

PARABLES OF JESUS

THE PARABLES OF THE TWO SONS AND THE TENANTS - MATTHEW 21:28-44

A. Context

1. Jesus headed to Jerusalem with His disciples and foretold His death for the third time.
2. Jewish religious leaders again challenged Jesus' authority because of His triumphal entry and the cleansing of the Temple.
3. In response to religious leaders' question of Jesus authority, He promised to give them a reply when they would tell him where John the Baptist received his authority, from heaven or men. They did not give an answer for fear of the people.
4. Jesus then gave two parables that speak to the hypocrisy of the religious leaders as noted in Matthew 21:45-46, *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.*

B. The Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32)

1. Jesus asked the religious leaders their opinion of the behavior of two sons (28-30)
 - a. The first son's response (28-29), *What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.*
 - 1) The first son rejected the father's rightful authority over him by refusing to work in the vineyard.
 - 2) Later, he changed his mind and did what his father commanded.
 - b. The second son's response (30), *And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.*
 - 1) The second son submitted to the father's authority by agreeing to go the vineyard.
 - 2) The son did not do what he promised his father.
2. Jesus interacted with the religious leaders concerning the two sons (31-32)
 - a. They responded to Jesus' question concerning which son was truly obedient (31a), *Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."*
 - 1) Jesus asked which of the two did what the father commanded.
 - 2) The religious leaders said the first because he repented and did what he was told to do.
 - b. Jesus identified the religious leaders with the son who agreed to work but did not (31b-32), *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*
 1. The religious leaders rejected John the Baptist but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him.
 2. The religious leaders would not repent even though they had evidence of the truth.
 3. Christ showed in this parable that submission to authority is not confirmed by profession but by obedience.
 4. J. Dwight Pentecost, *...the Pharisees who claimed to be sons of God but did not obey the law and fulfill its righteousness could not be counted as sons. But one who submitted to the authority of the law and obeyed it was a son.*
3. This parable was a condemnation of the religious leaders.
 - a. They rejected Jesus' authority but would not repent even as Jesus gave evidence that He is the Messiah.
 - b. Those who lived far from kingdom truth repented and turned to Jesus.
 - c. J. Dwight Pentecost, *The leaders would never have accepted tax collectors and prostitutes as being eligible to enter the kingdom, let alone actually be in it. But Christ affirmed that those who received John's message in faith were acceptable to God and were actually in the kingdom. Thus Christ disproved the claim of the leaders that they needed no repentance because they were already sons of the kingdom.*

C. The Parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:33-44)

1. Jesus gave a parable concerning a master who planted a vineyard and leased it to tenants (33-34), ***Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.***
 - a. Jesus told a second parable directly following the Parable of the Two Sons.
 - b. He continued His teaching concerning the Pharisees and their relationship to His kingdom.
 - c. Jesus alluded to Psalm 80:8-16 where the vineyard is Israel and the landowner is God.
 - 1) The care shown by the landowner shows God's concern for Israel.
 - 2) The tenants represent the leaders of Israel.
 - 3) The servants are God's faithful prophets.
 - d. Since Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus as Messiah, what would happen to the nation? That question is addressed in this parable.
2. Responses of the tenants (35-39)
 - a. To the servants (35-36), ***And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.***
 - 1) The background of this parable may be seen in Isaiah 5:1-7, *Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!*
 - 2) Israel's leaders had beaten and killed prophets in the past.
 - a) 1 Kings 18:4, *and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.*
 - b) Jeremiah 26:23, *and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people.*
 - b. To the master's son (37-39), ***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 have his inheritance.' 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.***
 - 1) Jesus is the last one sent by the Father to deliver truth, according to Hebrews 1:1-2, *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*
 - 2) Jesus had on several occasions told His disciples that He would die. Now, He foretells His own death at the hands of the leaders of the nation of Israel.
 - 3) God entrusted the vineyard of Israel into the hands of tenants, the leaders of the nation, who rejected the Son and had Him killed.
3. The expected response of the master (40-41), ***When therefore 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 let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."***
 - 1) The master would kill the current tenants and replace them with those who bring forth fruit at the appointed time.
 - 2) Jesus was looking ahead to the ministry of the apostles and all believers after His death, resurrection, and ascension.
 - 3) Direct responsibility for promoting the kingdom of God is transferred to followers of Christ in this Church Age. The nation of Israel's responsibility will be restored in the Millennial Kingdom, note verse 43.

4. Jesus relates the parable to the nation of Israel (42-44)
 - a. The nation has rejected the cornerstone (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 marvelous in our eyes'?"*
 - 1) Every time Jesus said, *Have you never read in the Scriptures*, He was showing how the Scriptures pointed to Him as the Messiah, Matthew 21:16, *and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?"* And Jesus said to them, *"Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?'"*
 - 2) Jesus was quoting Psalm 118:22-23, which declares that the rejected stone will become the capstone.
 - 3) The same imagery is seen in the church, Ephesians 2:19-22, *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*
 - b. Results of rejecting the cornerstone (43-44)
 - 1) The kingdom of God will be given to those who obey (43), ***Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.***
 - a) Mark Bailey, *Matthew 21:43 could be the key verse in the entire argument of Matthew.*
 - b) *Therefore*, ties this verse to verses 40-41, the verdict on the tenants is now applied to the chief priests and elders; they will be dispossessed.
 - c) God will transfer responsibility to proclaim the kingdom of God from Israel to the Church, 1 Peter 2:9, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*
 - d) Israel will have the most prominent position in the kingdom when Jesus returns and establishes it on earth.
 - e) Stanley Toussaint, *For the first time the King speaks openly and clearly to someone outside of the circle of the disciples about a new age. This is full proof that the kingdom was no longer near at hand.*
 - 2) Those who reject the cornerstone will be destroyed (44), ***And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.***
 - a) Those who don't receive Jesus as the Messiah, *this stone*, will be destroyed.
 - b) Jesus' claim was that He will judge and crush those whom He judges.
 - 3) *when it falls on anyone*, the new tenants are to produce fruit but judgment will come even to the new tenants who disobey.

CONCLUSION

- A. Interpretational review of the parable
 1. The master of the house is God.
 2. The vineyard is the nation of Israel, the chosen people of God.
 3. The tenants are the Jewish leaders.
 4. The servants are the prophets of God.
 5. The son is Jesus.
 6. The other tenants are those coming to faith in the Church Age.
- B. Practical instruction from this parable.
 1. There is no greater privilege nor responsibility than to be entrusted with kingdom responsibilities.
 2. There is no more important choice than to accept or reject Jesus as Messiah, King of the kingdom of God.