

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Matthew 21:33-46

Key Verse: 21:33

"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."

In the last passage we studied the parable of the two sons. The second son was compared to the chosen people who said "yes" but did not carry out their mission. As a result, they could not enter the kingdom of God. Verse 31b says, "Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the [kingdom of God](#) ahead of you." The first son was compared to the tax collectors and the prostitutes. They were sinners. But after hearing the good news of great joy from Jesus, they repented, beating their chests, and they were, only by the grace of God, accepted into the kingdom of God. We learned that when we repent all our sins, our [Lord Jesus Christ](#) forgives our sins and gives us the privilege of inheriting the kingdom of God. Today's passage, with the title, "The Parable of the Tenants," is precisely the extension of the parable of the two sons. Here we learn who God is and who man is. In short, we learn man's relationship with God.

First, a landowner (33). Look at verse 33. "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." The phrase at the beginning of this verse, "Listen to another parable," delineates this parable as a succession of the parable of the two sons. Jesus was eager to teach man's relationship with God once more. When we ponder verse 33 carefully we learn that the landowner who planted the vineyard was God. Here the phrase, "who planted a vineyard," has a deep meaning. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Again, John 1:1-4 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Isaiah 40:11 says, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." This verse describes God's character. He is like a shepherd. We have seen many pictures of Jesus who takes young sheep in his arms and carries them close to his heart. I believe everybody has seen this kind of picture. Maybe many of you have hung this picture of Jesus on your wall. Isaiah 40:12-13 says, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the [scales](#) and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor?" In these verses we learn that our God is the Almighty Creator God who can measure the waters in the hollow of his hand, and who has held the dust of the earth in a bucket and weighed the mountains on his scales. Therefore, to acknowledge God's existence is most important for all humankind. Otherwise, we are nothing but the dust of the ground. We

want to maintain this dust of the ground forever. But it crumbles, and the wind blows it away. If we do not believe that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, we become worshipers of a monkey. By worshipping a monkey, we get nothing except several pieces of bananas. As long as we believe that God is the Creator of man and the world, we thank God that he has provided all the necessary things for us and even gave us a glorious mission to join in his world salvation plan.

Second, man is the steward of God's world (33b-34). Verse 33b says, "Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey." Here, "the vineyard" refers to the world, and "some farmers" refers to all mankind. God created the heavens and the earth and all the good environmentseven paradiseand rented them to mankind so they might take care of God's world. Here we learn that God made us for the purpose of using us as his tenants. The word "tenants" has a bad connotation these days. But in the Bible, "tenants" is synonymous with "stewards." God made the world for his own glory and for the utmost happiness of man when he stewards God's world. The first man, Adam, gave names to all the fish in the sea and all the trees on the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. When we review the story of Abraham, the ancestor of faith, we learn that God made man to be great and to be a blessing to himself and to others and finally to all peoples of all nations. If we refuse to be God's stewards, we become godless people who can do all kinds of evils and become inventors of evils. Praise God that he made us the stewards of God's world! The phrase, "and went away on a journey," tells us that God completely entrusted us with the care of God's world. Actually, men are nothing but clumps of the dust of the ground and, in them is the life of God. Without stewardship from God we are indeed miserable. So Psalm 19:1-4a describes the glory of man's stewardship. It says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." When we meditate on this psalm, we learn that God is God, and that we are stewards of God's marvelous world. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Paul is more philosophical. So he clearly told us that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

There are many people who want to do God's work. But they are badly injured and broken by the evil of the world. So whenever they want to do God's work and whenever they want to carry out God's mission, their injuries and scars make them feel unbearably painful, so painful that they forget about doing the work of God. They become useless. But at the end of Ephesians 2:10 there is the phrase, "prepared in advance." For example, Moses received palace training and next, painful wilderness seminary training for 80 years all together. Finally, he lost the vocabulary to express himself. His mind was occupied with the words "a political criminal." But God called him to liberate his 600,000 slave people in Egypt from the hand of Pharaoh. Moses suffered much through training. But the training itself became the strength to deliver his people to the promised land. There was a girl whose mother divorced her father. So in her young age, her heart was broken. She became sorrowful, so she cried with her older sister

when the day was sunny. She cried with her older sister when the day was rainy. She cried when she saw a man who looked like her father. But through one-to-one Bible study her heart was healed. Soon after, she married a gentle and generous young man. Now she does not cry. Instead, she is a mother-like shepherd to many children from broken families. When we accept the Creator God, our misfortune changes into God's compassion in our hearts. When we help the same kind of people who have had the same kind of misfortune, our souls rejoice in the Lord. Here we learn that God disciplines us in order to use us to bear much fruit, and that through much training he heals our wounded souls. When our wounded souls are healed, there is happiness for each of us.

Look at verse 34. "When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit." This verse doesn't mean that God wants to collect rent from his tenants like apartment owners do. Rather, God wants to see if we are stewarding God's world and living in a way that can bear fruit. Then, what is fruit? "Fruit" has deep spiritual meaning. Again, we think about Abraham. When God came to him and gave him promises, God first said, "You will be great and you will be a blessing." Through this, we learn that fruit is to become great in the sight of God and to be a blessing. To be great in the sight of God means to mature in God. To be a blessing means we are great and wealthy enough, both materially and spiritually, to be a blessing to others. If we do not bear fruit we are totally useless to Godlike firewood.

Third, the illusion of the tenants (34-40). Look at verse 34 again. "When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit." Spiritually speaking, "to collect his fruit" means God wanted to see that they were doing well. Look at verse 35. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third." It is totally unbelievable that the tenants treated God's servants in this way. At first, the tenants recognized that they were God's tenants. But the vineyard grew larger and larger, and the fruits were more than abundant. Then they forgot the owner, God. They had the illusion that the vineyard was their own. Their illusion made them beat one of God's servants and stone another and kill a third. They made terrible mistakes. This hallucinative illusion can happen to anybody or any nation. Many Korean missionaries came to America. They worked hard for God's vineyard. Soon they were blessed. They became rich and honorable. Then several of them ran away from God's vineyard to use their wealth all by themselves. When they ran away from God's mission, God did not bless them. He loved them and wanted them to repent. One of the medical doctor missionaries was an anaesthesiologist. He gave too much anaesthesia to a patient. As a result, the patient died. So he lost his physician's license. Now he is running a small grocery store. He has to wake up at 4:30 a.m. and gather merchandise to sell during the daytime. His work finishes at 10:00 p.m. Another was a very proud medical doctor. When he was blessed by God, he ran away. Then God gave him two retarded sons. Later he had a severe car accident and is now totally crippled. He lives on government aid. A third one was blessed by God while carrying out God's mission. But he ran away. Now he has insomnia and a stomach ulcer. He is existing. But his daily work is not medical work but a boxing match with his wife. Another of them finished his architecture study with much subsidy from God's institution. As soon as he graduated he ran

away. Then he got kidney cancer and died after two months. Two medical missionaries are as proud as Herod the Great. They were dismissed from their hospitals and are intensively looking for jobs. But they have had no success. One lady was greatly blessed by God when she was doing God's work. But when she ran away with hallelujah Christians she had a car accident, and only her head has been alive for the last seven years.

The illusion of the tenants was indeed stupid and suicidal.

Nevertheless God sent his own Son, believing that they would respect his Son. When the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "Aha! He is coming! This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance" (38). So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. This is an allegorical illustration of Jesus' crucifixion on the cross. We must be alert not to fall into the illusion that we made ourselves or that we made the vineyard with our own ability, and that the vineyard is our own. This is the generation in which many people say: "This is my life. My children are mine." But that's sheer illusion. No one is his own self. He is made by God to work for the glory of God and to be happy in the course of fulfilling God's mission. His children are not his own. His children are God's children, entrusted to him for an appointed time. We must tremble before our children, realizing that they are God's children entrusted to us, and so we must be a good example to them and a good influence on them. Anybody who is recognized as a servant of God by his family members is a great man in the world. Abraham Lincoln was recognized by his wife as a man of God, so he became a great man in the United States of America. There are many irresponsible people who do not care for the children entrusted to them by God. Newsweek magazine concluded about the Colorado gun-shooting event, "That happened because their parents did not care for them." These days many parents enjoy worldly pleasure after work. They are too tired after enjoying worldly pleasure. So they cannot take care of their children, even though they really want to. It is tragic. How can we ignore God's children entrusted to us? How can we break up our families, abandoning our children like oinking piglets? We should not repeat this kind of sin anymore in this country.

God's fruits are holiness and gentleness. But during the last several years, we have had enough headaches because of young kids' unholiness. These days we are terrified because of young kids' violence. Our kids are not studying hard because they are crazy for dating and gang activities. According to the chemistry of the Bible, immorality and violence are the beginning point of destruction. We must pray for our kids to be holy and to be gentle.

Fourth, the rejected stone (41-46). Look at verse 41. "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." His disciples understood humanly and said, "If he rents the vineyard to other tenants they will give him his share of the crops at harvest time. Then it will be okay; it will be no problem." Look at verse 42. "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'?" This verse describes how Jesus lamented over those who abandoned God and became godless and self-centered. Not only so, they made Jesus the rejected stone. They

thought Jesus was not fitting in their blueprint. So they rejected him. In other words, they crucified Jesus on the cross. But God made the rejected stone become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Those who live in illusion may reject Jesus and put him far away. But it doesn't work that way. Look at verse 43. "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." Those who abandon God cannot inherit the kingdom of God. This is really a crucial matter to anyone who abandons God. In addition, those who fall on the rejected stone will be broken to pieces. But he on whom it falls will be crushed. These days relativistic humanists do not honor God as God. They will not inherit the kingdom of God. It is not a light matter. If they are not accepted into the kingdom of God, they go to another place, where Satan lives.

The chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables and they ground their teeth until they had to go to the dentist. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they could not arrest Jesus (45-46).

In today's passage we learn that God created us. God also gave us the mission to bear much fruit. God also expects us to be great and to be a blessing.