

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS. Matt. 21.33-45 8th Oct.2023

Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem and triumphantly enters the city on a borrowed donkey colt.. Matthew writes that this is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 "Behold your King comes to you, humble and mounted on a colt, the foal of a donkey." What a contrast this picture gives to us! A King, a person of high status in earthly terms, humbly riding on the most ordinary of beasts of burden, a colt.

The crowd cheered Jesus and shouted "Hosanna to the son of David" possibly among them were also some who would later change their "tune" and deny Him.

Jesus proceeds to the temple and overturns the table of the money-changers and the seats of the dove sellers, who were obviously robbing the people. This was a demonstration of righteous judgment on the misuse of the "sacred" space. "My house shall be called a house of prayer but you are making it a den of thieves." (Matt 21:12-13)

The blind and the lame people, knowing his reputation, came to him and he healed them.....in the ' Temple.'

The proclamation of the people, the overturning of the tables, healing and curing the suffering, right in the temple precinct, angered the Chief Priest and scribes. They were offended! Jesus was now in their "sight" and on a trajectory that would lead Him to suffer at their hand and the fulfillment of His ministry. (Pharisees, scribes and elders were part of the Sanhedrin who were the supreme legislative court of justice and council of Jerusalem under Roman rule.)

The next day Jesus returns to the city, was hungry and curses the fig tree for not being fruitful. Does this have something more to do with the temple episode, where hungry people would come to worship, but the institution, 'The Temple', was dry and devoid of feeding God's people with the food of the spirit, meeting their needs for wholeness, and communion with their God.

It is in the temple precinct that the priest and elders confront Jesus about His authority. Masterfully, with wisdom, Jesus replies with his own question about John's baptism....."Did his authority come from heaven, or human authority?" The elders could not answer because they were frightened of the crowd's response. They were caught in their own reasoning.

It was time for another parable.....There were two sons, both who were asked to work in the vineyard for their father. The first one said "No" but changed his mind, repented and went to the vineyard, the other "Yes" but didn't go as the Father had requested. Jesus now asks his own question, "Who did the will of the Father?" They were able to answer the obvious, "The first son," not realizing that the parable was about themselves..

Again we hear that the Kingdom of God is about the rule and reign of God in our hearts, resulting in obedience and righteous living ... "bearing fruit." A change of heart and mind which seemed far easier for the tax collectors and the prostitutes who were already aware of their need for a new beginning in life.

2. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants. This Parable is important enough to be included in Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19.

A Landowner planted a vineyard. Fenced, dug a wine press and built a watchtower. He made it ready for tenants to lease whilst he went to another country. Harvest time came and he sent his slaves to collect his produce. The tenants beat, killed and stoned the slaves. He sent more slaves and they were treated the same way. Finally he took a risk and sent his own son hoping that they would respect him. The tenants were given three chances to change their minds.

No respect was given and the son was treated brutally and finally killed.

Again Jesus asks the question to those in charge of the Temple. "When the owner comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

They answer Jesus correctly – "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at harvest time." Again the hierarchy did not understand that they, the leaders who had killed the prophets in the past, (Isaiah 5:1-9), had been trapped into a circumstance of their own making. This parable was all about them.

Israel was God's vineyard, his own people, the leaders, those in charge, were the tenants, the slaves sent were like the prophets (stoned and killed) and the son was like the rejected cornerstone of the building, as Jesus was to be. (Isaiah 8:11-15) They had three chances to repent and return to God.

Jesus replied:- "The kingdom of God, (their inheritance,) will be taken away from you and given to a people that produce the fruits of the kingdom. Those who worship in spirit and truth having a change of heart and behavior. (love, compassion etc.) (Jn 14:23-24)

This is the judgment of a covenant God on the leaders of the nation. A clear message that the Kingdom of God is now given to a people of God, whose constitution would be founded on the spiritual basis of relationship and faithfulness instead of ritual. The difference between "law and grace." After hearing this parable, the Chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to arrest him but they feared the crowds who regarded Jesus as a prophet.

The Pharisees and Chief priests, the professionally religious of society, disdained the outcasts, lepers, tax collectors, harlots, or anyone who did not meet their criteria. They kept the law to the letter and demanded others do the same to be acceptable. They were self-righteous. Their behavior was outwardly good but inwardly corrupt, full of hypocrisy, like white-washed tombs where the outside looks beautiful but inside are dead bones. (Matt 23:27. For a fuller explanation read the whole chapter.) Some of the better ones were Nicodemus and Paul.

Another example is the stoning of the adulterous woman and Jesus response "He who is without sin can cast the first stone." The battle lines are now between "Law and Grace". (John 8:1-11) We have an account of the tax collector and the Pharisee. (Luke 18: 9-14) who were both praying. The Pharisee prays- "God I thank you that I am not like other people; thieves rogues; adulterers or even like this tax collector.

3.

I fast twice a week and pay my tithes." He is self righteous and contemptuous of others, exhibiting a very superior judgmental attitude. He had forgotten about justice, mercy and faith. (Hosea 6:6)(Isaiah 58:6 -Gods chosen fast)
It is relationship God wants -not ritual.

The tax collector knew his shortcomings and asked for mercy. In the kingdom of God everything is turned the right side up. Expectations are overthrown. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted. There is a division now between faith and unbelief. (Matt 20:16) The first will be last and the last will be first.

The whole system had become corrupted. There were gaping flaws because the leaders had misused their power, which was over people instead of leading them to worship God with their hearts. They were not setting the example instead, laying heavy burdens on them and not helping to lift them. Gatekeepers! There had to be a better way to change mankind. No wonder Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem, the very heart of the problem. Something more powerful had to happen.. And it did.....God sent his own Son who died but rose from the dead, to restore what had been lost and to bring in the New Kingdom of God,whose foundation would be built on love,(Jesus sacrifice) justice and mercy .

A loving, passionate God, still calls his people to-day. He calls us to forget our traditions, (sometimes even the good ones). He doesn't even want our sacrifices such as tithing. In the words of Hosea, God wants our steadfast love and knowledge of Himself. He desires a people, every part of us to become a Holy Nation, a royal priesthood totally loving God and his family, progressively being changed daily into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour (1 Cor:13.1-4

The great invitation of Jesus is still for us all today, as the way to relationship with him, bringing freedom, peace and healing. Listen to his gentle voice as he proclaims to any who will listen:-

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matt.11:29-30)Come and get to KNOW ME.

For I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

"I am here to heal the broken heart,

I am here to set the captive free . To free you from broken relationships, wrong choices, the daily struggles of life, sickness of body, mind and spirit.

I am friend to the lonely, the widow and outcast and promise to never leave nor forsake you. I am closer than a brother. I am here to open the eyes that have been blinded to see truth.

Come unto me with all your burdens and heaviness of spirit and I will give you the only peace that will give you rest. Rest for your soul.

I love you forever and promise you everlasting life.. I am the vine, you are the branches if you abide in me you will be fruitful."

This is "Kingdom of God "fruitfulness. As we begin to bear fruit, others see God's Kingdom at work in our lives and come to desire the same life giving power.