THE NEW SHOFAR

The invitation to follow Jesus isn't an invitation to live for Jesus; it's an invitation to abide in Jesus and let Him, out of the overflow of that relationship, live His life in and through us in a way that produces fruit for His kingdom. ***Vance Pitman***

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The Kingdom comes down to believing in Jesus as God's Son

The parable of the vineyard is the second of three parables in a row that Jesus spoke as He was being confronted by the chief priests and elders of the Jews in the temple. This all took place just a couple of days after He made His triumphal entry into the city, and a couple of days before His death on the cross. In the temple this last week, Jesus had cleansed the temple, healed the blind and lame in its courts, received worship in it as Messiah, and taught the people within its walls. However, the religious leaders refused to recognise His authority to do these things, asking, *By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?* This series of parables then, continues to question the Jewish leadership in order to highlight the real issue, namely their stubborn refusal to repent and believe. What would it take for them to believe what God was saying to them?

What more could God have done for Israel?

Speaking with the authority of His Father, Jesus commands, "*Hear another parable*... Imagine how this hit these proud men. The last thing they wanted to hear was another parable, especially not another like the one Jesus just spoke against them (the two sons)! But Jesus goes on and lays out the parable of a certain landowner who owned a vineyard. While he was away, the landowner leased the vineyard to tenant vinedressers. No Jew would fail to recognize in this story a picture of the relationship between the Lord and His people Israel. Jesus' parable of the vineyard begins almost exactly like Isaiah's **Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5**…*For the vineyard of Yahweh Almighty is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help* (**5:7**).

Yahweh (God) had planted them. He called their father Abraham out of a pagan world and promised to make him into a great nation. He renewed that covenant with Isaac and Israel. He delivered them from bondage in Egypt and gave them the land of promise. He protected them from their enemies. He gave them good statutes and ordinances that would bless them. He dwelt in their midst in the tabernacle and temple. He entrusted Israel's care to its priests, kings, and nobles—the "vinedressers" who were to teach the people His word and lead them in His ways. All done out of love with abundant care and compassion,

The landowner (God) gave the vinedressers time to produce the fruit of the vineyard, then sent his servants to collect what was due to him as the owner of the vineyard. But instead of honouring the owner, they abused his servants. Even in the face of that evil, the landowner is gracious and patient. Even in the face of such dreadful acts, the landowner remains gracious and patient. He sent other servants; but they were treated the same. Unwilling to give up on his vinedressers…*then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son*. When the son arrives, there should be no doubt that he carries the authority of his father, the owner of the vineyard. Even if they did not respect the owner's servants, surely, they will honour his son.

It is Babel all over again!

The tenants see an opportunity here. They believe that if they kill the son, they will then receive his inheritance: possession of the vineyard. They will become landowners themselves! They too wanted to build a tower up into the heavens and become "gods". It was bad to mistreat the servants. It was worse to kill them. But in arrogance and defiance to kill the owner's son is an outrageous act of evil and greed. What a contrast between the gracious and patient landowner and the wicked and petulant vinedressers! They knew His miraculous powers. They knew His claims. They knew He spoke the word of God. Still, they refused to believe in Him and even sought to kill Him.

After finishing the parable, Jesus went on to quote **Psalm 118**… *The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.* The chief cornerstone was the most important stone in the building. The Greek word used here could refer either to the cornerstone which formed the foundation of the building or the capstone which was the final stone placed at the top of an arch, completing the building and securing the structure. Jesus is both. He is both cornerstone and capstone. He is the foundation and beginning of God's kingdom, and he is the one who completes it and brings everything to fulfillment.

To reject Jesus is to reject the son of the landowner and to be like those wicked vinedressers. By the chief priests' and elders' own admission, it would be right for the landowner to take the vineyard from them and to give it to someone else. And so, Jesus gives them His verdict, *…the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruit of it*.

the kingdom of God will be taken from you

Imagine the shock to the religious leaders upon hearing those terrible words of judgment! The privilege of Israel, of her leaders, would be ripped violently away, and it would be transferred to others. No longer would Israel's twelve tribes comprise the people of God. Rather, through His twelve apostles Jesus would build a renewed and transformed people of God, His church, a new race comprised of people *from every tribe, tongue, people and nation*, being fruitful, multiplying, and bearing fruit for His kingdom.

But this is not just a parable aimed at the Jewish leaders as though they are the only ones to misread the reality of Jesus as the Messiah the Son of God. Every Christian faces the very same demands, the divine expectations that these Jewish elders could not accept. It was John the Baptist's message: ***repent and believe***. That is a biblical demand that extends beyond any specific moment of coming to believe in Jesus. It is about an ongoing life transformation, of daily opening up to the grace and power of the Holy Spirit at work, speaking to us, so that our every word and deed speaks eloquently of the love God has for all people, saints and sinners alike. This is not something we do automatically. It is a response to ongoing divine initiatives in our lives, initiatives that only become apparent as we allow God's voice (grace) to be our guide and strength through daily prayers, daily readings of scripture and in our communion with fellow believers. Keeping in mind the Last Judgment scene of Matthew 25, who wants to be among the goats?