

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-6 Parable of the Tenants

Why do people steal what they know belongs to others? Why do violent people take the lives of the innocent? The Bible gives the answer; Satan has blinded such people. They desire for things that belong to others to use for their own selfish purposes. Such people live as though they will never have to give an account for their actions. They live in rebellion to God's order for this world. In this lesson Jesus deals with the pride and selfishness of the religious leaders. Using a parable, he warns them that they will not escape the judgment of God.

While teaching in the temple, Jesus told the people another parable: "A certain landowner planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit."

The vineyard wall was built to keep out animals and thieves. The watchtower was a shelter and a second means of guarding the property. The winepress anticipated a good harvest and the production of juice. After waiting for several years, the time came for the first grape harvest. Only then did the owner send his servants to collect his portion.

"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and threw stones at a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said."

In this story God, represented by the landowner, looked for a harvest of righteousness from his people Israel. He planted his people in a good land. When they turned from him, he sent his servants the prophets to guide them back to the right way. Throughout Israel's history they killed and beat those sent to warn them of their evil. Finally he sent his son Jesus, the best he had to win back their hearts to him.

Jesus went on, saying, "When the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him" (Matt 21:33-39).

Sent by God, Jesus was rejected and condemned by the religious leaders. Some of the leaders listening that very day realized they were the tenants Jesus was speaking about. They wanted total control over the nation; because they thought they knew what was best. They failed to remember that God's watchful eye was on them.

Jesus continued the story by asking, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," the crowd replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed” (Matt 21:40-44).

Jesus asked the crowd their opinion about what the landowner should do in such a situation. Their reply was that the owner should judge those evil men, and bring their lives to an end. He could then rent the field to others who would deal justly with the landowner. Jesus confirmed their opinion by quoting from Psalm 118. He spoke about the people of Israel and their rejection of God’s plan. Rejected by the leaders of the people, Jesus became the chief cornerstone of the temple God would build, the church. Every believer in God would be a part of this new living temple.

God would give his kingdom to those who would produce the fruit the king required. Here Jesus revealed that the Gentiles would be a part of his kingdom. Using again the image of a cornerstone Jesus said two things. Those who fall before him in repentance will be broken of their selfishness and sin. This will give them new life. Those who reject Jesus as Messiah will be crushed in judgment, as when a rock falls and crushes a pot. Such people will experience only the wrath of God.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd. The people believed that he was a prophet (Matt 21:44-46).

The religious leaders realized that they were the wicked tenants referred to in the parable. Driven by anger they wanted to stop Jesus. But since they feared the crowds, they waited for another time.

This story is **important** because it reveals how Jesus and his Father viewed the Jewish religious leaders who had broken their covenant with God and thus chose their own fate.

The **main truth** of this story is that the Kingdom of God was opened to non-Jews because Israel failed to produce the fruit that God sought in their lives.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What did the people who rented the vineyard do to the servants of the master who came to collect the master’s portion?

A. [Pause] If you said, “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, threw stones at a third, and then they killed his son,” you are correct.

2. What did the people listening to the story say should happen to those who refused to give the master his portion of the harvest?

A. [Pause] If you answered that they said, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” you are correct.

3. What did Jesus say was the meaning of the Parable of the Tenants?

A. [Pause] If you answered that Jesus said, “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you religious leaders and given to a people who will produce its fruit,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After telling the story ask this question, “Jesus knew that the religious leaders would arrest and have him crucified. What was his attitude toward them as illustrated in this story?” (He told them the truth about their situation, but still showed them the way of escape. He pointed to himself as their Messiah and God’s only salvation.