

Kingdom (Part 9) The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

4/6/2025

This morning we will be looking at two parables from Matthew 21:28-46 The Parable of the Two Sons & The Parable of the Tenants. These two parables not only involve the people but also some of the leaders in Israel. Men who would or should have known the Scriptures best.

For context we will begin today's lesson in Matthew 21:23-27

“Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Taken to its simplest form here we have the leaders of Israel being more concerned with the thoughts of man than with the thoughts of God. For they feared the people more than God's Word. They could not see John the Baptist as the one spoken of in Malachi and therefore could not understand who Jesus was. Or as we saw from John 1:10-11 in last week's lesson when speaking about Jesus - *“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”*

This scene above sets the stage for the two parables which followed.

Jesus continues with these words (**Matthew 21:28-46**) -

Parable 1

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”

Here we find no need to explain the parable for Jesus does that for us. However let us notice the examples Jesus uses in this parable. Things that these leaders should have been well familiar with from Scripture. Consider -

1. This idea of a man having two sons. In last week's lesson we looked at Paul's statements in Romans chapter 9 where he used numerous passages from Scripture concerning Israel's past to show how God had tried to prepare them (Israel) for the coming of the Messiah, and yet they

stumbled over Him when he arrived. Remember the part in Paul's statements about two sons - *"For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." (Genesis 21:12) In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." (Genesis 18:10,14) Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23)"* the path (history) of these two sons would have been well known to these leaders in Israel. Just as would Cain and Able, another two sons.

2. On a broader note - to those leaders there were simply Jews and Gentiles in their world. Jews were God's people and Gentiles were not .
3. Next this account involves a vineyard. The song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5) would have been another vivid reminder to these men. More on that later in this lesson!
4. Both Moses and Joshua had gathered all the people of Israel before them to read the whole law of God as commanded. This was to have the people affirm and reaffirm they would follow all of God's commands. To which at that time they all had agreed to do just that. But in the end they turned from God's Word and in the days of Jeremiah we read - *"This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.' Therefore hear, you nations; you who are witnesses, observe what will happen to them."* Surely these leaders would remember their nations history and the results of Israel not having obeying God's commands after saying they would.
5. Now tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom and not you. Again recall in last week's lesson the words of Paul quoting from Hosea about people other than Israel being called God's people. Gentiles entering first into this kingdom and not only Gentiles but tax collectors and prostitutes!
6. First shall be last and last shall be first!

Parable 2

Note* I have highlighted some of the passages to point out some of the things those leaders would find familiar in Scripture with Israel's past.

*"Listen to another parable: **There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it 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 tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned 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. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.'***

what will he do to those tenants?" "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they 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'? (Psalm 118)

"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.**" 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 because the people held that he was a prophet.

In the following below I will include the **highlighted** passage from the parable above and underlined the section of a passage of Scripture they should have already been familiar with.

1. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower.

(One that I referenced earlier above - the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7)

"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

2. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third."

Matthew 23:29-34 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started! "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town."

3. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. "But 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.

Some of these leaders present before Jesus on this day may have been the very people who participated in the trial of Jesus. But notice the detail of that which I have underlined above.

Or as the writer of Hebrews states it -

“The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.” (Hebrews 13:11-12) The Hebrew writer is referencing a command in the Law for the priests to follow when sacrificing animals. Consider the words below.

“Bring the bull to the front of the tent of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. Slaughter it in the Lord’s presence at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Take some of the bull’s blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar. Then take all the fat on the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them, and burn them on the altar. But burn the bull’s flesh and its hide and its intestines outside the camp. It is a sin offering.” (Exodus 29:10-14)

4. “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”?***

“Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad. Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (Psalm 118:19-29)

Psalms are songs. And these songs were sung often. This particular passage was part of the ‘Hallel’ meaning ‘praise’ and was sung during the Jewish festivals. As stated in the Psalm itself - “With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.”

To which Jesus asked the leaders of Israel - **“Have you never read in the Scriptures:**

5. “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”

As prophesied in Hosea 2:23

*“I will plant her for myself in the land;
I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’
I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’;
and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”*

And as referenced by Paul in Romans 9:22> (see last weeks lesson for details)

6. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.

Here Jesus once again speaks of 'this stone' and its application to anyone. Which once again would include those to whom he was speaking. And this time the leaders of Israel respond.

7. "They looked for a way to arrest him,"

Which they, the leaders of Israel, did. BUT! As Peter said in his speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:22-33) -

"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it."

Just as it was prophesied about in The Old Testament (Isaiah 52:8-10) -

"Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God."

The scene of which Isaiah 52:8-10 had spoken was fulfilled by Jesus coming to earth as the Messiah. Peter during his speech at Pentecost spoke of how the people of Israel had responded to His arrival. 'They with the help of wicked men put Jesus on a cross'. But Peter's speech at Pentecost that day didn't end there. It continued and also contained these words which we are so familiar with -

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Sadly many of these leaders of Israel to which Jesus had spoken these parables on that day were also like the people of Isaiah's day. They had eyes but could not see, and ears but would not hear. And as that passage from Isaiah continues with these words - *"Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

God still makes the same offer to all of mankind today. That is to turn away from our sins and back to God, the one who created us in His image. Then God will heal us.