



The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matthew 21:33-46)

How is God advancing His kingdom in you and through you? As believers we have a tendency to selfishly take the kingdom of God for granted while we remain in control of our own lives. The result is that His will is not advanced in or through us. We avoid heart transformation and the shaping of Christ in others, which begs the question, “*Are we really in Christ?*” When questioned about His authority by the popular and religious of the day, Jesus responded with a duo of parables. The first was *The Parable of Two Sons*. In the second, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, Jesus painted a portrait of God’s heart regarding the advancement of the His kingdom—or the lack of it—in and through His people (see Matthew 21:33-46).

The Landowner is *generous* (Matthew 21:33-34). Jesus began His story with a landowner who had planted a vineyard and rented it to tenants. The landowner represented God. The vineyard was imagery for His kingdom, or the effective reign of His will. Jesus said that the landowner had built a wall and watchtower, symbols of security. The tenants were the religious leaders to whom Jesus was telling the story.

The landowner’s decision to rent the farm was common in Palestine. Either foreign or wealthy Jewish landowners who held large farming operations would rent their acreage to poor Jewish farmers. At harvest time, payment occurred, (usually 25 percent of the yield went to the tenants).

Street Smarts for the Restoration Road

Do you see the Landowner as generous in His expression of His kingdom in and through you? How are you handling the responsibility that comes with His grace? Would those closest to you describe you as generous? This week, take five minutes each day to pray, asking God to reveal any barriers to generosity in you and to identify who should be the recipient of your time, talent, and treasure to advance His heart in them. Then, make an appointment with that person in need whom God has placed in close proximity to you. Discover how you can help them experience His generous heart.

The Landowner is *patient* (Matthew 21:35-39). At harvest time, the tenants seized the landowner’s servants, including his son. Absentee landowners were often harsh on tenants, sometimes hiring assassins who would enforce the landowner’s rule. In Jesus’ parable, the roles were reversed. The tenants acted harshly to the generous landowner,

presuming too much on their inheritance. This is how the Jewish leaders had responded to Jesus and, in essence, to God. They had taken the patience of the Landowner for granted.

The servants in the parable referred to the Old Testament prophets who were rejected and killed (see 1 Kings 18:4; Jeremiah 20:1-2). The son tossed outside the vineyard wall and killed by the tenants was an unmistakable reference to Jesus (cf. Matthew 11:27) whom the religious leaders later crucified outside the city gate (see Hebrews 13:12). The same religious leaders would have been amazed and infuriated with the patience of the landowner in Jesus' story. However, the Apostle Peter taught that God is patient because He wants all to come to repentance (see 2 Peter 3:9).

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How are you responding to the patience of the Landowner? Are you taking it for granted, finding that your heart remains untransformed while you white-knuckle control of your own life? Are you killing the advancement of the Son in you? Read a chapter a day in the New Testament in order to read it completely during the next year. Each day, ask God, "What do you want me to know, do, or change?" He will crystalize your focus on Christ.

The Landowner is just (Matthew 21:40-46). The landowner took the vineyard from the tenants and gave it to others. Jesus concluded his story with a rabbinical teaching tool—He asked a question: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" (Matthew 21:40). The religious leaders spoke judgment on themselves with their answer: "'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' the replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who give him his share of the crop at harvest time'" (Matthew 21:41).

Next, Jesus referenced Psalm 118:22 to point to His rejection and future vindication. This appeared near the end of the last of the *Hallel* praise psalms, the beginning of which had been sung when Jesus had entered the gates of Jerusalem on a donkey. In this passage, the pre-incarnate Christ is referred to as the capstone, or the cornerstone. The capstone was the last stone placed in the construction of a structure, connecting two parts of an arch. The cornerstone was the first stone placed in the construction of a building. It had at least three purposes. It was the most important stone in the foundation; the stone by which all other stones were measured and aligned; and also the stone that connected other stones together. These functions represented functions of Christ, the first and last. He builds, aligns, and connects.

The vineyard—the kingdom of God—has been taken away from proud, religious pretenders and given to the humble, those who are in Christ, either Jew or Gentile (Matthew 21:43). The *people* (*ethnos*) referenced by Jesus as being given the vineyard is singular, indicating Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ, the Capstone, or the Cornerstone.

Jesus concluded that there were two responses to this Stone: willingly broken or unwillingly broken (see Matthew 21:44). The kingdom of God is advanced in and through only those who are willingly broken to Christ, the Capstone. It is taken from the unwillingly broken—the hard hearted, the proud, the religious. The chief priests and Pharisees knew that Jesus had been describing them (see Matthew 21:45). These popular, religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus for His authoritative words, but they were afraid because the people had held Him in such high regard (see Matthew 21:46).

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These two responses to Jesus two thousand years ago represent the same two mutually exclusive responses to the Capstone today: *willingly broken* (repentant) or *unwillingly broken* (unrepentant). Which response is yours? How are you responding to the Landowner's justice in Christ?

This week, respond to God's advancement of His kingdom in you by being willingly broken to Christ. If you have been selfish with the Landowner's generosity, then willingly become broken and repent. If you have taken the Landowner's patience for granted, then willingly become broken and turn to Him. If you have presumed on God's justice in Christ, trusting in your own self-atonement with God, then willingly become broken and see life through the eyes of Jesus.

Conclusion

The kingdom of God has been taken away from the proud and given to the humble who are willingly broken on the Capstone. Bend the knees of your heart to Christ. He will build your life, align your life, and connect your life with the Cornerstone.