

The Mind of Christ

Preaching in the Enemy’s Camp – Part 2

INTRODUCTION:

- I. For the past few Sunday’s we’ve been focusing our attention on the final week in the life of Jesus. It was also the week of the great Jewish Passover – the most important feast day celebrated by the Jews in the days of Jesus.
 - A. That week began...
 1. On Sunday, when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey, coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords – coming as the Messiah. **(Matt. 21:1-11)**
 2. On Monday, Jesus went into the Temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and those who sold animals, and drove them all out of the Temple courts. **(Matt. 21:12-17)**
 3. And now we are taking a close look at the events that occur on Tuesday of Passover week.
 - a. When Jesus returned to Jerusalem after spending the evening in the nearby village of Bethany, He went back to the Temple where He begin teaching. **(Matt. 21:23-32)**

- b. Once there, Jesus was IMMEDIATELY confronted by the chief priests and elders of the people who challenged His authority for doing the things He’d been doing.
 - c. Jesus countered with a challenge of His own. He agreed to answer their questions if these chief priests and elders of the people would tell Him who gave John HIS authority to baptize with a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
 - d. When they refused to answer, Jesus was no longer obligated to answer their question.
- B. Instead, Jesus immediately launched into a series of six parables – the first three of which are specifically directed at His accusers.
- 1. The first parable was about two sons who were asked by their father to go into his vineyard to work.
 - a. The first son REFUSED, but sometime later REPENTED and DID as his father asked.
 - b. The second son AGREED to go to work, but NEVER kept his word.
 - c. Jesus said the tax collectors and harlots were like the first son – they were rebellious and disobedient toward God, but when John came preaching in the way of righteousness, the

tax collectors and harlots repented and turned their hearts to God.

- d. However, Jesus said the chief priests and elders of the people were just like the second son – they made an OUTWARD display of obedience and righteousness, but IN REALITY refused to faithfully obey the Lord.

(1). The chief priests and elders of the people were nothing more than RANK HYPOCRITES.

BODY:

- I. This brings us to the SECOND parable Jesus taught on this day – the parable of the WICKED VINEDRESSERS. This parable was ALSO directed at the chief priests and elders of the people.
 - A. The parable is found in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), but the most thorough account is found in the gospel according to Matthew.
 - 1. Let’s read the parable together (**READ: Matthew 21:33-44**)
 - B. Jesus used two things in the story.
 - 1. First, He used one of the most ancient symbols for the nation of Israel – the picture of the nation as the vineyard of God.

- a. In **Psalm 80**, the psalmist pours out his heart to God at a time when Israel was facing a terrible threat from the Assyrians who had trampled down nation after nation. The psalmist was praying that God would restore Israel and find favor with the vineyard HE had planted with His OWN hand.
- b. **Psalm 80:14-19** – *Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch that You made strong for Yourself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. Then we will not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!*
- c. Sadly, the Israel of Jesus’ day ALSO needed to pray in repentance for God’s forgiveness. But because of Israel’s disobedience and spiritual decadence, Jesus said THIS vineyard was about to be taken away from its caretakers and given to others.

- d. It was clear in the minds of those who heard the parable of Jesus that He was picturing the nation of Israel as God’s vineyard.
2. The second thing Jesus did in this story was to use a situation that was common in His day – absentee landlords who entrusted the care of their vineyards and farms to others.
 - a. It was very common for a man to rent out his ground and go to live in some more comfortable country.
 - b. When that was done, the rent he was due was usually paid in one of three ways: either by a fixed sum of money, a percentage of the crops, or a set amount of the crops regardless of the size of the harvest.
 - c. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for renters who refused to pay their rent to resort to violence when confronted by the landlord’s representatives who demanded the rent be paid.
 3. The most important fact about this parable is that every detail has an important meaning.
 - a. The vineyard in the parable is clearly the people of Israel.
 - b. The landowner of the vineyard is God.
 - c. The vinedressers are the priests and rulers – those who were responsible for taking care of God’s vineyard, Israel.

- d. The servants who were sent and ill-treated are the prophets – whom God sent in every age to warn the people, and were sometimes disregarded and at other times, martyred.
 - e. And finally, the SON of the landowner is clearly Jesus Himself.
4. In teaching this parable, Jesus was giving a vivid picture of God’s care for the nation of Israel, and the failure of her religious leaders to perform the tasks for which they had been entrusted.
- a. God had done everything He could possibly do to help the people of Israel remain faithful and obedient, but His people continually rejected His way and sought their own.
 - b. And those who failed to keep the people focused on faithfulness to God were the religious leaders.
 - c. The prophets who had been sent were mistreated and killed, and so God sent His Son, Jesus.
 - d. The death of Jesus, and God taking away the vineyard from those wicked men and giving it into the care of others, spelled the impending doom of these wicked leaders of the people of Israel.
- C. Matthew is very clear in recording this parable of Jesus that God had done everything possible for His vineyard Israel.

1. Jesus pictured a vineyard that was protected and self-sufficient.
 - a. The vineyard was protected by a dense, thorny hedge – common in those days – to keep wild animals from feeding on the grapes, and to keep out other intruders.
 - b. A winepress, which was a stone-lined pit, had been dug in the vineyard so that wine could be processed on location – making the vineyard completely self-sufficient.
 - c. Furthermore a watchtower had been built in the vineyard so that guards could keep watch on the vineyard, and protect it against robbers who might come in at night and strip large sections grapes needed to produce the vineyard’s wine.

- D. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the Israel of HIS day as a beautiful vineyard that God had planted, but the vineyard didn’t produce pure grapes. Instead the vines mixed other grapes and produced wild grapes that are not suited for winemaking.
 1. **Isaiah 5:1-7** – *Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. "And now, O inhabitants*

of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

- a. Isaiah gives us a sad picture of how the Lord had planted His vineyard on a fruitful hill and did EVERYTHING to make the vineyard productive.
- b. But, because the vineyard produced WILD grapes – grapes that were BITTER and UNSUITABLE for wine – the Lord would tear down the hedge around the vineyard and burn it with fire – completely and totally DESTROYING the vineyard so that the ground would NEVER produce anything again except for weeds and thorns.

- c. And sadly, when the Lord looked for justice, He found oppression; and when He looked for righteousness, all He heard were the cries of His people when their enemies came upon them to destroy them and lead them into captivity.
 - d. But the cries came too late.
 - e. The religious leaders in the days of Isaiah had failed in their duties to properly teach the people. As a result, the people went after false gods, and as a result, they had become “wild grapes” – completely unacceptable to God the vineyard owner.
2. In the days of Jesus, the religious leaders – the priests, the chief priests and the elders of the people – had ALSO failed honor THEIR responsibilities as the spiritual leaders of Israel.
3. As a result, Jesus said in His parable in Matthew chapter 21 that THIS vineyard will be taken from them and given to “*a nation bearing the fruits of it.*” **(Matthew 21:43b)**
- a. If we’re not careful we’ll miss the significance of what Jesus was actually saying here.
 - b. Jesus said THIS vineyard – the nation of Israel – will be TAKEN AWAY, and that it will be given to another “NATION.”

- c. Jesus was saying the VINEYARD ISRAEL will no longer be the SAME vineyard that it HAD been.
 - d. In other words, Jesus was saying the PHYSICAL nation of Israel will be taken away, and the privileges of bearing fruit for the Lord will be given to ANOTHER nation (a SPIRITUAL kingdom) – the Lord’s church that would include both Jews and Gentiles who WILL acknowledge the landowner’s SON JESUS, and who WILL gladly pay to the landowner GOD the fruits of righteousness.
- E. The reaction of the chief priests and the elders of the people to this parable of Jesus was immediate.
1. **Matthew 21:45-46** – *Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.*
 2. Now you know why the chief priests and elders of the people were so enraged. Jesus had just pronounced the death sentence on the nation Israel and said the responsibility lay solely at the feet of Israel’s religious leaders!

II. This parable is CLEARLY an indictment against the chief priests and elders of the people.

A. God had entrusted the religious leaders of Israel with HIS vineyard, Israel.

1. He had placed into the hands of these men the great responsibility of teaching the people about the TRUE character of Jehovah.

a. But that’s the VERY THING they FAILED to do.

b. The chief priests and elders of the people were NO DIFFERENT from the priests in Hosea’s day – some 700 years earlier.

c. God told Hosea, *“My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge.”* **(Hosea 4:6)**

B. God had also exercised GREAT PATIENCE in dealing with these wicked men – just as the owner of the vineyard in Jesus’ parable had been patient toward his vinedressers.

1. God had given the religious leaders of Israel warning after warning through the prophets.

2. But each time He sent a prophet to warn them to turn from their wickedness, they either treated these prophets with contempt, or murdered them.

- a. Listen to how the prophets were treated during the days of Jeremiah **(READ: 2 Chron. 36:11-21)**
3. God’s **ULTIMATE** act of patience and longsuffering was in sending these wicked leaders His “Only Begotten Son.”
 - a. Sadly, they had **NO RESPECT** for Jesus either.
 - b. In fact, they saw Jesus as a **THREAT** to their positions of **POWER** and **PRESTIGE**, and to **RID** themselves of this threat – they would do the **SAME THING** the wicked vinedressers did to the son of the landowner. They would **MURDER** the Son.
- C. Finally, Jesus made it **CRYSTAL CLEAR** that a **TERRIBLE JUDGMENT** would come upon these men **AND** upon the kingdom of Israel itself.
 1. This would be the **FINAL** rejection by God of the chief priests and elders of the people, and, **SADLY**, the final rejection of the nation of Israel itself.
 2. Now you know why the chief priests and elders of the people were so enraged. Jesus had just pronounced the death sentence on the nation Israel and said the responsibility lay solely at the feet of Israel’s religious leaders!

CONCLUSION:

- I. So, what is the meaning of this parable to us?
 - A. Obviously, the wicked vinedressers were the chief priests and elders of the people.
 1. They had had failed to honor their commitment to God, who rejected every emissary God had sent, and who would eventually murder Jesus – the Son of God.
 - B. But what do WE learn from this parable of Jesus?
 1. In the parable, God had blessed His vineyard Israel with everything it needed to be productive and self-sufficient.
 - a. Are you aware of the blessings God has given you? Do you realize that because you’re a child of God...
 - (1). He has provided you with all the PHYSICAL blessings of life – all the necessities of life like food, clothing, and shelter? **(Matt. 6:25-34)**
 - (2). He has also provided you with every SPIRITUAL blessing in Christ? **(Eph 1:3)**
 - (3). God has protected you from the power of Satan. Satan can’t tempt you more than you’re capable of bearing, plus God always provides you with a way of escape? **(1 Cor. 10:13)**

- (4). We could go on and on listing all the wonderful things
God has done for us.
2. In the parable, God had entrusted the chief priests and elders of the people with the responsible of caring for His vineyard and of teaching the people about the TRUE character and nature of God.
 - a. Are there responsibilities God has placed into your hands – responsibilities that you may not be fulfilling?
 - (1). Are you doing everything you can as a laborer in the vineyard of the Lord?
 - (2). Are you doing your part telling others about Jesus Christ – helping them learn about the Christ Who died for them?
3. In the parable, the wicked vinedressers rejected every warning God had given them through the preaching of the prophets, and eventually made the ULTIMATE REJECTION – they rejected the Son of God.
 - a. Have you been hearing warning after warning through the preaching and teaching of the word of God – warnings that you have consistently rejected?
 - b. And don’t you realize that in the end you’re REALLY rejecting Jesus – the Son of God?

4. And in the parable, God was patient with these wicked vinedressers – giving them opportunity after opportunity to repent.

a. Is God STILL being patient with you?

(1). Has He been giving you opportunity after opportunity after opportunity to repent and faithfully serve Him?

(2). And have you not only been IGNORING His pleas, but actually REJECTING Him out of a defiant and rebellious heart?

C. Finally, in the case of the wicked vinedressers, God eventually reached a point where nothing more could be done to get these disobedient and rebellious men to repent.

1. All that remained was a DAY OF JUDGMENT – a day when God would TAKE AWAY every BLESSING and PRIVILEGE these men had been GIVEN, and WASTED.

a. Is a DAY OF TERRIBLE JUDGMENT coming for you – a day when God will take away every blessing and privilege YOU’VE been given – blessings and privileges YOU’VE WASTED?

2. In the parable, the kingdom was taken away from these wicked vinedressers.

- a. Is the time coming when YOU’RE right to the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN will be taken away from YOU – and given to OTHERS who are TRULY bearing fruit?

II. The REAL tragedy of this situation was that these men were so spiritually blinded that they simply couldn’t see the truth.

A. The same thing can happen to us.

- 1. It’s so easy for us to see the faults in OTHERS, but to be TOTALLY and COMPLETELY blinded to our OWN faults.
- 2. Are there things in YOUR life that need to change – things that are becoming MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT to see?
- 3. The real tragedy comes when you can no longer see those things AT ALL.

B. Since this is a real possibility, why not do whatever you need to do to make yourself right with God while you still see the need for change.

- 1. If you’ve never obeyed the gospel of Christ – if you’ve never come to Christ in complete obedience – then that’s what you need to do while you can still see the need for change.
- 2. And if, as a Christian, you haven’t been living as you should, then you also need to make changes while YOU can still see the need for change.