

³³ *“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. ³⁴ Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. ³⁵ And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. ³⁷ Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” ⁴¹ They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’S doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? ⁴³ Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”*

Text: Matthew 21:33-44 A 10-13-24 Isaiah 55:1-9 Ephesians 5:15-21 Psalm 67 Resp. Ps.: 9
Hymns: 363, 343, 411, 351

WE ARE PLANTED IN GOD’S VINEYARD

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

John says, *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”* (1 Jn. 3:1). By nature we’re like everyone else in the world: clueless when it comes to God. By nature we resist God. By nature we fight God. By nature we hate God for telling us we’re sinners who can’t do anything to save ourselves. But God in His grace opened our eyes to see the truth about ourselves, that we are sinners. God has given us faith in Jesus who died for our sins on the cross and rose again to give us forgiveness and eternal life! God has made us among His believing, saved people. For that we thank and praise Him with all our heart, and show our gratitude by fruits of faith.

Jesus tells a parable. *“There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower.”* God is the *“landowner.”* The *“vineyard”* is the kingdom of God. God had brought the Old Testament Jewish people into His kingdom – had made the Jews His people during the time of the Old Testament. Like the landowner who did so much to make the vineyard nice, God blessed His Old Testament people in so many ways. He protected them. He provided for them. He gave them their own country: the Promised Land. He sent them His faithful prophets to teach them His Word. He gave them and all people the promise of salvation in the Savior who would come from their race.

Jesus says that the landowner leased his vineyard *“to vinedressers.”* That is, God put His people under the care of the Jewish leaders, including the Jewish leaders to whom Jesus was telling this parable. The Jewish leaders were to be the spiritual shepherds of God’s people. Tragically, like so many of their forefathers, the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day had failed to be the shepherds God

wanted them to be, caring for His people and providing for their spiritual needs. Jesus described the Jewish people of that time as being *“weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”* (Mt. 9:36)

God has given us His kingdom. He has blessed us with the greatest blessings in life: faith, His Word, eternal salvation in Him, His faithful pastors to teach us and lead us with His Word, His help and guidance and protection in life, and eternal life in heaven.

Jesus says, *“When vintage-time drew near, [the landowner] sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.”* As the landowner looked for his vineyard to produce grapes, so God looked for fruits of faith and love from His Old Testament people. Because of all God does for us in Jesus, He looks for fruits of faith and love from us.

Tragically, *“The vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.”* This seems like really strange behavior. But remember, this is a parable – an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. As we heard, Jesus was telling this parable to some Jewish leaders. Just after our text we read, *“They perceived that He was speaking of them”* (v. 45). Often many of the Old Testament Jewish leaders had God’s prophets beaten, killed, or stoned. Stephen said to the Jewish leaders, *“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One....”* (Ac. 7:51-52)

This is a warning to us to listen to God’s pastors as they speak to us and tell us God’s Word. It’s a warning not to subject Jesus Christ and His Word, the Bible, to our reason and feelings, and reject Him, our only Savior.

If it was surprising how the vinedressers treated the landowner’s servants the first time he sent them, what comes next is even more surprising. Jesus says, *“Again [the landowner] sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them.”* This seems foolish of the landowner, but again, remember this is a parable. Jesus’ point is that God is very patient and merciful and loving. The Old Testament Jews mistreated and even killed many of God’s faithful prophets. Yet God kept sending His prophets to try to turn His people to Him and save them.

Many preachers today don’t preach Christ crucified for sinners. Yet God keeps sending us His faithful pastors who preach His condemning Law and His saving Gospel. Peter says, *“The Lord ... is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet. 3:9). God is so patient and merciful toward each of us because He wants to save us. Peter adds, *“Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation”* (2 Pet. 3:15). God puts up with our sin-sick world because He’s working to save as many people as He can before it’s too late.

What the landowner does now is the most astonishing thing of all. Jesus says, *“Last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”* Although his servants had been beaten and even killed, the landowner sends his son. *“When the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.”* Jesus’ point in the parable here is that God

the Father sent His Son to save everyone. As the vinedressers threw the landowner's son out of the vineyard and killed him, so Jesus was taken out of Jerusalem and crucified on Calvary. How God loves us! He willingly sacrificed His only dear Son to save us. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."* (Jn. 3:16-17)

Jesus asks the Jewish leaders, *"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"* They reply, *"He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."* With their own words they condemn themselves. Jesus says, *"He who believes in [Me] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (Jn. 3:18)

Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, *"Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected' (from the original, 'which the builders declared to be useless') 'has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"* Most of the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as God's promised Messiah and Savior. But Jesus really is the Messiah and our Savior. Although many people reject Jesus, He is the Son of God and our Savior from sin. God has established His kingdom on Jesus Christ, *"the chief cornerstone."*

Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, *"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."* Jesus lamented over the Jews, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate"* (Mt 23:37-28). The Jewish nation is no longer God's chosen people. God's kingdom is taken away from all who reject His Son, Jesus, and given to believers from all nations – to everyone who believes in Jesus. As members of God's kingdom, the fruits we produce are fruits of faith.

Jesus says, *"Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."* The Jewish leaders believed and taught that we get to heaven by our good works. Jesus told them and everyone else, *"Repent"* (Mt. 4:17). To repent means to believe what Jesus says, that we are sinners. To repent means to tell God we have sinned and ask Him to forgive us. Most of the Jewish leaders thought they were good people who led a good life, and didn't need to repent. They saw no need for Jesus to forgive their sins. They rejected Jesus as their Savior, and made Him their Judge instead. The same is true with everyone who refuses to admit he is a sinner, ask God to forgive his sins, and trust in Jesus for salvation.

How blessed we are that God has given us His kingdom. God in His amazing grace sent Jesus to save the world from our sins. Jesus earned heaven for us with His perfect life and sinless death in our place. God has given us faith in Jesus, and we are saved. We show our gratitude to God by our fruits of faith. *"Heavenly Father, keep us planted in Your vineyard and take us to live with You one day in heaven."* Amen.