

EXPOSITION

- We are at the time period of Jesus' ministry where He has traveled into Jerusalem for the last time arriving by the "triumphal" entry, cleansing the temple, and being publicly confronted regarding His authority. We are told that He is spending His days teaching in the temple complex, and this passage is in part what He was teaching. This is what He was teaching "the people" (v.9). The particular form of this teaching was a parable, a story based on the common experience of people, which communicated some larger truth. First notice...

I. THE PARABLE'S ITSELF – vv.10-16a

- In the parable, the main character we are introduced to is a man described in such a way that indicates he was wealthy (with ability to buy fields, with servants, and inheritance). This man (or at least his servants), according to Matthew, plants the vineyard, sets a hedge around it, digs a winepress in it, and builds a tower. (Matthew 21:33) All the preparation is made to grow grapes, protect them from natural threats, thieves, to squeeze and ferment them for the purpose of making wine.
- Having done this, the owner leases the land to some men. These men agreed to be land tenants, doing the work of cultivating the vines, protecting the field, and producing the wine. In return for their labor they would get a portion of what was produced to sell to make a living. The rest would be the property of the landowner, who would send to get his portion, also for his use or profit.
- The owner then goes to a far country for a long time. This seems to indicate at least several years, sufficient time for the fields to be cultivated, and to expect a crop which created profit both for him and the vineyard workers.
- After that long time, the owner sends a group of servants for the purpose of collecting his portion. Probably for the purpose of the simplification of the story, Luke only mentions a single servant in each attempt. In Matthew's account, however, we are told that there are actually groups of servants sent. This would be expected, within the "real world" of the parable. The single servant is probably the official representative spokesman or steward, while the others are his assistants to help transport the many gallons on the back of beasts of burden to the far away country.

A. Attempt #1 – v.10

- At the season of harvest, when it was time for the works to pay the agreed percentage of the proceeds (in goods) to the owner, he sends a servant to collect. He wasn't asking for anything not already expected or anticipated. He wasn't coming to take of everything, but only of "some" of the fruit.
- The response to this servant is not a pleasant one. The vinedressers have decided in the absence of the owner during this long period that they are unwilling to pay up. They will keep all the proceeds for themselves, and give none to the servant to take back. He will have to return empty-handed.
- But this is not enough for them. They will demonstrate their hostility toward to field owner by beating him. On his return the owner will hear and see of the abuse his servant has suffered in belligerence toward him.

B. Attempt #2 – v.11

- The owner decides to send a second servant. He again expects for them to give his portion of what they gained. But they reject this servant also and the vinedressers will not budge on their refusal to give what is the owner's due, and treat the servant shamefully. They reject his authority as being sent by the owner, beat him, and send him away without any fruit. Again, the servant would return, face the owner, and give an account what happened.

C. Attempt #3 – v.12

- Surprisingly (if we were reading the parable for the 1st time), the owner again sends a servant (how would you like to be in his position?). The response is the same. They don't merely send him away, but first wound him, and then cast him out. But notice that the phrase "they sent him empty-handed" is missing. This is due to the fact (from what we learn in Matthew and Mark) that the man dies as a result of his wounds. The violence has escalated, and they have not only abused, but now murdered the landowners' representative. This report would be carried back by his entourage.

D. Attempt #4

- At this point the owner decides to take another course of action. Obviously, the approach of sending mere servants (though they came with his authority) hadn't worked. His plan then becomes to send his son to them. Not only is he a son, but Jesus works into the parable that he is the owner's "beloved" son. Mark's account makes clear that this is his "one" son. This is, of course, a key reference as to how the parable is to be interpreted, and how it is to be understood.
- What is surely being emphasized is the incredible patience of the owner of the field. Because of what he does in the end (i.e. destroys them), it is assumed all along that he has the power to do so now. It isn't because he is lacking ability to do something about this, but his longsuffering and patience to undeserving, unthankful, and murderous people.

- The owners' plan is to send his son with the hope that they will see who he is (perhaps involved with the previous lease negotiations), and respect him. This one will not be a mere servant representative, but an official heir of the landowner.
- What is the response? In seeing the son, they have a meeting and reason among themselves. They recognize who he is...the heir. But instead of respecting and honoring him, and simply giving what they already agreed to give, they devise another plan. They will kill him. Their purpose is doing so is that the inheritance, probably referring to the field itself, would be theirs. As the heir, the fields would eventually be the son's. We are told they followed through on their wicked scheme, casting him out of the vineyard (shaming him by treating him as if it wasn't his own) and killing him. Now the field would be all theirs. Nothing would stop them.
- Now Jesus asks a question; How will the owner of the field respond to the abuse of his servants and the murder of his son? They were sent so the master would receive the rightful due of the blessings of his field, but they rejected his attempts. He will do three things
 - 1.) He will come – until now he has been away, and has been acting by proxy through his servants and son. But now he himself will return from the far country to which he has been away for so long. The workers, due to his long absence of judgment, presumed that there were never going to be consequences for their behavior. They misinterpreted his longsuffering, perhaps thinking he was weak or cowardly. But he himself, in response to them, will come.
 - 2.) He will destroy – he will bring destruction to them. It is unclear whether he himself had the authority to do this himself, or that it means he would ensure they would remove their means for living and pursue justice so that they receive the death penalty for murder. Either way he will demonstrate his righteousness in response to their wickedness. Though longsuffering, it did not mean that he would never act finally and dramatically.
 - 3.) He will give – the owner will not abandon his plan for his field. He desires fruit from it, and rather than abandon it completely, he will give the responsibility to others.

II. THE RESPONSE TO THE PARABLE – vv.16b

- Luke tells us what the response was. But the question is, “whose response was it?” The reason I ask this question is that we face a potential problem of narrative. When we compare Matthew's account with Luke's here, it reads a bit differently. In Matthew we are told that in response to Jesus' question the people are the one's who answer the question. In Luke's, Jesus answers the question and they seem to respond negatively. I would suggest that the solution to this difficulty is this: Jesus tells the parable, and asks the question. The people answer correctly in saying that he will come and destroy them and find other workers who will be faithful. It is at this point in Luke that the “they” we are told about are the leadership themselves. They understood the repercussions of the parable, in that they were speaking about Him (v.19). They were plotting to kill Him (as the son in the parable), and so they understood that the parable was a threat as to what would happen to them. They also understood he spoke of the judgment of God, and there is an implicit reference that Jesus was, in a unique way, the Son of God.
- Their response to this? “Certainly not!” As if to say “While we certainly plan to destroy you, what you are saying the outcome is cannot be true. Our responsibilities as leaders of Israel will not be taken away, God will not destroy this nation, and it will not be given to another.

III. JESUS CORRECTION AND WARNING

- Jesus answers them by quoting the Scripture to make His point. If you say “certainly not”, then why does the Scripture say this? He quotes Psalm 118:22 (which is applied to the Lord Jesus in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:4-8). You are the builders, the ones responsible as leadership over this people. God has already said that the builders of the house of God will be the very ones who reject the one God has chosen to be the most important stone (i.e. the cornerstone) in the building.
- Jesus then goes on to give a kind of parable, slightly changing the imagery. Viewing Himself as the chief cornerstone, there are one of two ways to have dealings with Him.
 - 1.) Fall on Him – This means to cast yourself on Him in trust and hope. To do so is to be broken. We cannot come to Christ and remain the same, but in doing so we have a kind of brokenness, a humbling of ourselves. It takes on different dynamics for different people, but broken we all must be. It is to come to Him in humility and recognition that we are sinners and damaged, and yet throw ourselves on His mercy. But in this brokenness we can be truly repaired and made whole.
 - 2.) Be ground by Him – For those who will not come to Christ in this way, there is but one other option. He describes it as a grinding. It is not the brokenness of the previous way, but this is a crushing to powdered. It indicates complete and irreparable destruction. Something that is broken can be fixed, but something crushed to power cannot be.
- In v.19 we are told that the chief priests and scribes, the very ones He spoke against, recognize that this parable is about them. There was no more pointed preaching than Jesus at this point. They realized that Jesus was not preaching about some people in general, but that crosshairs were on them, and they were the target of a prophetic warning of their destruction as a result of their plots to kill Him.
- Here was God's own beloved son, and having rejected the prophets again and again under the Old Covenant, and rejecting the ministry of John the Baptist, and now rejecting the very Son of God who He sent in mercy to plead with

them, there could be in future only the anticipation of their destruction. And the stewardship of God's field (representative of the people of God) would be taken from that nation, and given to another (Matthew 21:43).

- Even this threat was a gracious call to do the right thing and to accept Jesus for who He was.

APPLICATION

What is Jesus communicating in this parable, and how does it apply to us?

- 1.) The longsuffering of God – Read through the Old Testament, summarized in this parable, and you see the amazing longsuffering of God. Again and again he calls to repentance, but does not utterly cut off Israel. His mercies continue to be extended, though they walk in their own ways, reject the prophets, and ultimately reject His own Son.
 - This is God's disposition toward you if you are not a Christian, if you have not yet accepted His Son. He comes to you in the Gospel, asking for the fruit of your life because God is your gracious owner, and you owe him life and breath and everything you have.
 - God has sent to you sermons, and books, and the Scriptures themselves, and yet you remain outside of Christ. And you hear the message now, once again, and opportunity is extended to give God your life and the praise worthy of His Name.
 - And if this is so for those outside of Christ, how much more toward His children? Let's not think of hard thoughts toward God. No, we should not toy with grace and use it as a license to sin, but as I have said recently we so easily turn what God reveals about Himself completely around. He reveals Himself as slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness, and we too often relate to Him as quick to anger, and slow in loving-kindness.
- 2.) The faithfulness of God – This is the other part, and we must never forget it. While He is longsuffering, He is faithful to both His promises and His threats.
 - He will not always endure the rejection of His Son. He will not always and infinitely extend the opportunity to turn from sin and serve Him. The time is coming, as it did for Israel in 70 AD as the climactic end of the Old Covenant, and they were left utterly desolate. So God in His faithfulness, apart from Christ, will come in such power and wrath that even the unconverted will cry out for the mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the wrath of God.
- 3.) The preeminence of Jesus Christ – By preeminence I mean supremacy or superiority. The parable communicates to us that God has His servants, representatives sent into the world, but He most supremely has His Son whom He has sent. It is one thing to reject His servants, it is another to reject His Son.
 - In that sense it matters little if one rejects the messenger, but rejection of the message of the Lord Jesus Christ carried by that messenger brings certain destruction.
 - God has said, "I will send my Son, my only beloved Son." Will you receive Him, or will you reject and bring on yourself the judgment of God?