



FAITH AND GRACE CHURCH

LEARNING FROM THE MASTER (JESUS CHRIST- OUR CHIEF CORNERSTONE)

STUDY 21-63 – THE PARABLES OF JESUS - Parable No. 38- The Parable of the Vineyard (The Parable of the wicked servant)

TEXT: Matt.21:33-44

LAST WEEK: Parable of The Two sons MATT. 21:28-32

LESSONS: - In the sight of God works are of more value than words. And the lowest and most despised sinner may obtain precedence in the kingdom of heaven over those who are far above them in rank and importance.

The Parable of the Vineyard (The Parable of the wicked servant) (MATT.21:33-44)

INTRODUCTION

The Parable of the Vineyard is the second of the series of parables that Jesus told the leaders of the Jews that questioned His authority. (See Matt. 21:23-27). It appears in three of the gospels (Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19).

The first parable Jesus teaches tells the priests that they have claimed to accept the message from God but they have failed to live up to it by being obedient. Outwardly, they are pious and appear to be people of God, but God knows the heart, and there they have failed miserably. This second parable (the Parable of the Vineyard) is like pouring salt on a wound. Just in case they didn't fully understand (which they did), Jesus gives a much clearer picture of what He means. Obviously, this further infuriates the priests, but it also gives the others who were present an opportunity to hear Jesus fully explain the implications of the disobedience of the Jewish people throughout the ages.

Background: There are 6 main characters in this parable: 1) the landowner—God, 2) the vineyard—Israel, 3) the tenants/farmers—the Jewish religious leadership, 4) the landowner's servants—the prophets who remained obedient and preached God's word to the people of Israel, 5) the son—Jesus, and 6) the other tenants—the Gentiles.

Verses 34-36 tell us the landowner sent his servants to collect his portion of the harvest and how they were cruelly rejected by the tenants; some were beaten, stoned, and even killed. Then he sent even more the second time and they received the same treatment. The servants sent represent the prophets that God had sent to His people/Israel and then were rejected and killed by the very people who were claiming to be of God and obedient to Him. Jeremiah was beaten (Jeremiah 26:7-11; 38:1-28), John the Baptist was killed (Matthew 14:1-12), and others were stoned (2 Chronicles 24:21). The theme is God's repeated appeal through His prophets to an unrepentant people.

In the next verses (37-39), the situation becomes even more critical. The landowner sends his own son, believing that they will surely respect him. But the tenants see an opportunity here; they believe that if they kill the son they will then receive his inheritance. This amounts

to conspiracy to commit murder by the Jewish leadership, and it is prophetic in the sense that Jesus is now telling them what they are going to do to Him (see Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16). After Jesus' death, Peter would make the same charges against the religious establishment (Acts 4:8-12). The tenants probably thought that the fight for the property was over, but it wasn't; the owner would now appear on the scene.

Jesus now (vs.40-41) asks the question, what will the owner do to the evil tenants? What He is doing is forcing the religious leaders/priests to declare their own miserable fate: condemnation for their blatant disobedience. This is similar to the question that Nathan put to David (2 Samuel 12:1-7). Up to this point, Jesus has been dealing with the immediate situation of Israel and its past disobedience; now Jesus leaves open the question of what Israel's leadership is going to do with the Messiah, the Son of God, whom He refers to as the "chief cornerstone" (vs 42). Cornerstones and capstones are used symbolically in Scripture and picture Christ as the main piece of the foundation of the church and the head of the church, respectively. Jesus is the beginning of and is foundational to the church, and He now stands over the church in His rightful position of honor, guiding the church to fulfill its divine destiny. This verse makes clear prophetically how Jesus will be rejected by the religious establishment and ultimately be crucified (see Psalm 118:22-23).

The key to understanding this parable and what it says about the religious leaders is found in verse 43, where Jesus makes their lack of obedience personal. Jesus tells the leaders that because of their disobedience they will be left out of the kingdom of heaven (individually and as a people); that they have let their opportunity for the time being slip away to be given to the Gentiles (see verse 41, "other tenants").

Jesus continues the stone metaphor in verse 44 to show how a stone can be used to build something beautiful, such as His church, or it can be used to crush and destroy, depending on the situation. This could be likened to God's word: to some it is salvation, peace and comfort. To others it is foolish and disconcerting because of its ability to convict man of his sins (2 Timothy 3:16).

Verses 45 and 46 give us three insights into the psyche of the chief priest of the religious establishment. 1) They are jealous and envious of Jesus' popularity with the common people. This encroaches on their authority and power to govern. 2) They have come to the realization that Jesus is talking about them. This hurts their pride and embarrasses them in front of the people. 3) They understood the analogy of the son and that Jesus was referring to Himself. This would be blasphemous to them, and they would now seek to kill Jesus. From here the leaders would meet in secrecy to plot how they would get rid of Jesus. Why all the secrecy? The people thought of Jesus as a prophet from God; arresting Him could cause an uprising. An uprising would jeopardize the leaders' relationship with the Roman authorities, something that the Jews did not want at any cost.

Application: We apply this parable to our lives by asking two questions; first, have you come to know Christ as your Lord and Savior, or have you rejected Him like the Jewish leadership did? The process is simple, as long as you are sincere in seeking a relationship with Christ. You need to recognize your sins, and then accept Christ as the only One who can save you from the penalty of your sins. Second, if you are a believer, what have you done with Jesus? Are you like the bad tenants, rejecting His Word and living a life of disobedience? If you are, you need to study God's Word and pray for guidance, seeking His will for your life and living out that will as best as you can, moment by moment, day by day.