

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

The Wicked Tenants

DECEMBER 16, 2018

TODAY'S TEXT

Text: **Matthew 21:33-46**

"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.

FIRST THOUGHTS

When we read the Gospels, we soon discover that Jesus is not the quiet, mild-mannered man dispensing folksy wisdom; He is the King who turns over tables in the temple, excoriates the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, and challenges the kingdoms of this world until He becomes a threat and is taken away to be executed. To see Jesus as merely a good, nice teacher is to flatten Him out, to make Him one-dimensional.

- Why do you think so many people see Jesus as just a "good, nice teacher" and fail to consider His teachings about judgment?
- How do you see him? Why do you think that is?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The parable of the wicked tenants is one of the strongest and most pointed of Jesus' parables. Although it may not be as famous as the parables of the prodigal son or the good Samaritan, it shows up in three of the four Gospels. Together with the parable of the sower and the soils, this story becomes a good bookend to our study of the parables. The parable of the soils was told early in Jesus' ministry, and the parable of the wicked tenants came during the week before His crucifixion and resurrection.

In this session, we will look at the parable of the wicked tenants, one of Jesus' most famous parables of judgment. In this story we see the privilege and responsibility that comes with God's calling on our lives. We also see the grace of God in His warnings to sinners and the judgment of God in His retribution toward those who reject His Son. This parable's stark imagery reminds us that we are called to bear the fruit of repentance and mission and thus fulfill our purpose as God's people.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REJECT RESPONSIBILITY AS STEWARDS

> Read **Matthew 21:33-35**

Something similar is going on at the beginning of this parable, but because we are removed from the original context, we might miss the connection. The image of a vineyard instantly evoked Isaiah 5:1-7 for Jesus' hearers. Stop now and read Isaiah 5.

- Based on this passage, what does the vineyard in Jesus' parable represent? Whom does the vineyard owner represent?
- How have you experienced a greater understanding of Scripture by knowing the storyline and the details of the Old Testament?
- What responsibilities come with the privilege of being God's chosen people?
- What kind of fruit are we to bear as Christians?

REJECTION, GRACE, AND PATIENCE

> Read Matthew 21:36-41

◦ We tend to think of warnings as something bad, a message of judgment. How are God's warnings to us a sign of His grace?

Where do we fit in this story? On the one hand, the parable serves as a warning to all who reject the Son of God. Reject Jesus and you invite the judgment of God.

On the other hand, the parable serves as a warning to those who think they belong to God's people but continue to ignore His warnings. We show we truly belong to God by obeying Him, heeding His warnings, and embracing His Son. By failing to heed God's warnings, we take our stand against the prophets and against Jesus Himself.

◦ What words would you use to describe the vineyard owner if he had decided not to judge the wicked tenants?

◦ Why does punishment seem so proper in this case?

◦ How does this impact the way we view the judgment of God?

REJECTED BY GOD

> Read Matthew 21:42-46

As we apply this parable to our situation today, we should be aware of just how religious the rejection of Jesus and the prophets was. Sometimes we tend to think of people in categories of religious or irreligious, as if the former is good and the latter is bad. But in this case, the people who received the strongest condemnation from God were precisely the religious leaders and the people who bore no fruit. They were religious, but they weren't fruitful.

◦ What are some ways we might use religiosity to mask our lack of fruitfulness?

◦ What aspects of this parable's warning apply to us today?

◦ What role does "bearing fruit" play in our mission to share and show the love of God?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

"[Judgment] is no pleasing subject to me, any more than it is to you; but it is my duty to show you the dreadful consequences of continuing in sin. I am only now acting the part of a skillful surgeon, who searches a wound before he heals it."

GEORGE WHITEFIELD

If we were to place ourselves in this story, we would need to see ourselves as the wicked tenants. We are the ones who have spurned God and ignored His warnings. We are the ones who have turned on His only Son. The question now remains: On which side of this furious judgment of God will we be found? It is only in embracing God the Son and humbly trusting in Him that we find salvation. Instead of being the cornerstone that crushes us in judgment, Jesus becomes the cornerstone of our new life in Him, the cornerstone of the new people of God to which we belong. The wicked tenants is a parable of judgment, yes, but its purpose is to bring us to repentance and faith in the Son.

The portrait of a mild Jesus who spoke only of grace and never of judgment is a figment of the imagination. We serve a Savior whose scandalous grace was matched with the ferocious roar of judgment. In this parable, we see a glimpse of God's patience but also His swift retribution. Let this story from Jesus shock your senses and lead you to see yourself as a steward of His blessings.

UPCOMING LESSONS

12/23/18 & 12/30/18

No LifeGroups

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

16th – 1 Peter 1-5 | **17th** – 2 Peter 1-3; John 1 | **18th** – John 2-4 | **19th** – John 5-6 | **20th** – John 7-8 | **21st** – John 9-11 | **22nd** – John 12-14