

Isaiah 5:1-7 Matthew 21:33-46
“And the kingdom goes to ...”
October 4, 2026

When Jesus tells this parable, he is counting on his audience to remember one of the teachings of Isaiah. Some 800 years earlier, Isaiah had talked about a vineyard. Really what he was telling the people of his day was how much God loved them. He drew a picture of a vineyard owner carving out a wine vat from the side of a rock, with his own hands. He painted, with his words, a picture of tenderness and attentiveness, of caring and devotion, of passion and affection. Then Isaiah told the people about the produce of the vineyard. Even though it was given every advantage, every chance, instead of producing grapes for wine, it returned wild, sour, useless grapes. He told of the resultant heartbreak of the vineyard owner, and then of his judgment upon the vineyard, his condemnation of that vineyard.



Jesus' audience, when he tells the parable of the wicked tenants, is comprised primarily of pharisees and scribes - scholars of the holy writings and of the prophets. They know the history of their ancestors; how they were rescued by God and brought out of the land of Egypt; how they were brought to a land abundant and fertile, a land of milk and honey. They know that Isaiah told his prophetic story because the people of Israel had broken with the ways of God, continuously. They know that the people of their day were little better. They would have invited anyone, including Jesus, to look for themselves at the sinners and reprobates, the ne'er-do-wells and the outcasts.

So Jesus tells them this story, to tease their memories. On the surface, the story seems to be about the daily operation of a vineyard. In essence, it's about the ever increasing abyss that the stubbornness, willfulness, sinfulness of the people, all people, are creating between themselves and God.

The owner of the vineyard is God. The tenants are the children of Israel, the chosen people. The mistreated, beaten and murdered servants are the prophets of Israel. The owner's son, well that son is the story teller himself. And the other tenants?? They are those who have previously be shunned, rejected, dismissed, discredited by the first tenants as outsiders, as unworthy to tend the vineyard.

Through the story, Jesus is warning those in power, those in control, those who have been given the privilege of tending the vineyard. He's saying that the vineyard belongs to God and that those who try to "steal" it, to take over being the owner of it, will lose it altogether.

This story is about the kingdom of God and who will inherit it. The story suggests that the kingdom may go to unexpected recipients! Yet not before God has done everything to bridge the gap between himself and us.

Sometimes when we read/hear this parable, we are taken aback by the ending, by the reality that the owner of the vineyard tosses the first tenants out, by the real possibility that the kingdom of God may be taken away from us and given to a people who produce the fruits of the kingdom. And certainly, we must not lose sight of that warning of judgment.

However, it is equally important for us to note the extent to which the owner of vineyard goes to restore the tenants into a right relationship with him and his vineyard. He sends servants, then more servants, and then even his own son. In fact, he spends years and

years trying to restore the relationship with the tenants. He endures years of their abuse and dishonesty, years of no return on his investment. He stops at nothing to try to win them to him.

Paul also talks about who the recipients of the Kingdom of God will be. He tells the Philippians that the kingdom of God does not belong to those who make a great impression in this world or who have a superb dossier. He begins by sharing his curriculum vitae, describing, in detail, all he has going for him. He has lived his life following the letter of the law - circumcised on the 8th day; a member of the people of Israel, in the tribe of Benjamin no less; a Hebrew born of Hebrews; a leader in the synagogue, a Pharisee; passionate, even zealous for his faith; and utterly blameless under the law. Then Paul declares that none of this counts, in God's kingdom. All that matters, he says, is Jesus, God's Son, God's way of reaching out to us, across the abyss born of our sinfulness. All that matters is faith in God's love and grace and whether or not we receive it and live under it.

Paul says, "All I want now is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection ... and to become like him ... to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead ... which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above."

Our sinfulness has created a great chasm between ourselves and God. We are in danger of missing out on the kingdom. Can anything bridge the gulf? You know the answer, in your head, as well as I do. But what about your heart? Does it sing out the answer? Does it know and love the God who loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, ... not to judge the world, but to be its Saviour?

As tenants in God's vineyard, are we faithful workers, loyal stewards, grateful recipients of his goodness to us? Are we any good at tending the vineyard, ensuring that it will produce an abundant yield? And, how will we receive the Son of the owner of the vineyard, when he comes?