

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENNANTS

A sermon for Sunday, October 8, 2017, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba

Gospel: **Matthew 21:33-46** “Jesus said to the people:]³³ “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce.³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.³⁷ 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 get his inheritance.’³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.⁴⁰ Now when 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 lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”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 amazing in our eyes’?⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.”

A father of a young teenage boy had a surprise for his son when he turned 16. He bought him a brand new Ford Mustang, placed the keys in his hand and said to him: **‘Happy birthday son! Happy birthday!! This is yours! Be careful; Be responsible!!’** That very evening the son turned on loud music and drove through a rather quiet neighborhood. In three months he was involved in two accidents. This prompted the father to take on responsible fathering. He demanded that the teenager give back the keys of the car. The boy complained saying it was his car. ‘You gave it to me and now you would take care of it?’ The father retrieved the keys from the boy and said: **‘I bought it. I hold the Title. It belongs to me.’**

We **are servants** given all kinds of responsibilities. We are **responsible for ourselves**, and accountable for so many other things in life. We **are tenants**. We own nothing on earth. The parable of the wicked tenants is **a parable about accountability**. The tenants did not own the vineyard. They only worked in the Vineyard. They had no Title. The landowner had the Title. It was his property and would generously give it to the Heir, the son of his own family.

The **landowner** had done a lot to make the Vineyard profitable:

1. He had **planned it skillfully** - designed it from long ago (in *Isaiah chapter 5:1-7*).
2. The Provisions for the Vineyard were perfect.
 - A) **He himself plowed the land & cleared its stones, had planted it with the best vines.**
 - B) **He put a fence of protection around it.**
 - C) **He dug a winepress in it.**
 - D) **He built a watchtower in the middle for protection against wild beasts and thieves.**

The parable of the wicked tenants serves as an outline for understanding the life of Israel. God called Israel to be God’s Vineyard: **fenced by law** (The Ten Commandments); **God protected Israel**; God established the **worship of Himself in the Temple as the center of Israel’s political and religious life**.

But when **God sent prophets to Israel to remind her of her obligations to the Covenant, the people of Israel beat, stoned or killed them**. At last he sent **His SON, (JESUS)**. They knew

he was the **HEIR**. They did **not RESPECT him** either. They **killed him** expecting to take his **inheritance**. In this part of the Parable, Jesus is predicting his own death.

We know, The VINEYARD is not the first garden that God ever planted, and protected. The 1st garden is the Garden of EDEN. Adam and Eve were given the work of TENDING AND WATCHING OVER IT. IT was the work of RESPONSIBLE CARING. You know what happened there -- so they were banished.

The 2nd Vineyard (*Isaiah 5:1ff...*) is Israel. God's chosen nation was to bear fruit by carrying out God's work. They were to uphold justice and righteousness. Unfortunately, they rejected God's direction of their lives and produced SOUR grapes instead of SWEET grapes.

Jesus says that we can identify the tree by its fruits. We can identify people by their actions. Jesus says you will know a tree by its fruits (*Matthew 7:20*). By Israel's actions, she had broken the Covenant.

Here we are, the 3rd VINEYARD - the Church. Verse 23 identifies the Church as a "**people who will produce fruit.**" The Church is 3rd in the garden series - a people **expected to "produce fruit."** We are not the first, not the second, but the 3rd.

Jesus says to us, "I am the TRUE VINE and my Father is the GARDNER. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While the branches that bear fruit he prunes, so that it will be even more fruitful.... Abide in me and I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. You are the branches." (*John 15*)

God's expectation and hope is for us to bear fruit because we are in Christ His Son. Israel rejected the Messiah and the Kingdom was taken from them. The Kingdom and its power is now given to us; to those who respond to the Gospel **whether Jew or Gentile**. (*1Peter 2:9*).

This principle is inclusive. The Kingdom and its power is taken away from those who fail to remain in the true Vine, Jesus Christ. It is given to those who will remain faithful to Christ; It is given to people who separate themselves from the world and seek God's Kingdom and its righteousness first (*Matthew 5:6; 6:36*).

Even though Gentiles were a people outside the Jewish community, **now we are a holy and chosen people**. (*1Peter 2:1ff*). **God's promises in Jesus are our promises**. That's why, at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus sends the disciples to go out into all nations, *all of them*, and make them disciples, teaching and baptizing them. He promised to be with us to the end of age. (*Matthew 28:18-20*).

It is important for us to know that God is the one who owns the Vineyard and the tenants. He holds the titles of everything. He knew us *by name* before we were born. The Vineyard was Israel then. We are the Vineyard today. God sent His only Son to reach us through the sacrificial death on the Cross. We can't afford to reject such a gracious gift of redemption.

He is the stone that the builders of Israel, (i.e. the priests and leaders of the people) **rejected**. **He is the Cornerstone of His new Temple - the Church**. Ideally, we build on Christ. Yet many stumble on Jesus and fall. He offers mercy and forgiveness now and promises judgement later.

ACCEPT HIM NOW. Every faithful or accountable Christians who stays in the Vine bears good fruit and is assured of salvation. Amen!!