

## Matthew 21:33-43

<sup>33</sup>“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower. He leased it out to some tenant farmers and went away on a journey. <sup>34</sup>When the time approached to harvest the fruit, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup>The tenant farmers seized his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup>Then the landowner sent even more servants than the first time. The tenant farmers treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup>Finally, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. <sup>38</sup>But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance!’ <sup>39</sup>They took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup>So when the landowner comes, what will he do to those tenant farmers?”

<sup>41</sup>They told him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end. Then he will lease out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his fruit when it is due.”

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

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?

<sup>43</sup>“That is why I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruit.”

## Rejected

### I.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” We have become a people that *lives* by that mantra. A miniature movie studio tucked safely in your pocket or purse, you go forth to conquer the world with your everyday life.

Social media is *built* on the images of your children and grandchildren, and of the silly pet videos. You can even tap a few times on that magic screen and create some cute little memes by pasting things onto your pictures and videos.

We’re not going to stop long enough to read your rambling diatribe about...well, *anything*. If you want your creation to be “liked,” make it an image. We can digest that faster and more efficiently.

On the other hand, there is something about a well-crafted story using words. Movies are stories presented with images. Even so-called “reality TV” is usually scripted. There has to be an underlying story to hold everything together. If that *story* wasn’t well-crafted, the final film won’t be something that is remembered long.

Jesus didn’t need a film crew, klieg lights, a sound crew, and a director’s chair to create a story that is memorable. His story about the tenants and the vineyard is riveting.

Whether it’s to lease space for your business or just to find a place to live, looking at rental property can be depressing. So often the place is just an afterthought. The owner has some property just sitting there that he decides could provide a revenue stream, so he decides to rent it out. There is no thought given to how efficient the space is, or whether it will suit the needs of its user. Here it is—take it, or leave it.

Not so the landowner in Jesus’ parable. This man spent a great deal of time and money preparing the property before ever drawing up papers for a lease.

“There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower” (Matthew 21:33, EHV). Notice the meticulous attention to detail. No amenity is missing. He has laid out the vineyard and carefully planted the vines to get them started before expecting someone to pay to work the land. Beyond that, he has fenced the property in to prevent

easy access both to wild animals or potential vandals. As the grapes would ripen there would be additional threats from animals who would eat up the profits or from thieves who would try to steal the produce, so a tower was put in so the tenants could keep watch on their crop. Long before the first crop could ever be expected, the winepress was already dug and prepared for a bountiful harvest. The vineyard in Jesus' parable is a fabulous place.

Jesus had started his parable with an old story. It was today's Old Testament Lesson from the Prophet Isaiah: "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile ridge. <sup>2</sup>He dug it up and gathered the stones out of it. He planted it with the choicest vines and built a tower in the middle of it. He even cut a wine press into it. He expected it to produce clusters of grapes, but it produced only sour grapes" (Isaiah 5:1-2, EHV). Jesus gave the story a new twist. Isaiah had spoken of bad fruit. Jesus changes the emphasis to bad tenants.

You see, the vineyard was the nation of Israel. God had set everything up *perfectly* for the nation of Israel. They were his Chosen nation. He established them carefully in the land he had chosen for them—a good land—a land flowing with milk and honey, as it was described.

Then he brought in the tenants. The religious leaders were supposed to tend the vineyard—to provide spiritual care for God's people. The prophets served as the watchmen, to warn of threats to the vineyard of God's people.

There are parallels even today, aren't there? We have so many blessings living in this land at this particular time, it is as if God had set up everything perfectly for us, isn't it? He gave his Word by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that we have the pure spiritual food we need to grow in our faith. He sent reformers to weed out error and corruption in the church long ago so that his pure Word would be preserved, even 2,000 years after the birth of Christ. We have the privilege of living in this land in which our liberties are enumerated, including: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." So states the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. By its own governing documents, our government says that we can teach and believe what God's Word says without any fear of government intervention or restriction. No amenities are missing for us.

## II.

But then...the rent check was due. You don't want an eviction notice when you are enjoying something that has been set up just right, do you? The tenants of the vineyard have no such compunction. "When the time approached to harvest the fruit, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup>The tenant farmers seized his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third" (Matthew 21:34-35, EHV).

The vineyard was doing great. It was producing beyond expectations. It had been set up so well that the recipe was already there for success, but the tenants no longer see things that way. It doesn't seem "fair" that they should have to give up such a large percentage of the crop as the rent that is due. They want to keep it all.

The servants sent to collect the rent were treated poorly. One was beaten. That was bad enough, but things went downhill from there. The second servant was killed. The third was stoned to death. Stoning was the punishment reserved for the most heinous of criminals, but the tenants felt it necessary to humiliate the servants of the landowner in the worst possible way.

More messengers are sent. "Then the landowner sent even more servants than the first time. The tenant farmers treated them the same way" (Matthew 21:36, EHV).

The religious leaders didn't do a very good job of tending God's people. He sent prophets to warn them—to try to rein in the abuses and the outright pagan behavior of the people in Israel. Again and again the people failed to listen. Again and again the religious leaders and false prophets

thwarted the warnings of God's true spokesmen. Again and again the people focused on the *physical* problems of their nation and refused to notice the *spiritual* rot and decay.

“Finally, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. <sup>38</sup>But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance!’ <sup>39</sup>They took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him” (Matthew 21:37-39, EHV).

What landowner would send his son as the final effort to solve the problem? It's unreal! What tenants would think that by killing the heir they would be able to assume possession of the property when the owner was still alive? The audacity! The greed!

Jesus' parable illustrates the inhuman love of the Heavenly Father, who is the true landowner. It is inconceivable that God would send his One and only Son when his prophets had been abused, beaten, and murdered for presenting the message God had given them to speak. But he did. God sent his Son Jesus as another call to his people.

God's call comes again and again to us in his Word. Do we, too, often reject it? “I know what you say about marriage, Lord, but we're really in love, and we have decided to live together, anyway.” “I know you promise everything I need in life, Lord, and that I should give my offerings back to you from the top, trusting that you will be with me and will bless me, but I'm going to hold back, just in case.” “I know *you* love everyone, Lord, but you don't *really* expect me to forgive *her*, too, do you?”

### III.

“When the landowner comes, what will he do to those tenant farmers?” (Matthew 21:40, EHV). The question is a rhetorical one. Anyone who has heard the story Jesus just told can quickly and easily decipher what the final outcome would be for such wicked tenants. They will be dealt with harshly, and the lease will be issued to someone else who can give the respect that is due.

But the question is also given as yet another opportunity to repent. The message is clearly given to the religious leaders and everyone who has heard Jesus tell this parable in every generation since. Don't reject *this* time, too!

### IV.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”’” (Matthew 21:42, EHV).

The landowner of our Savior-God had a plan. The Son these very leaders rejected was the cornerstone of God's plan—the cornerstone of salvation. Jesus *did* come as the Son. Though he was thrown out and killed, those who attacked him could not stop the salvation he brought for mankind.

“That is why I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruit” (Matthew 21:42, EHV). New tenants have been brought in.

The word for “a people” in this verse is the same Greek root word used for Gentiles. This is one of only two places in Scripture where the word is used in the singular. It is not *all* Gentiles who were to be given the lease to be God's tenants, but *all believers*.

All believers are the nation of the Church, which has been given the task of producing the fruit of faith in the Son—faith in our Savior, Jesus. Live as Children of God who recognize the Lord Jesus as the Cornerstone of our faith. Amen.