



On the road to Emmaus.

THE STORY: EZE 34.2-5, 10-17

God appoints shepherds for His people who have a duty to feed the flock, and not use the flock to feed and clothe themselves. They have a duty to find the lost and care for the injured, with kindness and not harshness. Because the shepherds have not done that, God is against these delinquent shepherds – as Jesus was against the leaders of Israel. God Himself will be the Good Shepherd of Israel (Joh 10.11); He will seek and save the lost (Luk 19.10); He will feed them good pasture (Joh 10.9); and make them lie down (Mat 11.28); He will heal the broken-hearted (Luk 4.18) and separate his sheep from the goats (Mat 25.33). As we look at the parable of the wicked tenants, we see that Jesus has fulfilled this ancient prophecy to the letter.

TALK ABOUT IT:

In what ways is Jesus caring for you through your local church leaders? How could you make it better? (*Eph 5.18-21; Heb 13.15-17; Jas 1.25-2.4*)

Being part of the royal priesthood of all believers, how are *you* caring for others in your local body, including your leaders? (*1Pet 2.9-10; 1Tim 5.17; Heb 13.7-9*)

PRAY:

Thank God for your local leaders; ask God for ways you can help them lead well.

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*To bring glory to God
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GET INTO The STORY

LIFE OF CHRIST • LESSON 21

JESUS CONFRONTS THE PHARISEES

The Kingdom of God belongs to those who bear its fruit.



The rejection of God's Son – a parable

THE STORY: MAT 21:33-41

Israel's leaders (chief priests, elders, and Pharisees 21.23, 45), have rejected John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus (21.32), the testimony of Scripture, and the proof of Jesus' works. They're upset that Jesus is holding them accountable before God for the spiritual welfare of the people. Jesus tells them a parable from Isaiah 51.1-7. It's about the Master of a house who planted a vineyard. He hedged it in, dug a winepress to hold its fruit, and a watchtower. He leased it out to tenants. The Master is *God*; the vineyard is *Israel*; the wall may be the *Law*; the winepress contains the fruit (*faithful Israelites*); the tenants are Israel's *leaders*; and the tower represents their *duty* to watch over Israel. The Master sends his servants to collect the fruit of the vine which He planted – these servants represent the *prophets*. The tenants kill them. He sends more; they were abused as well. Then He sends His son. Knowing it is the heir, the tenants kill him, thinking to take his inheritance for themselves, the vineyard. But all they gained was the wrath of the Owner of the vineyard. The leaders say the tenants deserve death; but they're so self-righteous they can't see that *they* are the tenants, and that *Jesus* is the son.

TALK ABOUT IT:

We often don't know we're the one sinning, until we are confronted by a friend. Which friend of yours has your permission to confront you about your sins?

Who currently is responsible for your spiritual welfare and growth so that you can be "fruitful" in your Christian walk? (*Eph 4.11-14*) Are you submitted to them?

PRAY:

Praise God that He has appointed shepherds to care for you in the name of Jesus.



The rejection of God's Son – a prophecy

THE STORY: MAT 21:42-44

The Jewish leaders admit that God's justice demands that the vineyard be taken from the wicked tenants, but they don't see themselves in the story. And so Jesus reminds them of the prophecy in Psalm 118. The stone (Jesus) that the builders (the leaders) have rejected has become the Cornerstone of the Kingdom of God, and this was the *Lord's* doing. Jesus now tells them that just as the vineyard should rightly be taken from the tenants, the kingdom should rightly be taken from them, and given to a people who will produce its fruits; i.e., who will train up a righteous people to the glory of God. The leaders have stumbled over Jesus; they will be broken to pieces on him, and be crushed by him on the cross, unless they repent and believe in him. The opportunity remains for them to do that. Will they take it?

TALK ABOUT IT:

What can you do to ensure someone doesn't "stumble over the stone" of Christ? (*Rom 9.30-10.4; 1Pet 2.4-8 – proclaim the gospel to both sinners and believers.*)

What sort of "fruit" should the vine of Christ produce in you so you're a rightful heir to the vineyard? (*Gal 5.22-23; Eph 5.8-9; Php 1.9-11*)

PRAY:

Ask God to make you fruitful, to enable Jesus to be seen in you; and to give you the grace and knowledge of Jesus that makes you grow strong and mature.



Where is the Gospel?

THE STORY: LUK 13:4-9

The parable of the Tenants deals more with the rejection of Jesus than with the fruitfulness of the vineyard. Yet here we see what happens when we fail to repent, when a fig tree fails to do what it has been planted to do, which is to produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Luk 3.8). We believers are the fig tree. The fruit is outworking of the gospel in our life and in the lives of others, fruit that will abide in Christ as we love one another (Joh 15.16-17). Such fruit may not show for awhile. As we see in this parable of the barren fig tree, it needs watering and feeding before it can mature and yield a crop (*1Cor 3.7; Eze 34.2*). If it does not yield its fruit, it is barren, and will be cut down to clear the soil. The Gospel has

not taken hold of this life; its seed has fallen on a hard path where it was snatched away, or where its roots were shallow and couldn't persevere (Luk 8.12-15). That doesn't mean salvation is lost; it just hasn't become fruitful yet.

TALK ABOUT IT:

What makes a believer "root-bound" (hardened) and unable to feed? (*Job 8.11-13; Amos 8.11; Joh 15.5; Eph 3.17-19; Col 2.6-7; Heb 3.12-13*)

Is there hope after being cut down? (*Job 14.7-9; Rom 11.23*) Once the fig tree has food and water, what should happen with its fruit? (*Jer 17.7-8*)

PRAY:

Praise God that you are a branch grafted into Christ by faith, and that it is HIS root that feeds and nourishes you, and *causes* you to be fruitful.



The rejection of God's Son – continues...

THE STORY: MAT 21:45-46

Once the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees realized that they were the wicked tenants in the parable, and that Jesus was saying they would be crushed by him, they were infuriated – they didn't understand the nature of the cross, or what Jesus was about to do to redeem his people from God's wrath. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would have them repent and be saved (Eze 33.11). And yet, instead of confessing their unbelief, and repenting of their opposition to Jesus, they looked for a way to arrest him. But they feared the crowd which believed Jesus was a prophet. Favoring men more than God (Gal 1.10), relying on their own righteousness (Php 3.9), and claiming authority over Jesus instead of submitting to *his* authority (Luk 19.14), they remained in their sins (Joh 9.41).

TALK ABOUT IT:

Why might someone resent or reject someone's warning about sin? (*Deu 1.43 rebellion; Jer 5.3-4 no shame, foolish, ignorant; Luk 3.8 arrogance: "I'm a Christian, I don't need to obey"; Act 8.22-23 bitterness, bondage; Rom 2.4 despise God's goodness; Rom 3.18, no fear of God 2Cor 7.9 no regret or sorrow for sin; 2Pet 3.10-11, no sense of urgency about it.*)

Which of these keeps *you* from repenting of a sin? What can you do about that?

PRAY:

Ask God to give a deep sense of your own sinfulness, and how repugnant it is to Him, so you're always ready and inclined to repent of it and seek His forgiveness for Christ's sake.