

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD (Mk. 12:1-13)

The ‘vultures were circling their prey’, **Mk. 11:27** And they [*Jesus and His disciples*] come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, **28** And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? ... They were searching for an opportunity to dispose of Him. He responded by speaking to them in parables (Mk. 12:1). What is a parable? The simple answer is ‘an earthly story with a Heavenly meaning’. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry His parables were normally understood by the ordinary person, ... but as time progressed only the disciples would grasp their meaning, as Matthew explains, **Mt. 13:10** the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? **11** He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ... **13** Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. ... So, not being able to understand the parables was a judgment on the people for the meaning was hidden from them.

Having said that, here’s a parable these religious leaders, chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and elders *were* meant to understand! It is in the temple, on the Wednesday, two days before Jesus would be crucified ... He is telling His would-be killers they are going to kill Him! He begins with a very ordinary picture, **Mk. 12:1** A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat [*a vessel placed under the winepress to catch the juice of the grapes*], and built a tower [*for the watchman*], and let it out to husbandmen [*he leased it to tenants/farmers*], and went into a far country [*according to Lev. 19:25, it takes five years for the first harvest of grapes*] ... This was the well-known analogy the prophet Isaiah used to announce God’s judgment on the Jewish people of his day, in Old Testament Israel.

Isaiah was illustrating how God had ‘planted’ Israel in their own land, hedged/protected them, and provided all that was necessary to produce good fruit, to be a prosperous nation (Is. 5:1,2) ... Instead, they produced sour tasteless wild grapes. Consequently, God warned He would *destroy* His ‘vineyard’, - **Is. 5:5** I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: **6** And I will lay it waste ... The religious leaders were listening intently to Jesus ... He wasn’t saying anything strange or out-of-the-ordinary.

They hadn’t picked up on the Is.5 implications so far, and the parable hasn’t ‘rattled’ them. Jesus continues, **Mk. 12:2** And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the

vineyard. ³ And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. ... The deal was that the ‘husbandmen’, - the wine-growers who rented the portion of land, - would keep some of the money they made for themselves, and they would also pay the owner for the hire of his land. And when the grapes were harvested, and the workers had made their money, the servant of the owner would ‘call round’ to collect the rent-money which was owing. ... That was the deal, however, they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.

Now, they were ‘out of order’, because they were not keeping their commitment to the deal. Only for the owner of the land, they would not have had any grapes to produce wine ... and so they *should* have paid him, but they unfairly decided not to, ⁴ And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. ... Their violence was escalating ... The first servant was *beaten*, but the second servant was *stoned* and suffered serious head injury. ... If someone who did this was brought before the courts of these religious rulers (listening to Jesus), they would have been severely punished!

Then Jesus went further in His parable, ⁵ And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. ... Now, this is getting out of control, - something had to be done, - it could not be allowed to go on! ... The religious leaders were listening to discover what would happen next.

Finally, ⁶ Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved [*ἀγαπητός*], he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence [*respect*] my son. ... He only has one son, his heir, his beloved ... and he is going to send him to these people! ... I wouldn’t do it, and I would be very sure none of the religious leaders listening to Jesus would have done it either!

Well, just as they thought, ⁷ those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. ⁸ And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. ... They wanted to keep everything their harvest produced, - even the master’s share ... They wanted to keep it all and give the owner nothing in return. Without the owner renting them the land, they would not have had anything ... but here they were ... they were threatening to ‘cut the owner out of the deal’.

They took his son ... The owner’s son knew what they had done to his father’s servants, and he knew these men were ruthless ... If the owner kept on sending his servants, in next-to-no-time he would have none left ... And to

send his son sounded absolutely crazy ... but that is what the master did. The son was prepared to go, and they killed him ... They didn't even give him a burial, they cast him out [*ἐκβάλλω*] of the vineyard. ... The crows and the rats can have him!

Totally immersed in listening to Jesus, He then asked these religious leaders, ⁹ What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? ... Those religious leaders would not have had to think long or hard for they *knew* what *they* would do ... and Matthew records their answer to Jesus, Mt. 21:41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. ... *Absolutely* ... and then Jesus continued, Mk. 12:9 he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.

As they stood there listening, they started to feel uncomfortable because they realised where this parable was leading ... 'the penny was beginning to drop' ... especially when Jesus said personally to them, ¹⁰ have ye not read this scripture ... *that* would have annoyed them, - their 'feathers would have been ruffled', - of course they had read the Scriptures! ... And then He quoted from Ps. 118:22, The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: ¹¹ This was the Lord's doing [*cf. Is. 53:10 it pleased the LORD to bruise him*], and it is marvellous [*amazing, unbelievable*] in our eyes? ... Jesus had 'drawn them in' and *they* knew *He* knew what *they* were planning! ... ¹² And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: *for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them*: and they left him, and went their way. ... They understood!

In the Old Testament, God had sent the prophets but the people wouldn't listen to their message, Heb. 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented. ... Last of all, the 'Owner of the vineyard' was sending His Son! ... And these religious rascals in the temple could not bear to listen to Jesus any longer for they *saw* what He was saying. He knew the evil they were planning ... to put Him to death ... and they were no better than the murderers of the vineyard owner's son in the fictitious parable. Did it change their minds though? ... Not a bit! They were as desperate as desperate as ever to kill Jesus, for Mk. 12:13 they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.

What a darkness those men were in! The Light of the world was standing in front of them, and they did not realise it for, - spiritually-speaking, - *they were blind*. They did not recognise the Son of God standing before them!

There are many people today who arrogantly refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus ... even when the evidence points to the wisdom of receiving Him ... Jesus was way ahead of these religious rascals for he knew exactly what they were up to. ... He knows every thought that goes through your mind ... He knows how your heart is towards Him. It is easy to fool others, but He will never be fooled.

Jesus was judging these men ... and their religion would not save them from what would come upon them less than forty years later ... He told them what the 'lord of the vineyard would do', ⁹ *he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others*. ... The insinuation was they were going to kill God's Son and that God would hold them guilty ... God and His Word are not to be trifled with, mocked, or ignored, sneered at, or 'turn your nose up' at, *Gal. 6:7 for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*. ... And He had given generations of warnings, but no more! ... And there are two ways to consider what He meant when He told these religious leaders He would give the 'vineyard' to others ... Firstly, from a purely historical perspective, that is what happened when the Roman General Titus ransacked Jerusalem in 70 AD, destroyed the temple, massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the land, and they have never had a temple since. And Jerusalem and the land would remain in the hands of the foreign nations ... the Romans, and then the Muslims, the French, and the British, and even though Israel regained its nationhood seventy years ago, internationally it is not respected as having regained *all* of Jerusalem ... Secondly, from the Christian Church perspective, those religious leaders in Jerusalem were replaced by the apostles, the new stewards of the New Testament Church.

These religious leaders had a lot of learning to do, but they stubbornly refused and rejected the Saviour ... and they have suffered for it. ... People can mock prophets and preachers and pastors and evangelists ... but you daren't mock Jesus. ... He came because God so loved this undeserving world, and He continues to hold out His offer of salvation ...

God loved the world of sinners lost
 And ruined by the fall;
 Salvation full, at highest cost,
 He offers free to all.

*O 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,
 The love of God to me;
 It brought my Saviour from above,
 To die on Calvary!*