

Parable of the Landowner

33“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. 34“When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35“*The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.* 36“*Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.* 37“*But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’* 38“*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.’* 39“*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 vine-growers?”* 41*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.”*

42Jesus 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’?*

43“*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.* 44“*And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.*”

45*When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.* 46*When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.*

The rulers of Isreal have come to Jesus with a question. Two questions really. And from now until His death, there will be non stop conflict between Jesus and these rulers in Israel.

You'll recall the question. *By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority.*

If you hang around young christian guys long enough, sooner or later, you'll hear some smart alecky young christian say, who died and made you the 4th person in the Trinity.

Perhaps a little coarse. But you get the idea. They're asking who made you the boss of everything? Who died and left you in charge?

And that's basically what the scribes and pharisees have asked Jesus. Except, oops, He IS the second person in the Trinity!

They all thought they were God's chosen people. But they didn't recognise God when He visited them. Instead they basically ask the Son of God, *who do you think you are, Jesus??*

It was a trick question in the first place. They were hoping He would say, Umm, I'm the Son of God, and then, bam, they'd kill Him for blasphemy, because, well, only the Son of God should claim to be the Son of God. If someone else does, that's blasphemy.

Jesus answers their questions with a question. Was John's baptism of God, or of men. Was John a phony? Because if he wasn't, there's your answer.

And then He launches into 3 parables that further address the question of His authority and their position before a Holy God. The first, we looked at last week, about *The two sons*, one who worked for his father after he repented of saying he would not, and one who did nothing, after he told his father he would work.

That was last week. This week we'll consider the vineyard and the unrighteous sharecroppers, and next week we'll consider the invitation to the King's son's wedding and their indifference and rejection.

All of these show a different angle, a different perspective of Israel's

failure and willful disbelief. It was hard work to disbelieve that John was a prophet sent from God. But Israel was up to the task. Because believing John would require Jesus, and their collective mind was made up. Jesus was nobody, therefore by default, John also must be nobody.

Let's look at this parable of the landowner's vineyard.

33“*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.*

Does this sound familiar? Please tell me this sounds familiar.

This is like the first line in a song that we've all heard many times. We immediately are familiar. We could sing the rest of the song by heart. F-F-D-D . . . all I have to do is hum those 4 notes, even poorly, and you know the rest of the song. 4 notes. The first two words. Oh beautiful (for spacious skies, for amber . . .)

That's the same phenomenon as Jesus opening lines to His 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. . .*

This is from Isaiah 5. This is familiar ground. We know already then, the landowner is God. The vineyard is Israel. Jerusalem. Fruit, sweet fruit is the expected produce.

But then Jesus does something that we are not allowed to do. He uses the familiarity of the old song to launch a new one. His parable takes a different direction than Isaiah's, although some elements are the same.

We are not allowed to free-wheel with someone else's book. We don't invent new parables out of old ones. But guess what. The author of the book has rights that we don't have. It's His book. He'll take the original familiar story and go somewhere further with it. Only one person is allowed to do that. The author.

34 "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce.

We're familiar with this set-up. Especially in the old south. After the negroe's were freed from slavery, many became share-croppers. The arrangement was simple. A landowner owns the land. You do the work. You get a percentage, and the landowner gets a percentage.

So the landowner sends His slaves to get His take of the fruit.

Who are the slaves. The slaves are the prophets that were sent to Israel to call them out of sin and into fruitfulness.

But in another sense, we are the slaves. If you call Jesus Lord, Kurios, by default, that makes you what?

That's just by way of reminder, but for the purposes of the parable, we'll go with the prophets that God sent to minister to His people.

Notice also, harvest time. God is the landowner. He expects His land to produce a crop. God is expectant. He has a reasonable expectation of every man woman and child that He created to bring Him glory. Nobody's off the hook. God made us to glorify Him with every breath. He has a reasonable expectation from His creation.

35 "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.

OK, who are the vine-growers? The vineyard is Israel. Who are the husbandmen? The spiritual leaders in Isreal are the husbandmen. The vinegrowers. The very men who have come with the question about authority.

Who gave you authority? My Father owns the vineyard! But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

So the landowner sends His slaves to the vine growers to get some

produce from the vineyard, and; 35 *“The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.*

This is bizarre behaviour! You beat and stone and kill the landowners slaves!!?? Mercy! But that's what Israel did. Over and over. They murdered the prophets sent to them.

36 *“Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.*

What's going on here? Without pushing the parable any further, let me suggest there's a deeper rift between the land owner and the husbandmen in His vineyard.

There is distance. The slaves are sent. From another place. It's almost as if they're from different countries that are at enmity. There is conflict here that remains un-explained.

The scenario would better be perceived as if it were compared to something like the USA and ISIS. ISIS is at war with the USA. It's like the landowner lives in the United States and he has sent His agents to His vineyard in ISIS controlled territory to collect what is His.

That may push the parable a little but what this is, is a conflict playing out between the husbandmen, the vinegrowers working the vineyard, and they belong to Satan, and God who is the rightful owner of the property has sent His slaves, those who belong to Him, to collect what is due from Satan's men.

I'm currently slowly reading through Foxe's Book of Martyrs. In America we have taken religious freedom and all the blessings of this land we live in for granted. Martyrdom seems foreign to us. Persecution, unheard of. The church has grown sleepy and lazy in America. What could possibly go wrong?

But the truth that the real church has known from inception to this very day is more like this picture. Slaves go in Satan's territory. Satan's men kill them. Beat them. Mis-treat them. That's normative. America has

been the anomaly, not the norm. And the church here is slumbering.

37“But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

Remember the question? *By what authority do you do these things??
And who gave you this authority?*

Jesus is the Son of God, who with His Father, created everything, and ultimately owns it all. Satan may be a temporary tenant farmer, but God owns it all. Jesus is His Son. So much for the authority question.

So now we have our players and the conflict. What happens next?

38“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.’

We look at this logic and marvel. This is insane. This is logically insane. Kill the Son and by so-doing own the inheritance. That's madness. It's impossibly insane. How long did they think it would take for retribution to come??

But, there is a picture of sin. Sin is rebellion against a Holy God. How long do you think that's going to happen until retribution comes.

Well, let's look at a best case scenario. Suppose you're Hugh Hefner. You invented Playboy magazine in 1953. You made millions. You lived in splendor in your mansion for over 60 years. You indulged in every conceivable hedonism for as long as your body held out.

Whoopee. You beat all the odds. You're 90 now. You enjoyed 60 wild years, but eternity is knocking at the door. And it never ends. 60 years isn't 5 minutes in eternity.

That's the best case. Most people settle for far less in their madness as they rebel against the Creator and sustainer of life.

Rebellion against God is pure madness. Folly. Insanity. And so the

vinegrowers seize the land owners own Son and;

39“They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Notice the precision of the master's story. The scapegoat was taken where to carry away the sins of the people? Outside the camp.

The Lamb of God died where, for the sins of the people? Outside the city walls. Outside the gates. Jesus is precise in His prophecy of what will happen to Him in less than 48 hours. *39“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 vine-growers?” X2

A good story teller introduces tension that the hearer connects with. These hearers are into this tale. The wicked wicked tenant farmers, the impossibly wronged land owner. The massive need for justice!

They remind us of David listening to a similar tale. I can't resist the parallel;

Nathan Rebukes David 2Samuel 12

1Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said,

“There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor.

2“The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.

*3“But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb
Which he bought and nourished;*

*And it grew up together with him and his children.
It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his
bosom,*

And was like a daughter to him.

4“Now a traveler came to the rich man,
And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd,
To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him;
Rather he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the
man who had come to him.”

5Then David’s anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to
Nathan, “As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves
to die. 6“He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did
this thing and had no compassion.”

7Nathan then said to David, “**You are the man!**”

These vine growers have listened to Jesus story and the need for justice
burns within them. Even in our fallen condition, we long for justice.
We see someone mistreated and we wish for justice. Human sympathy.

Jesus has them at that point; 40“Therefore when the owner of the
vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?” 41They 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.”

That's the right answer. The problem is, they're in the same spot as
David. *You are the men.* They've just indicted themselves.

42Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures,

Hit pause. These are the literati. The scribes. The experts in the law.
The Bible answer men. These are the elites of Israel. When Jesus says
this to them it is the most sarcastic slap in the face you can imagine.

Have you never read??!! Really?? Nazareth guy with no letters is
asking us if we've read our Bibles?? We practically wrote the Bible.
The audacity! The cheek!! Who does He think He's talking to???
This is the put down of put downs. Did you ever read your Bibles??

‘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’?*

The quote is from Psalm 118:22, and as the early church marches forward this is a tool we'll see the apostles use over and over from their tool kit.

They must constantly explain how Israel missed and rejected their messiah. This is the foundation of the gospel they will take to the world.

Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected. But the imagery doesn't stop there.

Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the entire world, had a dream. You can read about it in Daniel 2. 4 kingdoms which will be one world rule that span from his timeframe when Israel was in exile all the way until a final world ruler will rule in the time of Jacob's trouble. The tribulation.

The dream pictured Assyria, ruled by Nebuchadnezzar during Daniels lifetime, then the Medo-Persian empire, then Greece, and finally Rome. And Rome morphs into a final divided 10 state confederacy of some kind which is yet future, but maybe only by months, and that final one world ruler will be the anti-christ.

But then you'll recall that a stone cut out without hands will come and crush all of those kingdoms of men. Let's look at that massive prophecy just briefly;

Daniel 2

31 “You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. 32 “The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 “You continued looking until a stone was cut out

without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. 35“Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

These men asked Jesus about authority? He IS the stone cut out without hands. He is the chief cornerstone. They are the builders who have rejected that stone.

This final crushing of all the kingdoms of the world is yet future, when Jesus returns at His second coming. He will turn the rebellers into dust in the wind. They will be no more.

Oh, the irony of dis-belief. These men are speaking with the Stone cut out without hands, the Chief cornerstone that will crush every rebellious person. They've been given the answer to their question on a silver platter. And they are locked down in unbelief.

They listened to Jesus story. They seethed with anger and wished for judgement to come on those wretches. A wretched end. A proper judgement for such a rebellion. And here it is; Both corporate and individually. Nationally, and individually.

43“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.

Time is up for the wicked tenant farmers. Israel was chosen by God to bring revelation of Himself to the world. They were special. It was a special relationship. The very Word of God came to us through the agency of chosen Israel.

The Word became flesh, born of these people. That special role is finished. After they murder their Messiah, God in human flesh, they will be scattered to the four winds until God brings them together at the end in order to fulfil every promise to them.

But their role as a vehicle for God to reveal Himself to men, that special relationship, is finished. 43 *“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.*

Who represents the Kingdom of God, the authority of God to reign as opposed to and in opposition to Satan in the world now?

We do. The church does. If you're like the son who repented and went out to work in the Father's vineyard, the true church, the fruit producing church, then this is you.

To as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become Son's of God.

Israel suffered loss, we received their prize. If we are fruitful. That was national judgement. But that was not all. Jesus will pronounce individual judgement. Each farmer in this rebellion will face the judge individually;

44 *“And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”*

The stone cut out without hands offends in two ways.

It's a stumbling stone. Israel tripped over the stone. This Jesus doesn't look like the messiah they had invented in their minds.

That messiah would lead the revolt that would overthrow Rome and restore them to greatness. He would cause earthquakes and make the stars fall from the sky like a fig tree casting it's figs in the wind. He would rule the world and these men would be 2nd 3rd and 4rth in line under him. That's the messiah they were waiting for.

This want-2-be messiah was on the attack against them! Not Rome. That's a stumbling block. They stumbled over Him.

And in the end, when He returns to judge the rebellers, He will be the

stone that crushes them to powder.

In Daniel's vision, the stone crushes and shatters and turns the wicked into chaff that gets blown away. No trace is left. It scatters men like dust. In this world. They will face the judge of all the earth in the next.

What was their question again? By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you that authority?

In view of the answer, the question almost seems ridiculous, doesn't it. What's my authority? And who gave it to me?? Really, grasshoppers.

I Am the stone cut out without hands who shatters Satan's rebellion and crushes every opposition and rules this world forever and ever.

45When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

What happened when Nathan told David, You are the man!

Psalm 51 happened. He wept and repented and begged forgiveness. He was broken by his sin and rebellion. He cried out for salvation.

*9Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.*

*10Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*11Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*

*12Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.*

What is the reaction of these men? They seethed with murder. They would have finished Him there and then if not for the people also there watching Jesus turn them into mincemeat.

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

Murder is in their hearts. Timing has to be worked out. It won't be long.

What about you? Have you submitted your life to the Stone cut out without hands. He is the cornerstone. We are the building. Little stones in a glorious structure.

It is insanity to rebel against the Lord of everything. Craziness. He offers you His righteousness. He carries away your sin. If you refuse His offer, we'll see next week, you will not be clothed in righteousness. You will be cast into outer darkness.