

June 9, 2019

“The Parable of the Tenants”
Matthew 21:33-46

FCF: Spiritual nearsightedness

PROPOSITION: (magnet) God’s ways with His people are a marvel to behold.
(anchor) We must consider them and let them shape us.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I like evenings in the spring and summer - not only because the sun going down means relief from the heat but because the bats coming out means relief from the bugs. Contrary to popular opinion, bats aren’t blind. Not to say they can easily see a bug. They use a system of echolocation, sending out a series of supersonic screeches that bounce off objects around them.

But again, bats aren’t actually blind. In fact, they may see better than some of us. Many of us are near-sighted, meaning we can only see a fraction of what’s around us. Which is a reminder of our spiritual condition. In the deepest sense, we tend to see and perceive so little.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 21:33-46](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Last week marked the 75th anniversary of D-Day, the Allied invasion of France during WWII. It was not the end of the war but historians will tell you it was the beginning of the end. Within the first few hours of the invasion, the Allies had landed more than **160,000** troops in Normandy. But that was preceded by a wave of **10,521** combat aircraft and **24,000** paratroopers. That was preceded by more than **2,200** Allied bombers dropping **7 million pounds** of bombs. And that was preceded by **3,200** reconnaissance missions sent to take photos of the landing zone. This may seem like a lot but such preparations were vital so as to really take in, to look at and know, what lay ahead as they moved forward. And it shaped the strategy and the mission.

This morning we need to consider not a landscape but God’s ways, and the shaping effect they should have upon us. The context of this exchange is a challenge to Jesus’ authority. In that, Jesus makes clear that He is the true King. Pressing further, He tells a parable of two sons, giving insight into the challengers and their opposition to Him. He tells a second parable, giving insight into the history and heritage of the people, God’s chosen people. And in doing this, Jesus shows us something quite striking. God’s ways with His people are a marvel to behold. His ways are a marvel and we must consider them. We must consider them and let them shape us.

What are these ways we must consider? We see three in this text. First, in His provision given. Second, in His patience exhausted. And then, third, in how His purposes are assured.

I. PROVISION GIVEN

First, we need to look at the provision given ([READ Matthew 21:33-34](#)). The generosity of the master is the context of Jesus’ story, setting the tone for everything that follows.

A) His Good Care

And this generosity, this provision given, begins with great care that is taken.

1. Ancient practices

We need to understand that a vineyard was a major longterm investment. The master is clearly a man of means, an absentee landlord, one who has supplied everything that the land could need.

2. Old Testament imagery

Which is exactly what the Lord had done for His people, Israel (**READ Isaiah 5:1-2**). What had been provided? Prophets, priests, and kings. Or, to put it another way, land, law, and love. His promises, purpose, presence, and protection. His guidance, warnings, security, and identity.

B) Over a Long Time

And it's not as though this was a once-for-all thing but it was over a long period of time.

1. Many overtures

Many overtures were made. Initiatives of love were taken, calling them forth from out of Egypt. Reminders of this were given, especially when they strayed, forgetting whose they truly were.

2. Over much time

And all of this was repeatedly over the course of centuries. The patriarchs, exodus, conquest of the land, period of judges, monarchy, the divisions, the exile, and return. His love was constant.

The Lord's provision was given - His great care extended over a long period of time.

Application:

This is an epic tale. And just like Israel and the people of Jesus' day, we need to look up and look back so that we can see the fuller expanse of God's love and the extent of His provision.

And the result that comes with such looking is needed and inevitable. Hearts filled and stilled with wonder. Thoughts transformed from entitlement to gratitude for His having written us into this story. And humility as we reckon with the reality that we are not the center of it all.

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II. PATIENCE EXHAUSTED

But that takes us to the second point. This is an epic but a tragic story as well (**READ Matthew 21:35-44**). What do we see here? Great provision given but also patience exhausted.

A) Foolish Rejection

Let's break down the foolish rejection depicted in both the story and the explanation.

1. Of the servants

Rent was to be paid by the tenants to the master with a portion of the fruits. The tenants refuse to pay and reject the servants. This is a depiction of the experience of the Old Testament prophets.

2. Of the son

So the master sends his son. The tenants assume the son has come because the master has died. They then kill him, the heir of the vineyard, so as to then have it for themselves. It's not much of a stretch to read Jesus' experience into this. And surely the disciples did as time went by.

3. Of the stone

Then, in Jesus' explanation, He shifts the images from a son to a stone. Masons search through a pile of rubble, looking for the right one to complete a project. They examine and test each one. But they reject the very one they need. And this was just what was happening in that moment.

B) Coming Reversal

So we have this foolish rejection. Which then would set in motion a coming reversal.

1. Recurring pattern

([READ Matthew 21:42](#)) This is from Psalm 118. The nations of the world looked down upon Israel. David was overlooked early on by those around him. So this was a recurring pattern.

2. Dire consequences

A recurring pattern with dire consequences ([READ Matthew 21:43](#)). The leaders of Israel and the nation as a whole had failed in its mission and failed to embrace their Messiah, their King. And so the kingdom was being taken from them. A new nation and people would then come from many nations and peoples. This is the church - a people without borders, ever expanding.

That foolish rejection set in motion this reversal because God's patience was exhausted.

Application:

Now what do we make of this? How does this apply to us? Start with this. This is not meant to make us wonder if we could lose something we have. This should raise a question as to if we have it in the first place. Are you a part of this people without borders, ever expanding? Who or what is your foundation stone? You're at the quarry. How do you assess this stone?

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III. PURPOSES ASSURED

This is an epic story, a tragic story. But it is not the end of the story or all there is to say ([READ Matthew 21:42-43](#)). Provision given. Patience exhausted. But purposes assured.

A) As Prophesied

What transpires here came as no surprise to the Lord. It had all been long prophesied.

1. Not just something that happened

This was not something that just happened. It was not that something new entered the frame.

2. But something that was planned

This was something planned. This kingdom was purposefully taken from one and given to another by the King. It was His doing. Going further in Psalm 118 ([READ Psalm 118:24](#)).

B) Producing Fruit

All of this was just as planned, just as had been prophesied, for the producing of fruit.

1. The purpose

([READ Matthew 21:43](#)) This is the crux of the parable. What is the purpose of a vineyard? To produce fruit. Back to Isaiah 5 ([READ Isaiah 5:4, 7](#)). This is the point to the master's labors.

2. The meaning

What sort of fruit are we talking about here? Inner moral change. Character formation and renewal of heart. Something deep within but with observable effects. Paul speaks of “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5, telling us where this comes from. That fruit then reproduces itself as it impacts the lives of the people around us and the places in which we live. It’s something going on all the time right now in a multitude of ways in and through the lives of Jesus’ disciples.

The point being that the fruit is coming as prophesied. God’s purposes are assured.

Illustration:

Let me read you the first few lines of an article from *USA Today* ([READ quote](#)):

Behold the new black gold. Dark and warm, it oozes water and teems with beneficial properties. It even harbors precious metals. And boy does it stink. Call it the excrement economy. Between the rise of fecal transplants and water strained from latrine sludge, the poop market is hot. Besides removing toxic waste, the commodification of crap could mean big bucks, especially in the developing world.

The “excrement economy” could save lives, mean better farming, expand our energy resources and water supply. It’s the ultimate wonder-from-waste scenario, true treasure-from-trash.

Application:

Or, to put it another way, another illustration of good being brought from evil, of God’s purposes assured. What Jesus is speaking of here is not just an epic tragedy. The Lord has the ability to take the ugly and turn it into beauty. Think of how receiving an unjust criticism can be used to drive you to your true identity in Jesus. Think of how a debilitating illness can be used to help us discover the source of true strength. Or the ultimate example of this, how the greatest injustice in the history of the world - the crucifixion of Jesus - was turned to our salvation.

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CONCLUSION:

There are many things we could consider that will surely and deeply shape us. From a historical perspective, think of Lewis and Clark as they finally caught sight of the Pacific Ocean. Or put yourself with the crew of Columbus as they laid eyes on the New World for the first time. Or perhaps you are on the International Space Station. No matter your background or backstory, the normal common reaction is how life changing it can be to see your home from orbit.

Let’s shift to everyday experience. What did you feel when you landed your first real job? Or when you moved away from home? How about when you held your driver’s license for the first time? I can remember what it was like to see my bride as she entered the sanctuary on our wedding day. Or a few years later as I held an ultrasound image of our child. Or months after that as I held that child’s tiny hand in mine. Those events and experiences change you.

There are many such things we could consider that will surely and deeply shape us. Pausing to take in Jesus’ words can have the same effect, the same impact. And more so. May it be for us. God’s ways with His people are a marvel to behold - His provision given, His patience exhausted, and then His purposes assured. We must consider them and let them shape us.

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