

# The Parable of the Tenants

080220

Jesus really had a way with words. He employed a powerful and effective technique to get His point across. Of course, He had an advantage, in that He understood the hearts of those with whom He was speaking.

When Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, He often employed parables. A 'parable' is a short, often fictitious story, that illustrates a moral lesson or an abstract concept. It also reveals a lot about the listener. It is one way Jesus communicated difficult and troubling things.

The "Parable of the Tenants" is an example of a parable that was NOT appreciated by the people Jesus addressed. This parable appears in Matthew 21, Mark 12, and Luke 20. Let's take a look at why Jesus told this insightful 'parable of the tenants.'

For context, Jesus had recently overturned the tables in the temple courts and driven out the moneychangers. Then, He addressed the crowd; **"It is written,' he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer," 'but you are making it a den of robbers'" Matthew 21:13.**

The chief priests and teachers of the law were furious. He was disrespecting their traditions and actually healing people in the temple courts. The children were shouting to Him in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" This Nazarite had the audacity to do, and speak of, greater things than the Chief Priests and Elders. Why, He even equated them with robbers! They were threatened, embarrassed, and angry!

**Matthew 21:14 Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant**

Later, after cursing the fig tree which bore no fruit, causing it to wither, Jesus returned to the temple.

**23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” Matthew 21:23**

In your mind’s eye, can you see these puffed up, arrogant Chief Priests and Scribes – people of honor and importance – looking down their noses at this common fellow? THEY were the ones with authority! THEY were God’s appointed! THEY were the very representatives of God! Just WHO was this unclean, uneducated, miscreant walking impertinently into the temple? Who was this rabble who dared to teach elementary and pedestrian lessons in the HOUSE OF GOD?

By asking these questions, they were looking for a way to discredit Him. Jesus had spent the better part of the last three years demonstrating with signs and wonders where His authority came from, but the religious establishment didn’t really want to know. So, in response to their question, Jesus told The Parable of the Tenants:

**Matthew 21:33-45**

**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 moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.**

**35 “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.**

**36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.**

**37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.**

**38 “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.’**

**39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.**

**40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”**

**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.”**

**42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:**

**“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;**

**the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?**

**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.**

**4 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”**

**45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them.**

**46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.**

It was commonplace in the first century for a wealthy investor to buy property for a farm or vineyard and then leave it in the care of tenants. Come harvest, the owner would send someone to collect their portion of the proceeds.

In this parable, the landowner is God, the vineyard represents Israel, and the tenants are the Jewish leadership.

In Matthew 21:35–37, the mistreatment of the servants, and even the Son is described. What Jesus is saying is that God had sent many prophets to the Jews, but they were mistreated and even killed. Now God had sent Jesus, demanding the respect that was not given to the prophets. But, the tenants saw the Son and figured they could kill Him and take His inheritance.

In that day, if a landowner didn't have an heir, the land became the property of the tenants. So instead of showing the landowner's son his due respect, they killed him so the land would become theirs. It was like robbery (what did Jesus call these leaders when he threw out the money changers?).

Sometime after this event, the apostle, Stephen, said it well just before he was stoned:

**Acts 7: 52 Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”**

So, Jesus continued; "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" The answer was a shout that that they would be dealt with justly.

Then, Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23, which those Priests and Scribes knew well: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

What is this "cornerstone?" If you did not get to read it, on July 5, our study was on "Christ Our Cornerstone." If you'd like it emailed, reach me at [br3nt923@ptd.net](mailto:br3nt923@ptd.net).

Well, apparently, it was not very marvelous in the eyes of those Priests and Scribes! Instead, they plotted to arrest Jesus, but were afraid of the people who had come to understand just who Jesus is.

Jesus was actually prophesying His own death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. And even though His death makes a way for the forgiveness of mankind, there will be a reckoning for this disobedient people and generation. They rejected the One who will become the cornerstone of God's kingdom.

Jesus used this parable to warn that the vineyard would be taken from those who refuse to submit to God and given to those who would. The implication here is that God's vineyard was being opened to the Gentiles—and anyone who would submit themselves to the Jesus, the cornerstone.

In short, the Jewish leaders had a long history of failure at honoring and obeying God. Their lineage had been set apart by God to serve Him in very specific ways, and they were doing everything except that!

**Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.**

It's heartbreaking to realize that the chief priests and Pharisees understood His words, but didn't respond with repentance. There's an old saying; "Too cool for school." I guess these pompous religious bosses were just too important to be educated.

Their response to this stern parable was to look for a way to arrest Jesus. They weren't at all concerned about pleasing God. Their only concern was how their actions would be perceived by the crowds who supported Him.

In fact, I've looked, and never found, an instance in which any of these priests or leaders prayed and asked God if Jesus was the Messiah.

If they were wise, they would have asked the same question Paul asked the Galatians: **"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?" Galatians 1:10a**

The Pharisees and priests were too proud to be corrected. So instead of making a mid-course correction and repenting, they ended up under God's condemnation. As we read this passage, we should consider our OWN openness to divine correction.

Do you allow God to challenge you through others, or do you tend to respond angrily to correction? When we're more concerned about how others perceive us than whether we're pleasing God, it's easy to see any correction as a confrontation instead of as an opportunity to prayerfully consider our posture before God.

**Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise. Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding. Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor. Proverbs 15:31–33.**

**Lord Jesus, your word tells us the Father corrects those He loves.**

**Help us to listen to you. Help us to keep our minds and hearts stayed upon you.**

**Amen**