



HG229: Parables And Possessions
The Parable Of The Wicked Tenants

Matthew 21:33-46

Home Group Study Notes

10 Octobr 2021 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

If you couldn't break any ice, what would you
break instead?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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When I was a child, one of my favourite Saturday morning cartoons was the Roadrunner. I couldn't stand the Roadrunner character; he was an irritating big-head. But he was a necessary foil to the bedrock character of Wile E Coyote. I loved his ridiculous schemes and his considerable purchases from ACME with the sole aim of trapping the Roadrunner once and for all. Sadly, he always failed ... And almost always, his schemes backfired, and he fell victim to his own wonderfully over-engineered traps. In our reading for today, Jesus has been building a trap, and baits it by inviting the religious leaders, '*Hear another parable.*' We'll get to that in a just a bit...

'I Predict A Riot!'

Jesus is in Jerusalem, and trouble is brewing. To begin with, a few days prior to this parable, he enters the city to Messianic acclaim, stirring up the whole city (Mt 21.10). Next, he enters the Temple and forcefully drives out all that stood in the way of it being the place that witnessed to the grace and truth of God. He calls what should have been the house of prayer a den of robbers (21.12-13). Then, the blind and the lame—those whom the Law of Moses had excluded from Temple worship because of their physical disabilities—come to him and are healed, made whole, by him (21.14). Finally, in response to a challenge from the religious experts sparked by children crying out, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!', he shrugs off their indignation by revelling in the Scriptures in which they held themselves expert (21.15-16).

Gentle Jesus meek and mild? Hardly. He is deliberate in his provocations! A riot is just around the corner...

'I H A Cunning Plan ...'

Now, the religious experts are apoplectic. You can hear them saying among themselves: 'We're being outsmarted at every turn. This guy has got to go. We need a trap.' So, they figure they can oust this Galilean pretender by challenging his credentials: '*By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?*' (21.23) In other words, 'Are you Oxford or Cambridge? Do you even have a degree?'

Jesus was overturning the established order that had focussed on form over substance, with the religious experts losing touch with God's grace, and exposing their failure to be caretakers of the people, their grasping at power, and inability to hear truly the Word of God. And so, he obliges himself to answer their question, *if* they first answer his: *'The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?'* (21.24-25)

Slowly, they realise that though they were looking to set a trap for Jesus, cunningly he has set a trap for them by surreptitiously questioning their own authority. His question infers only one possible answer, and their unwillingness or inability to answer reveals not only their lack of spiritual insight and understanding, but also their rejection of the truth of God's revelation, despite their expertise in the Scriptures. It is their authority that is spurious, whereas of Jesus the Father says, *'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him'* (Mt 17.5).

Kicking The Hornet's Nest

Into this tension Jesus baits the trap with two parables, both of which deal with the difference between knowing stuff about God, and the readiness to walk in the ways of God with God. In the first parable, Jesus states plainly that the tax collectors and prostitutes understood exactly where John's baptism came from, and the result was they entered the kingdom of God. The sinners heard God's exorbitant grace—forgiveness and inclusion in the love and life of God—and jumped in! The religious leaders did not, even though they could see the effect of John's message, and that he walked and preached the way of righteousness.

But it is in the second parable—the Parable of the Tenants—that Jesus extracts the unbelief and lack of trust in God of the religious leaders: *'There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard...'* (21.33). The imagery of the vineyard surely invoked prophetic recollection: *'For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!'* (Isaiah 5.7).

The master of the house is God the Father, and Israel is his vineyard. Everything that Israel needed to be faithful to God, to live out the grace they received in and from him, was freely theirs. God blessed them, and called them to shine as lights among the nations. We find that throughout the OT, and especially in the message of the prophets.

The religious leaders—the tenants—were charged with being faithful shepherds, to be the guardians and caretakers of God's people, to teach and lead by example how to receive the faithfulness *of* God and in consequence be faithful *to* God. Expecting there to be fruit of faithfulness and righteousness, God sends his servants—the prophets—to gather in or confirm the people's trust in God.

They were also tasked with drawing the people back to faithfulness when they had abandoned God's word. But they are abused and killed. So God sends his Son—Jesus—again to receive the fruit of faithfulness... And like the prophets, he too is rejected and killed, and the authorities conspire to take his inheritance.

This parable can be seen as a very brief history of Israel, whose beginning—and indeed continuance—is wholly by God's grace. The whole of the Scriptural record is testimony to God's goodness, his faithfulness and overwhelming grace. That Israel had a propensity to unfaithfulness did not negate God's goodness. Their cyclical un-trust brings the fury of God's love, the God who agonises over any walking away from sharing life with him.

Which brings us back to Jesus, who then asks, *'When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'* You can feel the logical minds of the religious leaders working: Why would the tenants, who abused and killed the servants, suddenly become faithful to the son? How would killing the son give them his inheritance? And so they answer, *'He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.'* They've taken the bait! They're caught in the trap, yet the religious leaders seem to be clueless as to the trajectory of their response, as if they cannot see how their words reveal their rejection of the revelation of God.

So, figuratively kicking the hornet's nest, Jesus asks rhetorically, *'Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'*

Of course they had! It's a great Psalm of praise and testimony to God's faithfulness and grace. Their problem with grace was they had to let go of their control, and be prepared to hear the Word of God.

I can't but help recall the words of Jesus in John 5.39-40: *'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.'*

God's grace, it seems, had morphed into ethnic and religious boundaries, and needed to be defined and guarded by the religious leaders, and as Jesus did not abide by these boundaries, he was wholly unacceptable to them: he had questionable parentage, spurious authority, dubious friendships, disrespect for Torah, delusional ideas of God, blasphemously equalled himself with God, and was a deceiver of the people. But the truth is simply that their charges against him were deflections revealing their own unfaithfulness, their own disrespect for Torah, their own delusions... They couldn't see this, nor accept it. So the kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to a people that produced fruit, like tax collectors, prostitutes, the halt and broken and unclean. Why?

Because these knew that against all human odds, God loved them and they were overjoyed to be accepted, and willing to walk in the light of his glory! You can't earn grace. You can only receive it!

And this angered the religious (it still does!), but instead of allowing God to change their minds, they plot to make Jesus a scapegoat: Let's kill the son and take his inheritance! Sadly, as long as they hold on to their religion over and above the grace of God, they will always stumble on this cornerstone: Jesus is the one in whom all things hold together. Jesus is the one through whom all things are reconciled to God. Jesus is the one through whom we are adopted as children of God. Jesus is the one through whose blood we have redemption and peace. Jesus is the one who draws all the nations into his inheritance!

Can God Be This Good?

God is fully revealed in Jesus, and what we see in him draws us to the Father who is good beyond our wildest dreams. In Jesus, before the foundations of the world, God has delighted in us and drawn us into the fullness of his life and love.

The challenge of the parable is as applicable to us as it was to the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Like Israel, human history reveals the propensity of unbelief and cynical un-trust in God, and is marked by human attempts to find meaning, purpose, and ultimate truth. But neither human endeavour nor religion can ever produce true revelation: the coming of Jesus the Son of God into the world, his life amongst us, his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, his reconciling of all things in himself, is God's sovereign action! It is his goodness beyond our wildest dreams! The revelation of Jesus will always expose as impotent all human ways of becoming acceptable to God. All religion will do is place humans at the centre instead of Jesus.

The invitation of the parable for us is to let go of all our striving, all our ways of seeing, all our religious proprieties, so that we embrace the One who loves us and who will restore our vision so that we can see truly the expanse of his love.

We will never find God in our expectations, nor will he conform to our religious ways, no matter how earnest we may be. But as we come face to face with Jesus, we will be shown the way to the Father, and we will proclaim: *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...'* (Ephesians 1.3-4). Amen!

Emmanuel Church Text for 2021

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

Hebrews 6:19



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. 'Faith is to fear and love God above all things; to fear and love Him as He is and not as we think Him to be.' (Karl Barth) How far does religion get in the way of our ability to 'fear and love God above all things'?

2. When we read Scripture are waiting to hear God speak, or do we merely expect him to confirm with what we already 'know'? What if God says something unexpected? How might we respond?

3. Read and discuss: 'Left to ourselves we tend...to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get him where we can use him, or at least know where he is when we need him. We want a God we can in some measure control.' (AW Tozer)

4. What differences might there be between being a member of a church and being a follower of Jesus?

5. Read Ephesians 1.3-14, and be guided in praise and wonder by the Holy Spirit.

6. Spend a week praying the Jesus prayer: *'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.'* Give space to meditate on the truth of Jesus. Own your need for mercy. Then, reflect on how it opens your heart to God and others.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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