

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.)

The contrast between the “grapes” the Lord expected and the “wild grapes” His people produced is stated in verse 7 in a play on words. The words sound alike in Hebrew: He looked for “justice,” *mishpat*, but found “bloodshed,” *miespah*; for “righteousness,” *sedeqah*, and heard “an outcry,” *se’aqah*.

143. What does it say to us that God’s expectations of fruit are described in terms of our interaction on the horizontal, human level? (See Isaiah 1:10–17; Micah 6:6–8; 1 John 3:16–18; 4:19–21.)

144. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Philippians 3:4b–14

All of Paul’s letters include warning against the influence of Judaizers, Jewish Christians who insisted that Christianity is a matter of “Jesus plus”—faith in Jesus plus compliance with the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. They went to Gentile churches and told Gentile Christians that if they wanted to be real Christians, they, in effect, had to become “Jewish” Christians. Paul warned the Philippian Christians to look out for “the dogs,” “the evildoers,” and “those who mutilate the flesh” (v. 2). He insisted, “We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (v. 3).

Then, in today’s Epistle, he declared that he was born of orthodox parents who circumcised him on the eighth day, was of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee, obedient to the Jewish laws, faultless as far as legalistic righteousness. He said, “If anyone else thinks he has reason for ____, I have more.”

145. Why did Paul emphasize his qualifications as a Jew so strongly even though he was writing to this Gentile congregation in Philippi?

146. How did Paul describe his goal in life as a Christian?

147. How could “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,” to which he had formerly devoted his life, become “loss” and “rubbish” to Paul as compared to “that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”? (See Romans 3:19–24; 7:18–19.)

148. What is the significance for our own lives when we make Paul's phrases our own: "I have suffered the loss of all things . . . that I may know [Christ]," "and the power of His resurrection," "and may share His sufferings," "becoming like Him in His death," and "attain the resurrection from the dead"?

149. Why does running the race as a disciple of Jesus require that we forget what is behind and focus our attention on the goal before us?

Note the contrasts in Paul's phrases: "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own" and "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Compare John 15:16.)

150. What comfort is there for us in what Paul expressed in this way? What challenge?