

Lesson 9

Proper 22

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 21:33–46

Jesus was interacting with the Jewish religious authorities. He had forcefully cleansed the temple and now was teaching there on Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week. The Jewish leaders challenged Him to declare by what authority He was doing these things. Instead, Jesus told the parable of the two sons, turning the focus on them. His parable exposed their unwillingness to go beyond an outward yes of formal religion in their relationship with the Lord. He followed that parable with this parable of the tenants, in which His incisive judgment moved beyond their spiritual shallowness to their outright rejection of Him as the Promised One—and their resultant loss of the kingdom.

As usual, His story was easy to understand. The practice of renting out vineyards to tenant farmers was well known. In such an arrangement, the tenants gained a place in which to live and work and shared in the harvest at an agreed-on percentage. The landowner benefited by having his vineyard properly cared for and made productive for him. The imagery Jesus used was also familiar, for it was drawn from Isaiah's picture of Israel as the Lord's vineyard, today's Old Testament Lesson.

136. Who were the “tenants” assigned the task of caring for the Lord’s “vineyard”?

137. What was pictured by the “owner” sending his “servants” to collect his fruit and finally sending “his son”?

In telling the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28–32), Jesus forced His hearers to interpret it by asking, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” (v. 31). Using the same technique here, He forced them to pronounce the judgment against unfaithful “tenants”—against themselves.

138. Why did Jesus quote Scripture as He moved from their analysis of His story to applying it specifically to them as the “tenants” of the “vineyard”?

Quoting from Psalm 118, Jesus changed His analogy. Cornerstones were key stones in ancient buildings, establishing the line of the walls and tying them together. Stones for this purpose were carefully examined, and flawed stones were rejected. The Greek for “rejected” is from the word used for testing coins to determine if they are genuine. As Jesus applied the words of the psalm to the

Jewish leaders, He was forcing them to see that they had examined and tested Him and had decided that He was a counterfeit messiah. But with the psalm He stated clearly that He would be shown to be the promised Cornerstone.

139. How does the analogy of the rejected stone that became the cornerstone complement the point of His parable? Who are the people to whom the kingdom of God will be given? What is the difference between the results of “one who falls on this stone” and “when the [stone] falls on anyone”?

140. Did the parable and Jesus’ application of it have the effect He desired? How may we apply this parable to the Church today? (See 1 Corinthians 4:1–2; 3:10–15.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 5:1–7

Isaiah was God’s prophet in Jerusalem during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Politically, the Kingdom of Judah was under the threat of mighty Assyria. Isaiah encouraged confidence in the Lord’s help and discouraged the pursuit of political alliances. The Assyrian conquerors swallowed up the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and then came against Jerusalem. Isaiah encouraged King Hezekiah to trust the Lord, and God’s angel went out and slew 185,000 Assyrians and forced their withdrawal. Isaiah, however, continued to point to Judah’s ultimate doom under God’s judgment, condemning their false confidence that was based simply on the fact that the temple stood in Jerusalem and its worship rituals were being continued. Isaiah 1–39 ends with Isaiah pointing ahead to Babylon as the instrument of Judah’s fall.

The prophecy of Isaiah provides some of the loftiest formal prophetic literature in the Old Testament. Because of Isaiah’s assurances of God’s rescue of the remnant and his detailed description of the Suffering Servant, the promised Savior, Isaiah is called “the evangelist of the Old Testament.” This song of the vineyard is unique in prophetic literature in its use of a parable and its “love song” style. Horace Hummel says in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, “It is widely supposed that Isaiah played the role of a troubadour, singing a sort of love song in order to first attract attention for his judgmental punchline, and that certainly would not be out of character for all that we know of prophetic behavior” (p. 201).

141. Since the song depicted the Lord’s love of Israel, what is suggested by “He built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it”?

142. Why was it appropriate for the Lord to expect it “to yield grapes” from His people? What was going to happen because they yielded only “wild grapes”? (See Deuteronomy 28:15–24.)