

The Parables of Jesus #15

The Restoration of the Vineyard & the End of the Evil Vine Growers

Part I

Just prior to speaking this parable, Jesus performed *three symbolic acts* which serve as the background and context for the parable. First, in what we call today “the triumphal entry”, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey’s colt (Matthew 21:1-11) *in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9* [9:8-17 for context]. Following this, Jesus entered the temple area and began to overturn the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling (Matthew 21:12-13), *in fulfillment of Jeremiah 7:11* [7:1-15 for context]. And finally, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem the next day, he cursed a barren and fruitless fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19) *in fulfillment of Jeremiah 8:13* [8:1-13 for context, also see Luke 13:6-9].

These three symbolic acts identified the then-current condition of the temple and nation *as a den of thieves and an unfruitful fig tree, and foreshadowed their complete overthrow which Jesus himself would accomplish within that generation.* The picture Jesus had painted was this: At his coming again (his second coming) with salvation, the Old Covenant system and its patrons would be completely removed and replaced; *the den of thieves would be restored and become once again “the Father’s house.”* It was in this context that Jesus said....

Matthew 21:33-45

Listen to another parable. *There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and put a winepress in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.* When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers *to receive his produce.* The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again, he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. *But afterward he sent his son to them,* saying, “They will respect my son. But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. They took him, and *threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.* Therefore, *when the owner of the vineyard comes,* what will he do to those vine-growers? They said to Him, “*He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.....*” Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, *‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’* Therefore, I say to you, *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.* *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.*

What about this parable stands out to you the most?

What is significant about the phrase “*when the harvest time approached*”?

Why do you think the chief priests and Pharisees *understood that Jesus spoke this parable about them?*

As is so often the case, to understand the parables we must go to the Old Testament scriptures.

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing now for my well-beloved *a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.* *My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it;* then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, *when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?* So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: *I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His delightful plant.* Thus, *He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.*

Why does Isaiah call this prophecy a “song”?

This is what was known in the ancient world as a “taunt song”. (For examples of taunt songs in scripture, read 2 Kings 18:17-37, Jeremiah 51:1-3, 11, 60-64.)

What does this tell us about Jesus’s parable?

I submit the following as guidelines for interpretation:

- The landowner is *the Father*
- The vineyard is *the house (the kingdom) of Israel*
- The wall, the winepress, and the tower, are *blessings of the covenant/Divine provisions*
- The vine growers are *the leadership (scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees) of Israel*
- The groups of slaves/servants are *the Old Testament prophets*
- The Son is *Jesus*
- The “coming” of the owner of the vineyard (the landowner) is *the “second coming of Christ”*
- The “wretched end” of the vine growers is *the judgment and removal of the natural kingdom of Israel in AD70*
- The “other vine growers” who were given the vineyard are *the body of Christ, the spiritual kingdom of Israel*
- The “proceeds at the proper seasons” is *the fruit of the vineyard (the fruit of the kingdom) - righteousness and justice*

Interpretation of the parable:

The Father (the landowner) had planted Old Covenant Israel as his vineyard (his kingdom) and had provided all things necessary for a fruitful harvest. When the time came for the Father to receive his share of the crop, he sent his prophets, one after another. But, one after another, they were rejected and killed. Finally, the Father send his Son, but in their greed and wickedness, the vine growers killed the Son and hijacked the vineyard to be their own inheritance. In response to this treachery, the Owner of the vineyard “came” and destroyed those wicked tenants and leased out his vineyard to others who were worthy of it. The judgment and destruction of the Jews and Jerusalem in AD70 marked the time when the kingdom (the rule and responsibility of the vineyard) was taken from natural Israel and given to the body of Christ who would produce and provide for the Owner his share of the kingdom-crop; a harvest of righteousness and justice.

In validation of this interpretation, notice (1) what Isaiah says next and (2) how Jesus applied it....

Isaiah 5:24-30

Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble and dry grass collapses into the flame, so *their root* will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; *for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel*. On this account, the anger of the Lord has burned against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down. And the mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. *For all this His anger is not spent, but His hand is still stretched out*. He will also *lift up a standard to the distant nation, and will whistle for it from the ends of the earth*; and behold, it will come with speed swiftly. No one in it is weary or stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps; nor is the belt at its waist undone, nor its sandal strap broken. Its arrows are sharp and all its bows are bent; the hoofs of its horses seem like flint and its chariot wheels like a whirlwind. Its roaring is like a lioness, and it roars like young lions; it growls as it seizes the prey and carries it off with no one to deliver it. *And it will growl over it in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land, behold, there is darkness and distress; even the light is darkened by its clouds.*

Luke 21:20-28, 31-32

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; *because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled*. *Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people*; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. There

will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth *dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world*; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. *Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.* But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, *because your redemption is drawing near....* So you also, *when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.* Truly I say to you, *this generation will not pass away until all things take place.*

In conclusion:

The parable of “*The Restoration of the Vineyard & the End of the Evil Vine Growers*” is the story of how God in Christ was at that time restoring His Kingdom, judging and removing his unfaithful servants, and transferring the stewardship of his kingdom (his vineyard) to his righteous New Covenant people. The fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age in AD70 *signified the complete end of Judaism and the Jews as a covenant-people of God*, and; that the kingdom of God had been transformed into its New Covenant form and given to the body of Christ to render to the Father *the fruit of righteousness and justice.*

What does the fulfillment of this parable mean for us today?

Why is it important that the fruit we (the Lord’s vineyard) produce demonstrates both *righteousness and justice*?

Continued in Part II....