

Parable #38 — Matthew 21:28-32 — The Two Sons

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

<sup>29</sup> “ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Parable #39 — Matthew 21:33-44 — Wicked Tenants of the Vineyard

<sup>33</sup> “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. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

<sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

<sup>38</sup> “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

<sup>41</sup> “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.”

<sup>42</sup> 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’?”

<sup>43</sup> “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. <sup>44</sup> He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

Parable #38 — Matthew 21:28-32 — The Two Sons

1. What is the best illustration—positive or negative—that you’ve ever seen of the old saying, “actions speak louder than words”?
2. Who are the people in the parable? Who did they represent when Jesus told it? Who do they represent today?
3. Was the behavior of either son commendable?
4. Why doesn’t religious knowledge or information guarantee that we will do what God wants us to? Why do we so often drag our feet in doing what God wants?
5. When, if ever, is it too late to do the right thing? What does it mean to repent? Is it ever too late to repent?

Parable #39 — Matthew 21:33-44 — Wicked Tenants of the Vineyard

1. Let’s sort out the people and things in the parable (then and now): what does the vineyard represent? Who does the vineyard owner represent? The servants the owner sent to the vineyard? The tenants? The son of the vineyard owner?
2. Doesn’t it seem a bit far fetched that the tenants would hurt and kill the master’s servants and son? What were they thinking? Why would they do such a thing? Can you imagine anyone today doing something like that?
3. Compare this parable to “the song of the vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1-7.
4. What does the parable tell us about the fate that awaits those who reject Jesus as the Messiah or as the son of God? (Matthew 21:41. In reporting the same parable, Luke says, “[the master] will come and *kill* those tenants...”)
5. Who are the “other tenants” mentioned in 21:41?
6. What is the meaning of the scripture that Jesus quoted in 21:42? (Psalm 118:22)
7. How can we avoid letting the crowd (or our friends and peers) from making decisions for us? Is there an area of your life where you resist God’s authority?

Parable #39 — Matthew 21:33-44  
Wicked Tenants of the Vineyard — Notes for Leader

3. Isaiah 5:1-7 — A Song about the Lord's Vineyard

- <sup>1</sup> Now I will sing for the one I love, a song about his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard on a rich and fertile hill.
- <sup>2</sup> He plowed the land, cleared its stones, and planted it with the best vines.  
In the middle he built a watchtower and carved a winepress in the nearby rocks.  
Then he waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were bitter.
- <sup>3</sup> Now, you people of Jerusalem and Judah, you judge between me and my vineyard.
- <sup>4</sup> What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already done?  
When I expected sweet grapes, why did my vineyard give me bitter grapes?
- <sup>5</sup> Now let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard:  
I will tear down its hedges and let it be destroyed.  
I will break down its walls and let the animals trample it.
- <sup>6</sup> I will make it a wild place where the vines are not pruned and the ground is not hoed, a place overgrown with briars and thorns.  
I will command the clouds to drop no rain on it.
- <sup>7</sup> The nation of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord of Heaven's Armies.  
The people of Judah are his pleasant garden.  
He expected a crop of justice, but instead he found oppression.  
He expected to find righteousness, but instead he heard cries of violence.

1, 4, 5. With some parables, it is easy to determine the different meanings to Jesus' audience and to us today. But with this parable it is a bit more difficult. It is fairly obvious that in Jesus' day, this parable described both what had happened (the Jews rejection of the message of the prophets and of John the Baptist) and what would happen (Jesus' death on the cross and, ultimately, God's judgement against the Jews after which the Gentiles became the tenants and were welcomed into the kingdom of God).

But what does this parable mean to us today? First of all, we Gentile Christ followers have become the tenants minding the vineyard. But what is the fruit of the vineyard and who are the representatives or servants of God who have been sent to collect the fruit? When you think about it for a minute, it's quite clear. Just a few chapters further on (Matthew 25:34-46), Jesus says "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

So what Jesus is saying in this parable is that God expects us to use the gifts he has given us to help the poor. It's as simple as that. Read those verses in Matthew and the parable will be fully explained.