

A STING IN THE TALE:

JESUS' FINAL STORIES FROM MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

A STING IN THE TALE (WEEK 2: LOOK WHO WILL BE GIVEN GOD'S KINGDOM) SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT (from last week): What difference has God's grace made to you and your treatment of other people around you?

WARM-UP Questions

1. Are there areas of your life in which you've really struggled to acknowledge God as the owner?
2. What most strikes or surprises you about this parable?

READ Matthew 21:33-41

3. Who is Jesus speaking to in v.33 (hint see v.23)?
4. This parable is an allegory: different people or things represent something else in real life. Who does the vineyard owner, the tenants, the son, and the vineyard represent?
5. How do you feel about the owner sending his Son, given what happened to the servants? What is this telling us about God?
6. What is Jesus saying about the people interrogating him?
7. Who will be given the Kingdom? Why are they given the Kingdom?
8. What are the characteristics of tenants who act like owners? Do you agree that this is the problem of the world today? (See Romans 1:18-23).
9. Do you ever struggle in recognising God as the true and proper owner of your life? Are there particular areas that you are challenged with more to hand over ownership?

READ Matthew 21:42-46

10. Why does Jesus quote the Scriptures so often? Why is he using this quote in v.42?
11. Who does Jesus say the Kingdom of God will be given to in v.43? What do their lives look like (hint Galatians 5:16-26)?
12. How would you have responded to Jesus' words, had you heard him speak them that day?
13. The Kingdom will be taken from those religious leaders who reject Jesus and given to us! What sort of fruit ought we to be bearing? How is this an acknowledgement of the true owner of our lives?

APPLY (to this week): In what areas of your life could you hand over more ownership to God?

PRAY: *Gracious God, our maker and our judge. We are so thankful for the gift of your Son, the stone the builders rejected. Please forgive us for the ways we have rejected you and help us to embrace you with our whole lives, saying yes to you each day. Thank you for your Son our Rock and our redeemer. Amen!*



GOING DEEPER

A STING IN THE TALE (WEEK 2: A LOOK WHO WILL BE GIVEN GOD'S KINGDOM) GOING DEEPER RESOURCES & SUGGESTIONS

Each week we provide **additional resources** that help to go deeper with whatever series we're currently focusing on as a church. Resources could include recommended books, articles, online sermons, courses, or videos. These are optional extras! Please don't feel under pressure to look at every resource, but consider what could be useful to.

Talks & Other Audio

- AUDIO: "Parable of the Tenants" – A sermon by Allister Begg: <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/parable-of-the-tenants/>
- AUDIO: "The Marvellous Rising of A Rejected Stone" – A Easter sermon by John Piper: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-marvelous-rising-of-a-rejected-stone>
- AUDIO: "The Parable of the Tenants" – A sermon by William Taylor: <http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/media-library/src/talk/52739/title/the-parable-of-the-tenants>

Study Guide for Lent

- BOOK: For Lent this year we have developed a Lenten Guide looking at some of the final stories of Jesus. You can download a PDF copy here: <http://stbarts.com.au/2017/02/20/lenten-study-guide-a-sting-in-the-tale-download-or-order/>

Prayer for Lent

- Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP)

Articles and Other Reading

- ARTICLE: A helpful article about the symbolism of the Vineyard: <http://www.crivoice.org/vine.html>
- ARTICLE: "What is the meaning of the Parable of the Vineyard" – An article about the parable of the Vineyard: <https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-vineyard.html>
- ARTICLE: The Parable of the Tenants – A short Bible study linking our text to the rest of the Bible: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/parable-tenants/>
- COMMENTARY: Freely available commentary on Matthew 21:28-46: http://thirdmill.org/articles/kno_chamblin/NT.Chamblin.Matt.21.28-46.pdf
- ARTICLE: "Why did they Kill Jesus" – A helpful Article by Keven DeYoung: <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2009/12/02/why-did-they-hate-jesus/>

Talk 2/6 (A Sting in the Tale): 12/03/17

“Look who will be given God’s Kingdom” by the Rev’d David Browne

Bible Passage: Matthew 21:33-46

INTRODUCTION \ \ CONTEXT AND RESPONSE

This morning is the second sermon in our Lenten series examining the final stories from Matthew’s Gospel.

As Adam showed us last week Jesus has just entered Jerusalem and started shaking things up.

He’s ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey, just like kings of old, to shouts of “Hosanna!” from crowds of people.

He goes to the temple and accuses those selling things of turning his Father’s house into a house of robbers and the whole city is in a tizz asking: “Who is this?”

Jesus then returns to the temple and preaches about the Kingdom of God but he’s confronted by the chief priests and the elders of the people:

v.23 “By what authority are you doing these things?” in other words: “Who do you think you are?”

In response Jesus tells the parable of the two sons, which we looked at last week,

exposing how the tax collectors and prostitutes, those willing to repent and trust in God, do the will of God while self satisfied religious people reject Him completely.

This morning we have another parable and another Sting in the Tale.

“Who does Jesus think he is?” He is:

The Father’s Son

The Marvellous Stone

More (much more) than a prophet

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#1 The Father’s Son \\ v.33-41

Look with me in v. 33, where Jesus says:

“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...” (Matthew 21:28)

The parable of the tenants is found three times in the Bible: Matthew, Mark and Luke. One of the most eminent theologians I know, (my mum) once told me that if the Bible says something once it’s important, but if it says it more than once you’d better listen carefully!

Three early disciples felt this parable was so important for understanding Jesus that they wrote it down.

It tells the story of a vineyard owner and his Son who are defrauded by thuggish tenants.

Now I’m sure you’ve heard one of those nightmare stories about bad tenants. They break things, hold wild parties, and refuse again and again to pay rent.

4

Perhaps you've had a tenant like this yourself... perhaps you are that tenant!

It seems dodgy tenants have been around for over 2000 years as Jesus ingeniously blends together this common human experience of nightmare tenants

with a metaphor that would have been familiar to his audience:

Prophets who came before Jesus talked about the nation of Israel as a vineyard and God as the vine grower.

As we saw in our passage from Isaiah, despite God's best efforts, the vineyard (Israel) produces only bad fruit when it had every opportunity to bear good.

It would have been clear for Jesus' listeners that the vineyard owner in this story is God, and the servants he sends are the prophets, who were often rejected, persecuted or even killed by the people.

The Son is Jesus himself.

The vineyard is Israel, God's chosen people, set apart to bless the world and point to God.

The tenants are the rulers, the chief priests and the elders of the people who have abused the prophets and lived a fruitless existence in defiance of the God who made them.

5

While the parable describes something that still happens today and is quite easy to decipher, it's outrageous at the same time!

In Jesus' day, even more so than in our own, landlords had the full force of the law behind them, they could take back their property by force and punish their debtors.

You might be asking:

1. "Why in the world did the vineyard owner give the tenants so many chances? "
and

2. "What kind of father would send their Son to thieves who'd proven themselves to be violent thugs?"

This is exactly what Jesus is getting at!

Jesus' point is that God is prepared to give us more chances than we deserve and will risk his Son in order to redeem his people.

This parable looks at our world from **God's perspective:**

God gives us more chances than we deserve and is prepared to risk everything to bring us back into relationship with Him.

6

As we so often misunderstand God, the wicked tenants have misjudged the vineyard owner.

They assume his mercy is a lack of resolve, and misjudged his patience for indifference.

Historians point out that in Jesus' day, if a property went unclaimed for three years, the tenants could claim ownership.

The wicked tenants kill the Son because they think that the vineyard owner is too old or too weak to claim the property and by getting rid of the Son they can take it by force.

But the vineyard owner will not let this injustice and the final horror go unpunished.

Jesus does not leave his listeners wallowing in the sad story of the bad tenants' injustice, there will be justice, here's the sting in this tale.

He asks his audience in v.40:

when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? - Matthew 21:40

They know exactly what he will do, the only just thing he could do v.41:

"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." Matthew 21:41

7

In saying this the elders of the people and chief priests call themselves out and expose their hypocrisy.

The tax collectors and prostitutes are repenting and receiving the Kingdom of God because they can see the world from God's eyes.

They understand their role in mucking up God's world and their need to stop living for themselves and turn to Him.

The religious people refuse to see their need for God

Like the wicked tenants they despise the true owner and abuse the gift they have been given.

In doing so they reject not only the prophets whom God has sent but stand before His Son, Jesus challenging: "Who do you think you are?"

This is why the Kingdom is being given to others, because They are willing to receive Jesus and live for Him.

Friends let's never mistake God's patience for indifference and his grace for powerlessness.

Let's never delude ourselves into thinking we can live without Him.

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#2 The stone the builders rejected will become the capstone\\ 42-44

Having exposed their rejection of him, Jesus now shows his audience that the way forward is not to reject but to receive the Stone(the Son):

He quotes Psalm 118:

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Psalms 118:22-23)

- Jesus uses an ingenious word play.
- In Hebrew as in English if you take letters away from the word Stone, you get the word Son.

“The Son the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”

What is Jesus saying about this stone?

He’s saying I’m the stone you are rejecting , I am the fulfilment of the Psalm and I am the pinnacle of God’s plan.

9

In no uncertain terms Jesus tells the people that the Kingdom of God, of which the elders and chief priests had assumed ownership, will be given to those who do not reject him and his authority:

the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners and those who are prepared to humble themselves, embrace Jesus and live fruitful lives.

Not enough is known about 1st century building methods to tell for certain what type of stone a cornerstone was but what is clear is that it was a key part of the foundation of a building, and held it together, a bit like the walls which will now hold up stage 2.

The cornerstone was big and heavy and Jesus tells us that this marvellous stone which the builders rejected will become the judgment stone, those who fall on it will be broken to pieces

and those on whom it falls will be crushed, pulverised.

Jesus, the kindest and most considerate person who ever lived, the one who fed the hungry and healed the sick, the one who taught people to love their enemies, is saying in no uncertain terms:

“Your rejection of me will be your downfall”

Jesus is the only way to bear good fruit, the only way to live into God’s intentions for your life, the pinnacle of God’s marvellous plan for creation!

10

Reject him and you forfeit all his benefits.

Now is the time to embrace the marvellous stone, to build your life on the stone that was rejected and bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Jesus teaching here applies to us all. His words are confronting and should rightly shake Christians from arrogantly resting on their laurels,

sharing this parable is also a good way to respond to the objection that Christian leaders are hypocrites

Jesus addresses this exact tendency for religious leaders to abuse their powers and hoard their privileges

he does not mince words,

v.43 "The kingdom of God will be taken away from those who do not bear fruit and be given to a people who will produce its fruit."

God will take his Kingdom away from abusive leaders, who in their abuses reject Him, and give it to those who receive Him

This should call us to repentance

11

Genuine repentance is like brushing your teeth unless it becomes a habit it won't change much.

It's about constantly turning away from sin and running towards God, it's not a moment in time but a constant commitment to align our will with God's.

Jesus' words here confront us all:

They confronts those who say they follow Jesus, and reminds us that if our lives don't match our words we're no better than Pharisees.

They confront those who deny God and live as if he didn't exist.

The truth is that we all sometimes live like the wicked tenants, failing to care for the world that God has entrusted us with.

We exploit our world's resources and pollute as if our planet was expendable.

We take the people in our lives for granted and use them for our own personal gain.

We greedily hang onto all that God has blessed us with and hoard it as if it were ours to use and abuse.

Jesus teaches that the tax collectors and prostitutes are given God's kingdom ahead of the religious people because they receive the stone the builders rejected, and embrace God's marvellous plan for their lives.

12

#3 More than a prophet\\ v.47-48

The last two verses of this morning's passage are a textbook example of how not to respond to Jesus:

"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." (Matthew 21:45-46 NIV11-GK)

They realise that he is prophesying about them and plan to do what they did to other prophets whose message they didn't like

They could have heard the parable, seen things from God's perspective and changed their ways,

they could have examined Jesus, realised he was the real deal, and embraced him.

Instead they plot to his murder,

he is challenging their claim to power, he is undermining their claim on God's creation.

13

In desperately trying to hold onto power and privilege the chief Priests and Pharisees renounce God himself, but this rejection will not stop God,

instead it will fulfil God's marvellous purposes.

God uses this rejection to make a way for all who believe in him to be received into his Kingdom

the Kingdom of God will be given to those who repent and receive him: tax collectors, prostitutes and all who will receive the Son, the Stone the builders rejected.

Jesus is much more than a prophet, he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the basis upon which the Kingdom of God is received

Today Jesus presents us with the same choice that faced his audience in the temple that day.

Reject the Son and lose the Kingdom, or receive the Son and it will be gifted to you.

The weeks leading up to Easter are a wonderful time to be reminded of how vital our relationship with God is.

14

Now is the time to reassess and take stock of our relationship with Jesus

Now is the time to repent, to ask God for forgiveness for the sin in our lives, pray about how we need to change, and make those changes.

How are you rejecting God? How are you receiving him as Lord of your life?

Ultimately the posture of our hearts towards Jesus is crucial, build your life on him and all things will be given to you

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.”