

## THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMAN

Matthew 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19

The parable we are studying today needs to be seen in its context with the deepening conflict with the Pharisees. The previous parable of the two sons and the following parable of the wedding feast are in the same category.

Jesus had finally arrived in Jerusalem and had cleansed the temple. The religious leaders disdain for Jesus, which actually reveals their hatred for God is rooted in their concerns of the threats to their power, prestige and authority with the people as they were in jeopardy and being threatened as never before.

The parable for today cannot be fully understood unless a person grasps the intensity of heated and growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

In the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus was teaching in the temple and there was growing tensions with the Pharisees and other religious leaders. (Matthew 21:23, Mark 11:27, Luke 20:1).

The meaning of today's parable was clear in Jesus' day: Religious leaders killed God's prophets in the Old Testament and soon would kill God's own Son. The kingdom will be taken from those who do not produce fruits (righteousness, goodness, mercy) and be given to those people who do.

The meaning of this parable has just as clear and an equally distinct message for today.

That is, many who claim to be God's righteous ones often silence the true messengers of God, so that they can live their lives the way they want to.. The self righteous religious hypocrites often silence God's messengers, including the voice of his Son, in order to live a lie.

There are those today who claim to represent God and speak for God and they are just as false as the Pharisees, Sadducees and the scribes were.

There are those who are deluded enough to actually believe that their false interpretations of Scripture have been given to them by God and they go about building there own vineyards not knowing anything about the true kingdom of God.

We should also realize that this parable functions more like an allegory than a parable. There are many symbolic parts of this parable. The tenants represent the people of God and their religious leaders. The slaves/servants represent the prophets of the Old Testament who were killed for being prophets. The Son represents the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who will be killed by the religious. The owner represents God who comes in and destroys the tenant and gives the

vineyard to others who will produce fruits/actions of righteousness. In other words, with all the symbolism in this story, it functions more like an allegory than a simple parable with one primary point.

And to some extent the truths of the parables could be understood by anyone but remember, the depth of meaning for most of the parables was only given to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Jesus used simple stories rooted in the circumstances of everyday life but the truths of the stories had very serious meanings. Jesus' parables are fascinating, insightful and brilliant. His parables normally have one primary point.

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. Everyone in Jesus' day knew about vineyards, fences, pits, wine presses, watchtowers, owners and renters. This is the second "vineyard" parable in a row. Vineyards were a common scene in Jesus' day and formed the backdrop for several of his parables.

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

Circle the word, "produce," and write in the word, "fruit." The word, "fruit," is used four times in the text and the word, "fruit," is uniquely Matthean in this story. That is, Matthew has used the word, "fruit," in this text four times.

We recall other places where the Gospel of Matthew has emphasized the word, "fruit." For example:

Matthew 7:15-16 "15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" The Pharisees were the false prophets; they were the false religious leaders. A person recognizes them because of their lack of wholesome and healthy fruit.

Matthew 7:17-20"17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will know them by their fruits."

Matthew 12:33-37. "33 "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

35 The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an

account for every careless word you utter; 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

In other words, the concept of "fruit" is interwoven into Matthew's gospel.

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

Another prophet was sent and the leaders/Pharisees insulted and beat the prophet.

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

A third prophet and his fate was the same. "They" beat him up and killed him, and the "they" is the religious leaders, especially the high priests, Scribes and Pharisees.

We recall Matthew's comments in chapter 23:31 when he says directly to the Pharisees, "You are the sons of those who have murdered the prophets."

In Matthew 23:37 and the parallel in Luke 13:34, Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you." The servant/slave in this passage was one of the Old Testament prophets. The tenants (the leaders, Pharisees) killed the prophets.

Today, a primary, unconscious goal for many people is to silence the messengers of God in our lives, so that we can live with the way we want to live, pretending that "our" vineyard is indeed ours and does not belong to God. We pretend we are the owners of our vineyard and we don't want to hear from God's messengers otherwise.

The people of God and their religious leaders beat or killed and therefore silenced the messengers that God sent to them.

37 "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

This is the crux of the parable. The "he" in the allegory is God and He sends his own Son to represent Him and He is not welcomed by the religious hypocrites.

Of course God unlike the owner of the vineyard does not expect them to respect His Son. He is not surprised at how they reject the son of God who is the son of Man.

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.

The tenants wanted to get rid of the heir so the vineyard would be theirs. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of Jesus so that the temple (and its income) would be theirs.

I believe that there were several reasons why the Pharisees wanted Jesus dead. They wanted to be “the religious elite” in their society and Jesus was being given the adoration and respect that they wanted. In other words, they were jealous of Jesus and his authentic religious appeal to the masses. I believe they wanted him dead because he told the truth about their hypocrisy. He called a hypocrite a hypocrite and the Pharisees were predominately religious hypocrites. The Pharisees didn’t like Jesus’ honesty about them, nor would you or I. Jesus knew that these Jewish leaders were going to kill him. Once again, as Jesus told this parable, he was fully aware that he was going to be killed by the religious authorities who opposed him.

From Matthew 23:29-31, we recall Jesus’ teaching about the Pharisees and how they killed the prophets. “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you adorn the tombs of the prophets and say that if we had lived in those days, we would not have shed their blood. Your fathers killed the prophets and you have built their tombs.”

The Pharisees were blind about themselves, erroneously thinking that they would have been righteous like the prophets of old and erroneously thinking that they would have supported God’s prophets in the centuries past. The Pharisees thought to themselves, “If we had lived in the good old days of the prophets, we would not have killed them.” In other words, the Pharisees were blind about who they were and what they would have done. In fact, the Pharisees rejoiced when John the Baptist was killed and wanted the prophetic voice of Jesus to be killed as well.

Both the Baptist and Jesus were contemporary prophets of God, and the Pharisees wanted both of them dead.

This whole section in Matthew 23:29-37 is a good commentary on this parable.

Matthew 23:29-37: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this

generation.”

It was not only the prophets in previous centuries who were killed by blind self righteous leaders; it was this current generation of Pharisaical Jews who would also kill prophets, the Son and the apostles. Jesus’ words proved to be true. That is, within days, the Pharisees would kill the Son. Within a few years, the Pharisees would kill the numerous martyrs of the church, those people who were killed and crucified because of their faith in Christ. The prophets were the leaders of the church of the Old Testament; the apostles were the leaders of the church of the New Testament. The religious leaders of the day, including the Pharisees, killed both prophets and apostles.

People today sometimes want to silence the messengers from God so we human beings can pretend that this world is ours and belongs to us rather than God. Modern man often lives as if God does not exist, as if our world belongs to us. We too want to silence the voices of God’s messengers to us.

These hypocrites will lose their tradition as being the ones who represent God’s people. They will be replaced by Christ’s true kingdom sons, Jew and Gentiles who will preach the Gospel and make disciples

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."

The owner will come in and destroy the renters.

The wretched will meet a wretched end. The NKJV says "He will destroy those wicked men miserably.

Such attitudes are consistent with the other verses in the Gospel of Matthew where there is eternal punishment in hell for those who are unrighteous and do not love God nor their fellow human beings.

For example, in the next parable in Matthew, in chapter 22:1-14, there is a parable about the Great Marriage feast. This same parable is also told in Luke 14:15-24. Matthew’s version of the story the next parable of the Great Marriage feast makes many modern readers feel uncomfortable with its violent, punitive language. Listen to Matthew 22:7-14. “The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out

into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

In the Gospel of Matthew, the violent punishment ("destroy those murders and burn their city," "bind him and throw him into outer darkness where will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.") of God haters is very explicit. Six of the seven references to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in the New Testament are in the Gospel of Matthew. One is in Luke. The phrase, "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is an Aramaic reference to hell.

Eight of the parables about the last judgment are found only in Matthew's gospel.

They are: the parables of the weeds and the wheat, the good and bad fish, the unforgiving servant, the gracious employer, the marriage feast, the ten virgins, the talents, and the sheep and goats.

The Gospel of Matthew has more of a "hell and damnation" theology than the other gospels and is found in many of the stories Jesus tells.

42\* 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'?<sup>43</sup> "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.<sup>44</sup>\* "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

This is the issue. Highlight this phrase. Underline it. Circle it. The reign of God will be taken away from the religious leadership and given to a people who will produce the righteous fruit of genuine discipleship and show the evidence of being true kingdom sons..

When we live a lie and pretend that we are owners of God's vineyard, when we do not produce lives that produce the fruit of righteousness and sanctification that are given to us in the Sermon on the Mount and particularly the Beatitudes as we have studied, then we prove to be false and God's true vineyard workers will be known. The true kingdom dwellers will know that this vineyard (life) belongs to God and that we are to live productive lives, lives that reflect God's glory and a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees.

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

It was clear that this parable was told against the Jewish religious leadership of the temple. Special ears and eyes were not needed to understand these parables. It was just all too evident/

This whole section in Matthew has been a recording of the deepening conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

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

The Pharisees would seek to find a more opportune time to arrest him...and kill him.

I trust that today you are a true kingdom son and not one who would kill the son.

I pray that you would know with absolute conviction that you are truly a God lover and that your Iproves to be one that is striving to be obedient in all things that will honor the Son.

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