "knew he was talking about them."

- Have you ever read something in the Bible and felt convicted... like Jesus, the preacher, or the text was speaking directly to/at/about you?
- Describe that experience: what was it like to be the 'center of focus' in this way?

The Parable:

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

VIDEO: The Religion Teacher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XObDV8soTsk>

Discussion:

Does this Rundown of the Cast of Characters in the Parable of the Tenants make sense to you?

- Landowner: God
- Vineyard: People of Israel
- Son: Jesus
- Wicked Tenants/Farmers: Jewish Religious Leadership (Chief Priests/Pharisees)
- Rejected Servants: Prophets
- New Tenants: Disciples
 - At some point, there was no reason to keep sending more servants (prophets), so he sent his cherished son (Jesus). But they killed him, too.
 - They killed the son outside of the village (Jesus was also killed outside of the city).

What was actually owed?

Research answers this question:

- The tenants owed over half of the harvest to the landowner. (Yet they paid nothing and were not willing to pay anything.)

What was sought?

Simple obedience: *I will give you all that I have (in abundance), if you will receive my gift and act in faith.*

- Yet the wicked tenants rejected him outright. They rejected Jesus and the Father who had sent him. The landowner gets to decide the appropriate payment, not the tenant.
- God wanted no other gods added into the mix.
- God wanted to be honored.
- God wanted obedience.

Who was the audience?

Jesus' opposition are present as he's telling this parable.

- He has just one week to live. He knows what is coming.
- Notice Jesus accomplishes his goal of getting the attention of the "wicked tenants."
- This parable is a warning to all who reject the Word of God... who don't produce the type of harvest and fruit in their lives.
- Read **Romans 8:1-2**. The Pharisees came face to face with the conviction Jesus spoke.

A Few Facts and Thoughts:

- God created and owned everything in this scenario.
- The wicked tenants owned nothing.
- They were stealing and then they were surprised that they ended up with nothing as God gives the land away to others. (**re-read vs. 41**)
"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."
- To share the Good News of Jesus was & is a huge responsibility.
- God always has a plan for the Good News to be shared, even when the best efforts to silence the Good News has been exercised.
- Killing the first wave of servants didn't have the last word – even the death of the Son.
- God's will ultimately wins and even the wicked tenants understand their own demise is imminent.
- God's mercy allowed them to have a chance to reverse their actions, but their pride got in the way.

Cornerstone:

Vs. 42 says, "Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the **cornerstone**;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

This is Jesus quoting Psalm 118:22-23 as he eloquently compares himself as being the main part of the foundation for the Church. Because of the disobedience from the Tenants, Jesus tells them they will be left out of the Kingdom. Jesus will establish his church where the work of forgiveness will not be left to animal sacrifices... but, instead, a saving relationship with our Savior – the one who will die upon a cross and rise again.

As you read this parable, ask: am I good with my relationship with God?

- Is this relationship as solid as it can be?
- In what ways have I followed the example of the wicked tenants?
- Have I asked God to strengthen me?
- Have I rejected what God is sending my way?

Notice What God Says:

“I know you’ve blown it!”

“But we can still fix it if you’ll turn from your wicked ways.”

Still, they refused.

- What is your typical response to God’s invitation to “turn from your sin?”
- After rejecting God enough, we often build up resistance to God’s invitation to *turn away*.
 - o If being honest, are there spaces where you were convinced you were right, despite knowing (now) that God was not pleased with your decisions, actions, and practices?

Further Discussion:

- Notice that the landowner set them up for success:
 - o God gave them a wine press and built protection around them...
 - o God did the same thing for Israel. (God gave them protection and a perfect set of laws.) Yet, here they are: dismissing all of what God had established.
 - **Self-reflection:**
 - o What in your own walk is “out of alignment” with God’s plans?
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- The landowner had given everything for them for free. God only asked them to stay within the bounds of their rules. God wanted to be obeyed AND shared with others. God wanted all other nations to see a God who was SO CLOSE to the land.
 - o HOW could they have rejected this favor? How do WE? _____
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- So where do WE fit into this story: you and I?
 - o We are the Church, we are the replacement tenants.
 - o Jesus was saying to the original tenants:
 - Because you continue to reject me...
 - Because you see everything as yours and not mine...
 - Because you will not receive my servants (prophets), nor my Son (Jesus)

** What happens, in your mind, to the replacement tenants, if we, too, do not keep God as our #1 priority?

** What happens when Christ’s church fails our God-given commission in this passage – “to bear spiritual fruit?”

Application:

- We are being called to consider everything we have as that of GOD’S, not our own (including everything we own/have and are: skills, possessions, and opportunities).
- How did Israel get to the point where they went from loving God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength... yet lost their way? How do we?

- Have you ever lost your way from going 'all-in' with God to not even being able to hear the voice of God?
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What's Mine is MINE!

- Israel distorted their understanding of God in order to justify their disobedience. We do this, too, sometimes. The tenants initially loved God's deal: "we get everything for free? GREAT!" But then they started to say, "We're doing all this work; why does the landowner get ANY of our free labor? This is all ours!"
 - A lot of people are like Israel: we go to God in our most desperate times. When we gain traction and get out of that desperation, we aren't always as loyal. Have you ever seen this happen: where people are grateful when things are going well, but dismissive of God when things are not?
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- Israel: they had a mistaken view of God's patience. The landowner did nothing when they killed the first servants. They began to assume: "maybe God is weak," or "maybe God doesn't care. We'll kill the rest, too!" God's **grace** was **exploited**. As a result, the tenants missed out on all that God was offering. Have you ever seen this happen? Countries? Churches? Leaders? Where have you witnessed people exploiting the grace (and patience) of God?
- Notice that Israel never told others about all God had done for them. God never said Israel was better than others... God said *you will be a blessing and others will see this relationship and be blessed if they follow.*
- When the account comes due, some are always willing to take whatever they want: they keep juggling a specific sin, keep God's goodness to themselves... and guess what happens? Those secrets eventually become **exposed**. God's grace gives us time to handle the stuff that's destroying our lives, but so many keep avoiding the opportunity to deal with the disobedience. The prophets kept sending warnings: "stop turning away from God!" But did the people?
 - o Are we any better? How often have we seen where people only "STOP" when they are caught?
- By keeping their faith in the backseat... by keeping their faith quiet... by separating God's grace and their commandment to be obedient... they missed out on all that God was trying to reveal.
- Ask: who has God sent in my life to help reveal a lesson for my journey?
 - o Who has God provided that may be giving a warning I need to hear?
 - Is it a parent, a spouse, a colleague, a relative, a friend, a neighbor, a coach, a boss, a cop, a judge, a teacher, or anyone else?
 - o If you look at the "dashboard of your life," what are the red zones on your RPM's that you've been traveling in for far too long?

DANGER, DANGER!

When we reject the warnings: we become immune to all God is trying to point out. Some are broken. Some are striving but never arriving. We find people to blame, but we don't always pay attention to all God is sending our way. (re-read vs. 42)

- In the Bible, they had ways to kill people: they could throw small stones and people would essentially die on internal bleeding. They had bigger stones, they had large stones, they had crucifixions... when the big stone was going to be thrown, it would just crush people.
- Jesus was saying: I have 3 days left before I will be turned over... you can STILL seek forgiveness. You can STILL seek restitution. You can STILL share the Good News with the world...
 - o But they wouldn't turn from their ways.

Rejection No More:

- Right now: what if you no longer rejected all that God's sending your way?
 - o What if you were no longer the one who rejected God's ways and you surrendered to all that God was asked of you?
- What if you started sharing this free gift of faith that God has given? Who would you share something GOOD about God among right now? See their face: make something happen!
- What if you honored the gift by being obedient: working with all your might to "tend the field" and to share with God & others all that God has asked you to share?
- What if you were to carve out, eliminate, add, course correct, get right with all the God was pointing out in your life?
 - o What if unbelievers came to know you as someone who was safe to ask questions about faith to... or one that would help them come to know of God better through... or that you could more often lift in prayer, intentionally?

Final Thoughts/Homework:

- Read John 3:16 in at least 3 different versions...
 - o What does this verse do to your understanding?
 - o What might change for you if you were to get back to listening to God and not the same sources of authority as those wicked tenants?
- What would you most want God to reveal to you as you consider how to live, how to share God's love... and how to be Christ-like in word, thought & deed? What is it you MOST want to learn about when it comes to being the type of tenant God desires?