

Stories Jesus Told

2 Sons and a Vineyard

Matthew 21:28-31

January 16, 2021

The Context – Jesus’s last visit to Jerusalem before His death {Matthew 21-23}:

Days before, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a colt and the crowds had enthusiastically escorted Him into the city, fulfilling the prophecy of **Zechariah 9:9 - Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

The Messiah, the conqueror of all the nations – especially the hated Romans – was here... And the people rejoiced!

- **Matthew 21:9** - "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

And just yesterday... Jesus had gone into the temple and overturned the tables of the money-changers; driving out all who were buying and selling there. **"My house is a house of prayer, not a den of robbers."**, He had said, and as the blind and lame came to Him to be healed, the crowds rejoiced.

But look over there in the corner at the religious elite – **the Chief Priests and Elders of the People** – They aren’t enthusiastic. They aren’t praising God and if looks could kill....

The 2 groups that made up the majority of the Religious Elite {**Pharisees and Sadducees**} were often bitter rivals – but as the saying goes, **"the enemy of my enemy is my friend"**, and so they were united by one purpose ---- to **STOP** to Jesus.

So today.... they initiated a confrontation:

- **Matthew 21:23** - 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?"

The Parables

#1 – The 2 Sons {Matthew 21:28-32}:

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.' ²⁹ "I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹ "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. ³² 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.

#2 – The Wicked Vinedressers {Matthew 21:33-46}:

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. 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 capstone; 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. ⁴⁴ He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he 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.

The Lessons:

The 2 Sons

- **Father** = God
- **Son #1** = Individuals living in open sin who, perhaps, were rebelling against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, but were really using that as an excuse to refuse obedience to God's Law – when the message of John the Baptist came to them, they repented and confessed their sins:
 - **Matthew 3:5-6** - People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
- **Son #2** = Individuals who make a pretense of obedience – here the character of the religious elite was revealed. They represented themselves to be faithful and obedient, but time proved their professions a lie. They were proud of their holiness, but they did not love God. They had been convinced of Jesus' authority and divine power, but they rejected it. Their arrogance and self-sufficiency would not permit them to acknowledge their sins and repent of them. They adhered to the traditions of men, but were in fact, refusing to obey the commands of God:
 - **Matthew 15:1-9** - Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ² "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" ³ Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' ⁵ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' ⁶ he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.

A person who is not a religious hypocrite is no less a sinner – someone else's religious hypocrisy does not excuse your sin. To openly refuse the appeals of the Holy Spirit is just as sinful as the pretense of obedience. Confess, repent and be transformed!!

On the other hand, self-righteousness is not true righteousness. Many claim to obey the Commands of God. They love church ritual, but they do not love God --- because loving church is not the same as loving God. They will not surrender to God and their lives reveal the lack of a transformational relationship with Him. Confess, repent and be transformed!!

Words are of no value unless they are accompanied by action. While the first son was being convicted and converted, the second was resisting the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and by his own choices was excluding himself from the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Wicked Vinedressers

- **The Owner of the vineyard** = God
- **The wicked tenants** = Israel
- **The Owner's servants** = the prophets of old
- **The Owner's Son** = Jesus

In the first parable, Jesus set before the religious elite the importance of obedience to God. In the second, He pointed them to the abundant blessings that had been theirs which were the foundation of God's claims of obedience. Through Israel's relationship and fidelity to God, the whole earth was to come into a saving knowledge of Him. But Israel rebelled and did not fulfill the purposes of God. Not only did they rob God of their service, but they also robbed the nations of religious guidance and a holy example:

- **Isaiah 5:1-4** - I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³ "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?
- **Jeremiah 2:20-21** - Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. ²¹ I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?

The religious elite stood in an even worse position than the people because as religious leaders they were to be the caretakers of God's vineyard. However, they were faithless stewards. They were arrogant and self-seeking. They perverted scripture and laid heavy man-made burdens and requirements on the people that they could not hope to fulfill.

God, for his part, was incredibly patient. He sent prophet after prophet to urge a return to Him, but they were ignored, ridiculed, imprisoned and sometimes killed. Finally, God sent Jesus to the very people who were supposed to have represented Him all along and here they were looking for a way to kill Him – and, in a few days, they would succeed!!

They were so blind to their true condition that they declared that the faithless tenants should be killed and the vineyard given to other tenants!!

- **Ellen White {COL 294.2-296.1}** - The Jewish people cherished the idea that they were the favorites of heaven, and that they were always to be exalted as the church of God. They were the children of Abraham, they declared, and so firm did the foundation of their prosperity seem to them that they defied earth and heaven to dispossess them of their rights. But by lives of unfaithfulness they were preparing for the condemnation of heaven and for separation from God....

Christ would have averted the doom of the Jewish nation if the people had received Him. But envy and jealousy made them implacable. They determined that they would not receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. They rejected the Light of the world, and thenceforth their lives were surrounded with darkness as the darkness of midnight. The doom foretold came upon the Jewish nation. Their own fierce passions, uncontrolled, wrought their ruin. In their blind rage they destroyed one another. Their rebellious, stubborn pride brought upon them the wrath of their Roman conquerors. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple laid in ruins, and its site plowed like a field. The children of Judah perished by the most horrible forms of death. Millions were sold, to serve as bondmen in heathen lands.

As a people the Jews had failed of fulfilling God's purpose, and the vineyard was taken from them. The privileges they had abused, the work they had slighted, was entrusted to others.

Before we get too proud and “judgy” we need to realize that the words of Jesus apply to the church of 2021 as well.

- **Revelation 3:14-22** - To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

When I say “church” I don’t mean a building... I mean people – The people of God – His church – which is very precious to Him. However, His assessment of the church is not based on its grand ornate buildings or fashionable services, but on the character of the people and their growth in the knowledge of Jesus. He is looking for people who reflect who He is.

- **Ellen White {COL 301.2}** - All who receive Christ as a personal Saviour are to demonstrate the truth of the gospel and its saving power upon the life. God makes no requirement without making provision for its fulfillment. Through the grace of Christ, we may accomplish everything that God requires. All the riches of heaven are to be revealed through God's people....