

Valley Bible Church – Parables of Jesus

What is God like? He expects fruitful service.

The Rebellious Tenants

Matthew 21:36-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18

Introduction

Jesus' hour was approaching and He knew why he came and *"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."* --Philippians 2:7-8

He was careful not to publicly proclaim that He was the Messiah. The Jews expected their Messiah to come as a conquering king and overthrow the tyrannical Roman rule. Certainly he would not be a suffering servant who died on a Roman cross. He did not desire to set up a competition with their religious rulers at this time, nor to draw the Jews away from their Temple worship.

But the people pressed Him for a more definitive identity. Was He an Old Testament prophet, a John the Baptist type, another of the many self-proclaimed Messiah figures?

He entered Jerusalem and was welcomed in total triumph, with honor and pomp and circumstance. Palm Sunday with a royal welcome carpet of cloaks and branches and a host of people crying, *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"*--Matthew 21:9

He entered the Temple stopping in the outer court to drive out the dealers who were swindling the people who came to change their money to temple currency and buy sacrificial birds or animals. He stopped long enough to heal many people. Matthew 21:12-14

The reaction of the chief priests and scribes was incredulous. *"But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! they were indignant . . .'"*--Matthew 21:15

Later, when He returned to the Temple to teach, they confronted Him and ask, as recorded in verse 23, *"By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?"*

He answered their question with a question (V 24), *"I also will ask you one thing, which if you will tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The Baptism of John--where was it from? From heaven or from men?"*

They were stymied (V 25), *"If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for they all count John as a prophet." So they answered, "We don't know."*

He was therefore not bound to tell them anything and, in fact said (V 25), *"Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."* But then He told them a parable that gave them the answer very clearly.

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"I can do these things because I am the Son of God!"

Story of the Rebellious Tenants: (Read Matthew 21:33-46)

The Contract (Matthew 21:33)

A. Owner Creates a Vineyard

1. Landowner chose to buy some land for an investment.

He hired a workforce to prepare and protect his land. They cleared the rocks and brush, plowed and irrigate the land, and planted the vines.

Next they surrounded the new vineyard with a thorn hedge to keep animals and thieves out and a tower to guard the crop.

2. They dug a wine-press.

B. Owner Rents Out the Vineyard

1. Landowner leased out his vineyard and went away.

This was typical of the time and place. Many landowners were rich city people who had no desire to live in the primitive land but certainly enjoyed the profits from the business. And it was profitable. There were three top exports from Palestine: Corn; Wine; and Slaves.

2. Nature of the investment.

He could rent the land out for a flat fee, a percentage of the profits, or a percentage of the crop. There was some risk, as with all high yield investments, but a very high rate of return. The fourth year of growth should have brought a good yield.

C. Vine Dressers Lease the Land

1. Renters were given total possession of the land.

They were obviously professional free-men, not slaves and were bound only by a contract, probably verbal, which was worded to indicate that if they were successful the owner would be successful as well.

2. There was a potential problem.

The Greeks and Romans had ruled Palestine for over 200 years and during that time there was an on going struggle for independence. Landlords became a symbol of the oppressive system and so workers would often do everything they could to swindle them.

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D. Laws Governing Land Leasing

1. The wording of the law.

The law stated, "Land without apparent legal ownership became the property of the possessor." This is much like the "squatter's rights laws in frontier America.

Absent owners were responsible to maintain established proof of their ownership before the law. This gave the resident renters an advantage.

2. The legal cards were stacked against the absentee owners.

As we have already seen, the legal system was slow and corrupt. Local magistrates tended to side with "locals" against "outsiders," were hesitant to upset local order and could be bribed. By a combination of force and loop holes in the law the leasing tenants could become owners of the land.

The Confrontation (Matthew 21:34-39)

If we combine the story telling in Matthew, Mark and Luke we get a complete story.

A. Owner Sent Servants

1. Servants were sent to collect the land owners take of the crop.

There was little chance of much produce the first year but he wanted his share and it also kept his claim on his land alive.

2. Something was desperately wrong.

Jewish law states clearly, "A tenant unpaid for labor has a right to exclude produce until his pay is covered." So if there was a poor crop they could just tell the servants there was nothing yet to share. But they beat, robbed and sent them away with nothing. Obviously they had a sinister plan.

B. Owner Sent More Servants

1. Perhaps he waited for the second crop that should yield something.

The servants were beaten again, hospitalized, and some killed. Things were getting serious. A pattern was emerging.

2. It looks like things came to a head on the third year.

They had gotten away with it twice, so why not try again. This time they wiped out the owner's entire party. There should certainly have been a decent crop and the land owner could see the lessees moving into a strong legal position.

Jewish law allowed that, "Tenants enjoying the fruit of three harvests without outside claim owns the produce and at four harvests they own the land."

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C. The Owner Sent His Son

1. This must be the critical fourth year.

Many critics contend he was foolish to send his son. But desperate times call for desperate measures and if he didn't make a formal claim on his land it would be lost.

Jewish law insists, "Formal protest must be made by the owner of the land or his heir to retain claim upon his property." He must give formal notice and it must be in the person of himself or his son.

2. He can't imagine them not respecting his son. (V 37)

If the son is received and is allowed to look at the books their contract could be voided, they will lose the land, and perhaps even be arrested.

THEY CHOSE TO KILL THE SON.

The Conclusion (Matthew 21:40-46)

A. They Misjudged the Owner

1. "What will he do?"

Is he really weak and helpless or was he just longsuffering and merciful? What do you think he'll do? Does this sound familiar? Nathan and David perhaps?

And they walk right into it, "*He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease the vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits of their labor.*" (V 41)

2. What will God do?

Jesus nails his air tight case shut:

Matthew 21:42-43 "*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'?* Therefore I say to you, *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it.*"

Jesus had already called the chief priest and Pharisees hypocrites, white washed tombs, robbers of widows, and now he added crooked stewards and indicated that they would soon be murderers.

And did they understand what he was saying? Verse 45, "*they perceived that He was speaking of them.*" Jesus had in so many words called Himself the "Son of God" and not one of them dared to protest.

God will not let us confuse His Son with His servants. His is the son and they were just itching to kill him.

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Lessons:

1. This parable teaches us about Jesus.

He is the Son of God and God sent Him to claim what rightfully belongs to Him by purchase and legal right of ownership. And Jesus gave His life to fulfill the will of the Father.

2. This parable teaches us about ourselves.

We are the villains.

We have received every advantage and yet we feel we must own our own lives. We have the witness of creation, the prophets, the Scriptures, and the Son to show us our inability to save ourselves.

We are given everything as a stewardship and yet we feel we do all the work. We think we own our homes, families, jobs, churches because we earned them.

3. This parable teaches us about God.

God is patient and merciful, but He expects fruit. We are to be good stewards and "do business" until He returns to end it all.

God's long suffering can be exhausted. The ultimate sin, the rejection of His son leads to an awful and eternal judgment separated from God forever.