

### **Parable #38 ~ Matthew 21:28-32 ~ The Two Sons ~ Scripture**

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

<sup>29</sup> “ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

### **Parable #39 ~ Matthew 21:33-44 ~ Wicked Vineyard Tenants ~ Scripture**

<sup>33</sup> “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

<sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

<sup>38</sup> “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

<sup>41</sup> “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;  
the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

<sup>43</sup> “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. <sup>44</sup> He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

### **Parable #38 ~ Matthew 21:28-32 ~ The Two Sons ~ Questions**

1. What is the best illustration—positive or negative—that you’ve ever seen of the old saying, “actions speak louder than words”?
2. Who are the people in the parable? Who did they represent when Jesus told it? Who do they represent today?
3. Was the behavior of either son wholly commendable?
4. Why doesn’t religious knowledge or information guarantee that we will do what God wants us to? Why do we so often drag our feet in doing what God wants?
5. When, if ever, is it too late to do the right thing? What does it mean to repent? Is it ever too late to repent?

### **Parable #39 ~ Matthew 21:33-44 ~ Wicked Tenants ~ Questions**

1. Let’s sort out the people and things in the parable (then and now): what does the vineyard represent? Who does the vineyard owner represent? The servants the owner sent to the vineyard? The tenants? The son of the vineyard owner?
2. Doesn’t it seem a bit far fetched that the tenants would hurt the master’s servants and send them away with nothing, and then kill his son? What were they thinking? Why would they do such a thing? Can you imagine anyone today doing something like that?
3. Compare this parable to “the song of the vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1-7.
4. What does the parable tell us about the fate that awaits those who reject Jesus as the Messiah or as the son of God? (Matthew 21:41 says they will be brought to a wretched end but the same parable in Luke says, “[the master] will come and *kill* those tenants...”)
5. Who are the “other tenants” mentioned in 21:41?
6. What is the meaning of the scripture that Jesus quoted in 21:42? (Psalm 118:22)
7. How can we avoid letting the crowd (or our friends and peers) from making decisions for us? Is there an area of your life where you resist God’s authority?

## **Parable #38 ~ Matthew 21:28-32 ~ The Two Sons ~ Leader's Guide**

1. What is the best illustration—positive or negative—that you've ever seen of the old saying, "actions speak louder than words"?
2. Who are the people in the parable? Who did they represent when Jesus told it? Who do they represent today?

Here Jesus is outside the temple speaking mainly to the leading priests and elders but also to some of his disciples and followers. In other words, a broad audience sometime after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

With his explanation in Verses 31-32, Christ has not left any doubt as to the meaning of the parable. He says, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God ahead of you." When he says "you" here, he is referring to his main audience, the Jewish priests and elders, the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the two sons he would show his listeners an image of two classes of people in Israel. On the one side were they themselves, the religious leaders of the people, pleased with their own self-righteousness and boastful regarding their own sanctity. On the other side are the sinners and scum of the people that the leaders thought scarcely worthy to be looked at—the tax collectors and prostitutes.

If they were honest with themselves, the Jewish leaders must have recognized themselves as the second son, dishonest and untruthful, who said: "I will go, sir," but yet did not do his father's will. Thus they too, in their hypocrisy, always had the Law on their lips but did not obey the commandments or walk in God's ways.

The first son, on the other hand, is an image of the repentant sinners in Israel. They had not, indeed, done the will of God as long as they were slaves to sin. They had said defiantly, "I will not serve."

Jeremiah 2: 20 – Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute

Job 21:14 – they say to God, "Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways."

But later, in a penitent mood they returned to God and repented. Look at Matthew, Zaccheus, the Samaritan woman, tax collectors (unnamed), and the prostitute who poured perfume on Jesus' feet. Thus, sinners despised by the Jewish leaders would enter the kingdom of heaven before they did—if they actually entered at all.

Who do they represent today? Good question, which I leave it up to you to answer.

3. Was the behavior of either son wholly commendable?

No, of course not. With the exception of Jesus, no human is perfect. However, the first son recognized his sins and repented while the second said the right thing but arrogantly continued in his sinful lifestyle.

4. Why doesn't religious knowledge or information guarantee that we will do what God wants us to? Why do we so often drag our feet in doing what God wants?

5. When, if ever, is it too late to do the right thing? What does it mean to repent? Is it ever too late to repent?

---

Leonard Fonck in the (Roman Catholic) book, *The Parables of Christ*, further explains that the vineyard is the kingdom of God. We must all labor therein and attempt to follow God's commands with sincere repentance. Only by performing our daily labor are we worthy of a share of the fruits of the new vineyard of the Messiah.

Conclusions:

1) In the sight of God works are of more value than words.

2) The purpose of the works must follow Christ's example to fulfill the will of the Father.

3) Through the practical fulfillment of God's will, past disobedience and evil living must be atoned for.

4) By this means, the lowest and most despised sinner may obtain precedence in the kingdom of heaven over those who are far above them in rank and importance.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard shows the incredible importance and value of God's grace while this parable shows us the necessity and importance of our own cooperation with this grace.

## Parable #39 ~ Matthew 21:33-44 ~ Wicked Tenants ~ Leader's Guide

1. Let's sort out the people and things in the parable (then and now): what does the vineyard represent? Who does the vineyard owner represent? The servants the owner sent to the vineyard? The tenants? The son of the vineyard owner?

This is one of the few parables that appears in all three synoptic gospels. This means *Pay Attention!*

In some parables, it is easy to determine the different meanings to Jesus' audience and to us today. But with this parable it is a bit more difficult. It is fairly obvious that in Jesus' day, this parable described both what had happened (the Jews rejection of the message of the prophets and of John the Baptist) and what would happen (Jesus' death on the cross and, ultimately, God's judgement against the Jews after which the Gentiles became the tenants and were welcomed into the kingdom of God).

It seems fairly clear that the vineyard represents Israel, the landowner represents God, the tenant farmers stand for the leaders of Israel, the fruit stands for what is owed to God, and the servants sent by the landowner stand for the rejected prophets of the Old Testament right up to John the Baptist. We could stop there (as many commentators do) and say that the parable applies only to the Jewish leaders. But the prophets were not only rejected by the leaders but the Jewish people as well. This actually suggests that Jesus actually meant the tenants to be more than just the Jewish leaders but to include all of the Jews that had rejected the prophets from the earliest days in the promised land. God's messengers, the prophets and judges, were not sent to just to the priests, but to all the people of Israel.

Judges 2:17 – Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the LORD's commands.

Looking into these verses more deeply, we see that sending away the servants empty-handed was the least of the tenant's offenses—they didn't do what God asked them to do, they did what he commanded them not to do, and they even turned away from God.

Notwithstanding all this ingratitude, God's goodness and grace was not yet exhausted and in Verse 37 we read, "Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said." But, of course, they didn't, and he was crucified.

2. Doesn't it seem a bit far fetched that the tenants would hurt the master's servants and send them away with nothing, and then kill his son? What were they thinking? Why would they do such a thing? Can you imagine anyone today doing something like that?

This same parable in Luke 20:9-19 and Mark 12:1-12 says the tenants sent the master's servants away empty-handed, not that they killed them, only that they killed the son. Even so, the tenant's behavior seems pretty ridiculous—or does it?

For the organization, Feed My Starving Children, I've participated several times with groups of Christians filling food bags with a nutritious mixture of soy, veggies, rice, and vitamins to be shipped to needy people in 80 countries. At each event they ask the volunteers to pay for some or all the food in the bags they've packed. Each meal costs just 22 cents and at a packing event, a volunteer can pack about \$50 worth of food. So in a sense, these volunteers are doing a good job managing the vineyard. But when it comes to donating money, nearly everyone says "no." So in each group of 100 volunteers, only 3 or 4 make a monetary contribution. The same thing happens on missions trips. After a while, the trips turn into "feel good" vacations for most people and the real support of the missions organizations comes from a small handful of people. It's really no different with people today than those in the parable and those listening to it.

3. Compare this parable to "the song of the vineyard" in Isaiah 5:1-7.

Isaiah 5:1-7 — A Song about the Lord's Vineyard

<sup>1</sup> Now I will sing for the one I love, a song about his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard on a rich and fertile hill.

<sup>2</sup> He plowed the land, cleared its stones, and planted it with the best vines.

In the middle he built a watchtower and carved a winepress in the nearby rocks.

Then he waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were bitter.

<sup>3</sup> Now, you people of Jerusalem and Judah, you judge between me and my vineyard.

<sup>4</sup> What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already done?

When I expected sweet grapes, why did my vineyard give me bitter grapes?

<sup>5</sup> Now let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard:

I will tear down its hedges and let it be destroyed.

I will break down its walls and let the animals trample it.

<sup>6</sup> I will make it a wild place where the vines are not pruned and the ground is not hoed, a place overgrown with briars and thorns.

I will command the clouds to drop no rain on it.

<sup>7</sup> The nation of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

The people of Judah are his pleasant garden.

He expected a crop of justice, but instead he found oppression.

He expected to find righteousness, but instead he heard cries of violence.

4. What does the parable tell us about the fate that awaits those who reject Jesus as

the Messiah or as the son of God? (Matthew 21:41 says they will be brought to a wretched end but in both Luke and Mark it says even more directly, “[the master] will come and *kill* those tenants...”)

#### 5. Who are the “other tenants” mentioned in 21:41?

So what does this parable mean to us today? First of all, the original tenants, the Jewish leaders and the Jews who followed them were said to be killed (or “come to a wretched end”). They have no share in the coming kingdom of God. The “other tenants” or new tenants in 21:41 are Gentile followers of Christ. In early translations, Verse 21:43 directly says “the kingdom shall be given to the Gentiles.” As we said earlier, the fruit of the vineyard is what is owed (or our obligation) to God. What is this? When you think about it for a minute, it’s quite clear. Just a few chapters further on (Matthew 25:34-46), Jesus says “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

So what Jesus is saying in this parable is that God expects us to use the gifts he has given us to help the poor. It’s as simple as that. Read the next few verses in Matthew (or Luke or Mark) and the parable will be more fully explained.

#### 6. What is the meaning of the scripture that Jesus quoted in 21:42? (Psalm 118:22)

The “stone” (in later manuscripts called the “capstone” or “cornerstone”) was either the first stone of the foundation or the last stone of the arch. The very stone the builders rejected as being unworthy of use was, in fact, the most important. Here, Jesus was referring to his own role in the kingdom of God (21:43) and to his rejection by the leaders and their followers.

When he says, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” he is saying that God has rejected the theocracy of the Old Testament, and a New Covenant has been made with a new people who have been chosen as upholders of the kingdom of God in the place of Israel. These people include those who by fulfilling the will of God bring forth the fruit of the vineyard. Further, these fruits, i.e., works that are in conformity with the divine will, are the necessary conditions for participation in the kingdom of God.

The last verse, 21:44, simply means that those who fall over (or reject) the idea Jesus being the Messiah are doomed. This is perhaps the most directly that Jesus ever speaks of the fate of those who reject him. And remember, as I pointed out at the beginning, this is one of just six parables that appear in all three synoptic gospels. ***Pay Attention!***