

Matthew 21:33-46– “The Parable of the Tenants” – Sep. 29, 2024

1. Last week we saw the priests and the elders challenging Jesus’ authority after He very clearly picked up and assumed the offices of prophet, priest, and king when He came into Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, cursed the fig tree, announced doom on Jerusalem for rejecting her Messiah, and started teaching
 - a. Jesus reversed the trap and snared these men with their own question
 - b. He forced them to play their hand on their view of John the Baptist
 - i. Christ had taken them back a few years earlier to when He was baptized by John and very clearly received the Holy Spirit and the audible approval of the Father
 - ii. It was through John that the Triune authority of the Godhead was very publicly and very visibly and audibly placed on Jesus’s shoulders
 - iii. Jesus was not changing topics when He brought up His baptism by John
 1. Rather, He was forcing them to take sides about John, in which case they would have to acknowledge the authority of John, and therefore by extension, Jesus
 2. Or they would have to discount the authority of Jesus by denying the authority of John, and face political backlash
 - c. They knew full well what they saw at the Jordan, so they know that John was a prophet sent by God, and that he handed his mantle to the greatest and terminal prophet, Jesus Christ
 - d. But pride kept them from saying what they knew to be true, and cowardice kept them from giving their official position that John was not authoritative

- e. Last week we closed with the parable that Christ told to twist the knife after He had plunged it into their pride and cowardice
 - i. He told the story of two brothers, one who was like the fig tree and looked promising at first, but turned out to be useless, and the other who looked unlikely at first, but turned out to be fruitful in the end
- 2. Jesus is shifting the imagery in today's parable, but it won't be hard to see that He is saying the same thing yet again
 - a. One of the strengths of parables is that they communicate various aspects of large topics
 - b. All of the parables and actions of Jesus since He got to Jerusalem have been pointing towards the closing of the old covenant age now that it has given birth to Christ and the new covenant
 - i. The parable of the tenants is perhaps the most direct in illustrating this pivotal event in redemptive history
- 3. V.33 – *“Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.”*
 - a. It was not uncommon for wealthy landowners to lease out their land to farmers so that they could mind their other affairs
 - b. Here we have a picture of God, who is the rightful ruler of all things, leaving stewards in charge of His vineyard
 - i. The imagery is that of Isaiah 5 where the prophet speaks of how Assyria was going to destroy Israel and take her into exile in those days

do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

7 For what great nation is there that has da god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? 8 And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?"

- d. It is not hard to see how much care the master put into this vineyard
 - i. The fence, the winepress, and the tower are all considerable investments that take time to develop
 - ii. They are improvements to His property that He wants to see managed properly
 - iii. The vineyard itself is a long term project
 - iv. A vineyard takes years to turn a profit
 - 1. It is a long term investment that needs to be carefully tended and cared for before it produces anything
 - e. This is a fitting picture of how God has slowly but surely working on the vineyard of Israel, creating her out of the patriarchs, giving her land, providing her with law, judges, priests, kings, and prophets
 - f. He has committed Himself to building this vineyard patiently and meticulously
4. V.34 – *“When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.”*
- a. Tyrants and evil men demand the impossible and they thrive on being arbitrary

- b. Pharaoh quits giving his slaves straw to make bricks, and demands that they make more bricks
- c. Modern day tyrants love to tell everyone how wonderful they are even as they pay mothers to kill the next crop of wonderful people
- d. Inconsistency and arbitrariness are proof that one has lost his mind and is no longer living in reality
- e. The landowner in this story is a reasonable man
 - i. He is absolutely in His rights to get His rent paid to Him
 - ii. But he is not demanding His tenants to make bricks without straw
 - iii. He waits for the harvest before expecting rent
- f. God has every legitimate claim to His people, His church, His kingdom, His world
 - i. He would be justified in demanding whatever He desires since He is the rightful owner
 - ii. Yet He is patient and longsuffering
 - iii. He invests in His people before expecting a return
- g. Spurgeon – *“The householder waited till near the full time in which he could expect a return. The time of the fruit drew near and as the husbandmen sent him none of the produce of the vineyard, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of it, and bring them to him. These servants, as the lord’s representatives, ought to have been received with due honor, but they were not. The leaders of the Jewish nation for a long time rendered to the Lord no homage, love, or service. Prophets*

were sent of God to Israel, but their message was refused by the rulers of the people.”

5. VV.35, 36 – *“35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.”*

- a. When the rent was not coming back to the owner, he sent messengers to His tenant farmers and they get severely mistreated
- b. Obadiah led 100 prophets to caves for safety during the reign of the wicked Jezebel
- c. Jeremiah was thrown into a well
- d. Hebrews 11 – *“Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”*
- e. You start to get a picture for what kind of people are managing this vineyard on behalf of the owner

- f. Not only do they inherit all these tremendous blessings that have come about by the investment and meticulous planning of the owner, but now we also see that they have become fat and lazy and entitled
 - i. They let the due date for rent come and go and they don't send the owner His share of the harvest
 - ii. So the owner sends messengers to remind them of the terms of the agreement
 - iii. A reasonable response would be to feel ashamed for abusing the generous terms, seek repentance, and then send in the rent, perhaps with interest
 - iv. Instead, they have come to presume that the vineyard is theirs
 - v. The tenants have become proud and entitled
 - 1. These are people who were born on 3rd base thinking that they hit a triple
- g. It's not hard to see who the characters are in this story
 - i. The Master is God
 - ii. The vineyard is God's kingdom
 - iii. The tenants are old covenant Israel
 - iv. The messengers are the prophets
 - v. The Son is Jesus Christ
- h. The prophets served like covenant lawyers, reminding Israel of her duties before God, and instead of repenting, the people misdirect their shame into anger at the messengers
- i. It is clear to us how this story fits over the story arc of the Bible

- i. But before we are content to leave the application to other people in another time, we do need to consider ourselves
- ii. The kingdom of God today is not national Israel but it also isn't merely confined to the church
 1. The kingdom of God is anywhere that Christ's rule and reign is acknowledged
 2. So the church is very much central in the kingdom, but the kingdom of God is also in marriages and families and workplaces and in law chambers and classrooms and courtrooms and hospitals and nations wherever Christ is honoured and His laws are obeyed
 3. This means that if we are acting as though we are sovereign or autonomous in any part of our life, we are failing to give the Master His rightful due
 4. We don't have permission to operate by our own rules in the church, but we also don't have permission to operate by our own rules in Parliaments, hospitals, or households
- iii. Special application for where Trinity is at in the story
 1. Most or perhaps all of us have also been born on 3rd base
 2. We have had the blessing of growing up in church, of being fed and cared for
 3. Before he died in 1930, my great grandfather moved from Blumenhof to Landmark to give me and my kids an opportunity

4. He was one of the handful of men who made the move and established a church that I could grow up in
5. I only showed up 49 years after he was dead, but I was instantly an heir to a wonderful inheritance of a multigeneration faith that had planted its flag
 - a. Everything was ready for me and all the work that went into it happened in the olden days
 - b. But the olden days are not a fixed point in time!
 - c. *Right now is the olden days for those who are going to come after us!*
 - d. Let us be the kind of tenants who are diligent to turn a profit on what God has given us, so that we maximize both our blessing and God's glory!
- j. The tenants in Jesus's story are so presumptuous that they mistreat and kill the prophets one after another
6. VV. 37, 38 – *“Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”*
 - a. After all the messengers got killed and abused, the Master would have been fully in His rights to declare war on His tenants and have them killed and permanently removed from His vineyard

- b. God would have been fully in His rights to leave Israel in Egypt, or in the wilderness, or in exile, but time after time He restores them to the vineyard even after they abuse and murder the prophets that He has sent to them
- c. But amazingly, even though justice would demand it, the Master doesn't send His son to butcher these people, but to restore peace
 - i. *Think of this for a moment*
 - ii. Imagine if you owned a rental house, and your tenants spray painted the walls, tore up the flooring, broke the windows, and were so complacent that they felt that they didn't need to send you your rent
 - iii. So you send a messenger to remind them of their obligations, and they abuse him; you send another messenger, and they kill him
 - iv. We all know how we would feel in this situation and what we would be inclined to do
 - v. The remarkable thing about God is that He sends His Son, not to go declare war on these people, but to offer terms of peace
 - vi. This is a grace that we cannot fathom
 - vii. But the scribes and the elders and the Pharisees are so arrogant and so proud at this point that they not only refuse the terms of peace, but they grow deeper in their entitlement
 - 1. They think that if they can kill the Master's Son, who is heir to the property, that they will be able to stay there forever since the Son is no longer alive to inherit

- viii. The Jewish leaders at this point are so presuming on their ethnicity that they will hear nothing from the Master's messengers or His sons
 - 1. They have Hebrew names, after all
 - 2. They think this vineyard is owed to them
 - 3. They love the milk and honey but they refuse to pay their proper rent back to the owner
 - 4. Mixed in this story is a prophecy about Christ's death
- 7. VV.40, 41 – *“40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”*
 - a. Just like the last parable, Jesus turns this one on them and forces their condemnation out of their own mouths
 - b. This parable is so obvious to us that we don't know how anybody could miss it
 - c. But remember, when Jesus was telling this parable, He had not yet died, so one very obvious clue in the parable has not yet happened
 - d. Nevertheless, the sense of justice in these Jewish leaders means they come up with the right answer
 - i. Further, there is a very real possibility that they misapplied the details of the parable
 - ii. Even though these men are covenant breakers, they mistakenly thought they were legitimate heirs to Abraham and Moses
 - iii. They may very well have seen the Romans as the tenants in God's vineyard, and themselves as the messengers

- iv. Like many people today, they probably saw themselves as the hero in the biblical narrative, and not as the villain
 - v. So by demanding the death of the wicked tenants, it is probably that they were giving themselves the go ahead to drive out the wicked Romans
 - vi. This only adds to their shame and humiliation that it was these hated Romans who acted as God's agent of wrath against Jerusalem, just like the Assyrians and the Babylonians before them
 - e. Just like in the parable of the two brothers, once again these proud men condemn themselves with their own words; Jesus has trapped them a second time in one conversation
 - f. Once again, He will give the knife a harsh twist once it's in
8. V.42 – *“Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”*
- a. The question itself is insulting and sarcastic
 - b. Jesus is showing His cards now; He is saying that the parable of the tenants in the vineyard is another way of talking about what the Psalmist says in Psalm 118
 - c. After the priests and elders condemn themselves in Jesus' story once again, Jesus goes to the Bible and asks if they're familiar with it
 - i. He asks the Bible teachers if they've ever read the Bible
 - ii. He's asking the caretakers of the royal city of Jerusalem if they've ever heard of King David

- d. We're still on Tuesday, so the Triumphal Entry was only one day before, and the crowd was singing Hosannah from Psalm 118:25, 26
 - i. the providence of God has already shone a floodlight on this Psalm the day before
 - ii. the force of hearing Psalm 118 being sung on Monday, and then Jesus teaching from it on Tuesday would not have been lost on these men
- e. Christ quotes Psalm 118:22
 - i. In this image, a group of builders overlooks a valuable stone
 - ii. A cornerstone was set at the beginning of a building project, and it served to orient the whole building
 - 1. The entire building orbits arounds this cornerstone
 - iii. The early builders reject this stone on their project, and now a second group of builders comes to the rock quarry, and they are able to see this stone hidden in plain sight
 - iv. The first group was blind to the value of this cornerstone, and they start their project without it
 - v. The second group shows up, and because they have eyes to see this rejected stone, they take it and make it the cornerstone of their project
 - vi. Further, it says this was the Lord's doing
 - 1. The fact that the first group was blind and that the second group had eyes is owing to the sovereign grace of the Lord Himself

9. VV. 43, 44 – *“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. 44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”*

- a. This is a very straightforward explanation of both the parable of the tenants and the Psalm of the cornerstone
- b. Israel has been a terrible tenant
 - i. They assume they are owed God’s favour
 - ii. They assume that blessings are just how the world operates
 - iii. They assume that God’s property is their property
 - iv. They refuse to listen to the prophets when they come and act like covenant lawyers to remind these wicked people of their duties before God
 - v. Now before the week is over they are going to kill the Son on the assumption that with the heir gone, they’ll keep the vineyard free and clear
- c. Israel was the first set of builders that rejected the cornerstone that was hidden in the rock quarry in plain sight
 - i. They are like the overserved foreign businessman at the karaoke bar singing Sweet Home Alabama
 - 1. They know every note, every lyric, every inflection
 - 2. They know everything about the song except for what it means
 - 3. The scribes and the Pharisees know everything about the Scriptures except for what it means
 - ii. They missed the cornerstone, and now their entire house is built wrong

- d. Now that they are preparing to kill the Son, God is letting them know that He is kicking them out of the vineyard, and He is tearing down their building
- e. He is going to put better tenants in the vineyard, tenants who see that it is a great honour and pure sovereign grace that gives them this opportunity, so they are just happy to return fruit to the owner
 - i. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and Gentiles are entering the kingdom before the priests and the Pharisees
- f. V.44 picks up on two important OT prophecies
 - i. Isaiah 8:14, 15 – *“And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”*
 - ii. Daniel 2: 34, 44 – *“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces... And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”*
 - iii. One challenge to reading Scripture for all it’s worth, and for understanding the fulness and richness of Christ’s earthly ministry is that we tend to see most or all prophecies as future to ourselves so we apply them to Christ’s second coming

- iv. Of course, Christ is coming again to wrap up history and to give His final judgment, but assuming that most prophecies refer to that coming of Christ instead of His first coming keep us from seeing what a world-changing event Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension were
- v. Many of the prophecies that we assume are for the "end times" are actually about Christ's first coming, which was the end of the old covenant age, not the end of history
 - 1. These prophecies were future to the prophets, but nearly 2000 years in our rear view mirror
- vi. Jesus applies both of these prophecies to those who are standing right in front of Him, and the Daniel prophecy is clear even on its own that it is about Christ's first coming, not His second coming
- vii. Seeing this will have a deep impact on your view of history, including future history
 - 1. The wars, the tumult, the birth pangs, the end of the age, the sun moon and stars falling out of the sky, the catastrophe, etc. is describing the collapse of the old covenant world as it gave birth to the new covenant world
 - a. The cosmic significance of Christ's first coming is so undeniable that we count years around it
 - 2. In other words, many prophecies which were future to Isaiah and Daniel are in our ancient past

- g. Jesus is clear – He is Isaiah’s stumbling stone, and the Pharisees are tripping all over Him
 - i. He is Daniel’s rock that came hurtling to the earth in the days of those (Roman) kings, and now that God is swallowing up the old mountains in the sea of His wrath, this new mountain, which is the kingdom of Christ, is going to slowly but surely grow and conquer through history
 - ii. Whether one is thrown against this stone, or whether this stone crashes down on someone, the result is the same – they will be crushed
 - 1. One thing we realize when we kick against God’s law is that it is not God’s law which is broken; it is us who get broken
 - iii. The time between Christ’s first and second comings is a time where the enemies of Christ are slowly but surely being subdued under His feet, and in which His kingdom mountain is established forever
- h. This also makes sense of one of Jesus’ famous phrases before His death that His body is the true temple; the true cornerstone, the true temple, the true mountain is Jesus Christ, and all others must pass into history
 - i. As the cornerstone, this means everything is oriented around Jesus Christ
 - ii. He is the standard by which we measure everything now
 - iii. Because Christ is the cornerstone, this is why motherhood and economics and civil engineering must all bend the knee to King Jesus
 - iv. He owns it all; He’s at the centre of it all; all things must conform to His law and to His Word
 - v. He is the rightful heir to the vineyard, and the tenants must kiss the Son

10. VV. 45, 46 – *“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. 46 And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.”*

- a. V.45 sounds like such an understatement, doesn't it?
- b. Once again, these men could only see themselves in story form, when they didn't know that they were among the characters
- c. They have condemned themselves, and after Christ interprets His parables and His imagery into very plain language, they get angry
- d. Just as Christ has mentioned about prostitutes and tax collectors entering the kingdom before the elders and the priests, here again we see that while the religious leaders were denying Christ, the laymen on the street could see that Jesus was a prophet

11. APPLICATION

- a. Where are we at this morning?
 - i. Are you a tenant who assumes your place by birthright? That somehow you don't need to follow orders and return your blessings back to the Master?
 - ii. Or are you a tenant who sees you have been invited by grace, and you desire to do a diligent job of cultivating the vineyard so that you can maximize your joy and your Master's pleasure in you?
 - iii. Are we orienting our lives around the true cornerstone, or a counterfeit of our own making?

12. CHARGE

- a. *The vineyard in today's parable is the kingdom of God; everywhere that God's rule and reign is acknowledged. Christ has shown us that He is the legitimate heir to this kingdom, and that all who oppose Him will be cast out and put to a miserable death. These wicked tenants will be replaced by those who see that both their work and the fruit of their work are given by grace, and who cheerfully return this abundance to the rightful Master. This is another way of talking about what David saw – a valuable cornerstone that was hidden in plain sight, only to be discovered by those builders who came later. Our charge this week is to remember that all of life is lived "coram Deo", before the face of God. He is the Master for whom we must diligently and joyfully labour. His Son is the cornerstone around which we orient all of life.*

13. BENEDICTION

- a. *1 Corinthians 15:58 – "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."*