

## PARABLE OF THE LANDOWNER

*The Judgment for Rejecting Christ*

Matthew 21:33-46

(Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19)

The *chief priests* and *elders* and other *Jewish religious leaders* have just challenged Jesus' authority...*"By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"* (vs. 23). *"These things"* included...

- *His Triumphal Entry into the City* (vs. 8-11).
- *His reception of praise from the people* (vs. 9, 15).
- *His clearing of the temple* (vs. 12-13).
- *His healing of the blind and the lame* (vs. 14).
- *His teaching* (vs. 23).

Jesus then responded with a question for them...and after they refused to say whether **John the Baptist's** ministry was from God or men...Jesus gave them the *parable of the two sons* and declared that *tax collectors* and *prostitutes* would enter the kingdom before they would.

Here, Jesus continues to respond to their hostile challenge by giving them the *second* in a *trilogy* of *judgment parables*...the *third* will be **Matthew 22:1-14**...which will even more graphically illustrate their willful rejection of God.

To illustrate God's judgment, Jesus gives a parable about a landowner and his vineyard and those he contracts with to take care of his land...

- **Landowner...God.**
- **Vineyard...Israel.**
- **Vine-growers...Jewish religious leaders**...and most of the people too.
- **Landowner's Servants...The Old Testament prophets and priests** ...including **John the Baptist**...who were faithful to God and preached to **Israel**.
- **Landowner's Son...Jesus.**
- **The other Vine-growers**...The *Church*...which is composed largely of *Gentiles*.
- **The prediction of the destruction of the vine-growers** (vs. 43)... which was fulfilled when *Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70*.

## I. THE PARABLE (vs. 33-39)

**Isaiah 5:1-7** tells of a similar story.

Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (vs. 33-39)...

As He always did in using a parable to teach...Jesus told a *simple* and *understandable story* to explain a *profound truth*. The use of a **landowner who planted a vineyard** was commonplace in that region and was easy for His hearers to identify with.

The details that Jesus gives in this parable emphasized the owner's great care in *preparing* and *developing* the **vineyard**.

- **Put a wall around it**...one would typically use *stone* or a *hedge of thorn*...used to protect it from *wild animals* and *thieves*.
- **Dug a wine press**...sometimes one would have to cut it out of bedrock...it was used to squeeze the juice out of the grapes.
- **Built a tower**...used as a lookout against *thieves*, as a *shelter for the workers*, and as a *storage place* for seeds and implements.

When everything was in order...the owner **rented it out to vine-growers** he thought would be reliable caretakers. He then made an agreement with them to pay him a certain percentage of the harvest as rent...with the rest belonging to them. Satisfied that his vineyard was in good hands...the owner **went on a journey**.

When the **harvest time approached**, the owner **sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his** agreed upon percentage of **produce**. But instead of paying what they had agreed upon...**the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third**.

Even though these *three accounts* are grouped together here in **Matthew**...in **Mark's** account we learn that Jesus said that they came separately...one after another (**Mark 12: 2-5**).

After those *three* were sent...the owner **sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them ...beating some and killing others** (**Mark 12:5**).

These tenant growers had an unusually blessed opportunity to make a great living. They had an excellent vineyard to cultivate...and they had been given complete trust by to owner to operate it. But they weren't content with merely making a good living...they were selfish and self-serving...they wanted the whole harvest for themselves...and they were cruel and merciless in achieving it.

After the rejecting of his **servants**...the owner **sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son."** This only drove the growers to greater greed...and more heinous treachery.

**But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him...**They not only wanted all the profits...they now exposed the fact that they wanted the vineyard for themselves.

The killing of the **son** was totally premeditated. They didn't mistake him for another **servant**. The fact that he was the owner's **son** is why they planned to kill him to **seize his inheritance**.

## II. THE PRONOUNCEMENT (**vs. 40-42**)

**Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons."** (**vs. 40-41**)...

As was typical with Jesus and His using a parable...He would then pose a question to those He was addressing asking them to finish the story themselves.

**Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?...**The *chief priests* and *elders* eagerly replied with complete *indignation*...**He will bring those wretches**

**to a wretched end, and will rent out the vine-yard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.**

In their response, these religious leaders again took the opportunity to proudly display their self-righteousness before Jesus as they rightly assessed the proper ending of the parable...that the owner would first, severely punish the original vine-growers, and then, replace them with others who were honest and more reliable.

But at this point, they are completely oblivious to the fact that they were the first **vine-growers**...and that they had once again been exposed by their own words...words that would condemn themselves. When they told Jesus that the **wretched** vine-growers would be brought **to a wretched end**...the *religious leaders* had judged themselves in the same way **David** had judged himself before **Nathan** (**II Samuel 12:5-7**).

**Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"** (**vs. 42**)...

At first, this response by Jesus seems irrelevant to the parable...but He was using a very familiar Old Testament passage to reinforce the parable's point. He quoted out of **Psalms 118**...

***"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes."***

~ Psalm 118:22-23

The **cornerstone** figure was popular with New Testament writers... (**Acts 4:10-12; Ephesians 2:20; I Peter 2:7-8**).

A **cornerstone** was the most basic and essential part of a building. From its proper *placement* and *alignment*...every other part of the building was determined. If the **cornerstone** was imperfect, the *stability* and *symmetry* of the entire building would be adversely affected. Sometimes **builders** would **reject** a number of stones before selecting just the right one.

For centuries, **Israel** had been thought of as the **cornerstone**. But the **chief cornerstone** wasn't **Israel**...it would be Jesus...the **stone which the builders**...the stone which the *Jewish religious leaders*

...rejected. The *rejected stone* was the *crucified* Christ...and the *restored chief cornerstone* is the *resurrected* Christ.

Jesus thereby tied the messianic psalm there in **Psalm 118** to the parable in order to reinforce His point. The *rejected son* and the *rejected stone* both refer to Christ.

**Peter** later declared in **Jerusalem** before the religious leaders shortly after **Pentecost**...

*“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”*

~Acts 4:10-12

God had prepared a place of great beauty and blessing, and then, graciously gave stewardship of it to His chosen people **Israel**. It was a place of *promise...hope...deliverance...salvation...and security*. But **Israel** had misappropriated all those blessings for herself...robbing God of the *glory* and *honor* due Him.

We know from Scripture that...

- **Jeremiah** was *thrown into a pit of slime*...and tradition held that he was *eventually stoned to death*.
- **Ezekiel** was *rejected*.
- **Elijah** and **Amos** had to *run for their lives*.
- **Micah** was *struck in the face* by those who refused to hear his message (**I Kings 22:24**).
- **Zechariah** was actually *murdered in the court of the house of the Lord*...between the *temple* and the *altar* (**II Chronicles 24:20-22; Matthew 23:35**).

Old Testament history bore witness to the Jewish religious leaders' murderous hearts...whose wickedness would culminate in the killing of the Son of God.

### III. THE PROPHECY (vs. 43-44)

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it (vs. 43)...With these *straightforward* and *unambiguous* words, Jesus removed whatever uncertainty that may have remained in the minds of the *chief priests* and *elders* about what He was saying to them.

**Taken away from you and given to a people**...The Lord repeated His judgment of unbelieving **Israel**...and His replacing **Israel** with the **Church**...which is composed largely of **Gentiles** (**I Peter 2:9**).

**And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust (vs. 44)**...The Jewish leaders who **fell on the stone** and put Jesus to death would themselves **be broken to pieces**...and **whomever it**, Jesus the stone, **falls**, He **will scatter** them **like dust**. In other words...for those who will not have Jesus as *deliverer*...He becomes *destroyer*.

### IV. THE PREDICAMENT (vs. 45-46)

**When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them (vs. 45)**...There was no mistaking that these wicked religious leaders were the object of Jesus' *denunciation* and *condemnation*.

- They knew that they were *the son who told his father that he would go and work in the field, but then didn't go*.
- They knew that they were *the wretched vine-growers who despised the landowner and beat and killed his servants and eventually killed his son*.
- They knew that they were *the builders who had rejected the stone that would become the chief cornerstone...and because of that rejection they themselves would be rejected by God and forbidden to enter into His kingdom*.

Even with this *denunciation* and *condemnation*...they still would not *repent*...and therefore, they could not be *forgiven*.

**When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet (vs. 46)**...

Their response...they wanted to **seize Him** and put Him to death...just as they had been plotting since the beginning of His ministry. In the end...they feared the people more than they feared God.

### WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS PASSAGE:

- **God is gracious and patient towards us.** He is patience with our *unbelief* and *rejection*...and because He loves us...gracious to send His only Son for our *redemption*.
- **God is also a just God.** The warning of His righteous judgment that will be executed when His divine patience has run its course, has been given to us.