

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

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

CONTEXT OF THE PARABLE

The context of what Jesus is saying begins with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people praise him and worship him as the Messiah. Then Jesus threw merchants out of the temple area and insulted Israel's head honchos (the chief priests). Needless to say, he probably ruffled a few feathers. Then, the chief priests challenge Jesus' authority. Jesus avoids answering their question directly, but tells them two stories to make his point.

PICTURE AND FULFILLMENT

Jesus uses the picture of a vineyard in the two parables he tells here. This is not by chance. Jesus didn't "just have a thing for grape fields!" The picture of a vine/vineyard was Israel under the Old Covenant. The vineyard in Isaiah 5 parallels our parable in Matthew 21.

Psalm 80:8-10, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, 12:10-11, Ezekiel 19:10-14, Hosea 10:1-2, John 15:1-8

THE WHO'S WHO

The landowner is God (the Father). The vineyard is Israel. The tenants are Israel's leaders. The servants sent are God's prophets, the last one being John. The son is Jesus. The crop is our changed life/new heart.

THE SECOND GUY

Matthew writes that the second guy sent in the parable is killed. However, Mark and Luke say that he is beaten and sent away empty-handed. These stories contradict one another. And coming from Jesus, that should bother us! The answer is probably rather simple. Matthew writes that there were more people who were sent, in addition to the original three. This is a good example of why we should be discerning when making connections that are not clearly stated in Scripture.

THE POINT OF THE PARABLE

The point of this parable is that Jesus IS the ultimate authority. In fact, he warns the chief priests that God will take his "favor" away from Israel and give it to another. The Jewish people will be rejected because they rejected Christ and his authority. Once the characters are understood, the meaning seems rather simple to understand.

Ephesians 1:20-22

HOW DOES AN ALLEGORY TOLD UNDER THE OLD COVENANT TO ISRAELITES APPLY TO ME?

The real danger that the Israelites were in was not that they were Israelites. It was that they did not believe. This danger is just as real to us today as it was to them then. If we practice unbelief (reflecting our relationship to Christ), then we also will be wretched people brought to a wretched end. Jesus warns in Luke 12:5 that we

should “Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.”

Also, Jesus points out that though the Israelites have rejected Jesus, he has become the capstone. This is a wonderful thing. We can appreciate Jesus for the greatness of who he is and the position he occupies as our Lord. Reflecting on this should help us refocus when we are being tempted to think sinfully.

1 Peter 2:4-10

Another way we can apply this parable is to consider the grace of being chosen by God. If we are believing, then we are the people who will produce the kingdom fruit. We deserve the wretched end. But, we get the fairy tale ending.

Ephesians 2:1-10