

“Producing Fruit in God’s Vineyard”—Matthew 21:37-44

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Producing Fruit in God’s Vineyard”, is Matthew 21:37-44 → *“Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Fall is a season to which many people look forward. Aside from the beautiful fall colors with the changing of the leaves, gardeners enjoy the

benefits of their hard work when they harvest the fruits of their labor. Many will claim that there are no store-bought vegetables whose taste comes close to those picked fresh from the garden!

By the same token, many a gardener becomes very frustrated when the plants which they have chosen, planted with care and nourished throughout the summer yield no fruit or even bad fruit. It becomes doubly frustrating when ripened vegetables and fruit are ruined by birds, insects and other critters. I can remember the year I went to pick that beautiful squash. After cutting it from its vine I picked it up only to discover that voles had eaten it out from the underside, destroying the benefits of my labors! Frustrated and angry I simply had to destroy what was left by the pesky varmints!

In our text Jesus spoke a parable to the leaders of God's people—His Church—while teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. In His parable of the tenants Jesus confronted them about how they were working in His *vineyard*, amongst God's people, His Church. Thus, it confronts us in the same manner.

The background for this parable comes from the Old Testament where, through the prophet Isaiah, the LORD described His people as His choice vineyard. In Isaiah 5:1-2, Isaiah says: *Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a*

*watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.*

Its a picture describing God's action of choosing Israel to be His special people, making them a people who would reflect His glory among the nations. He redeemed and saved them, then "planted" them in the promised land, caring for them by His grace! Isaiah 5:7 goes on to say what happened with God's vineyard: *The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!* Yahweh came expecting to find the best "fruit" only to find unbelief, rebellion and a disrespect for His will produced by His Church!

While Isaiah stressed the fruit that was produced in this vineyard, Jesus also focused on the workers and their reaction to God's will for His people—the "fruit" which they were producing in the "planting" of His choice. When the master sent to receive the *fruit* that rightly belonged to him the tenants refused to give it to him, even to the extent of beating and killing his servants. The ultimate rejection is reflected in vv. 37-39 of our text: *"Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed*

*him.*” In the context Jesus was confronting the chief priests and Pharisees about how they worked amongst God’s people, especially treating His vineyard—His Church—as if it belonged to them instead of to the LORD.

This is actually a picture of the history of God’s people. So many times throughout their history the Scriptures continually reveal their rejection of the leaders and prophets which the LORD sent them and now they were rejecting His very own Son as well! On the way to Jerusalem where Jesus would experience the fatal consequences of this rejection Matthew 23:37-38 says that He lamented Jerusalem’s fate for this very reason. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, **and you were not willing!** See, your house is left to you desolate.* When you refuse the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ you accept the righteous judgment of God upon your sins. *Your house is left to you desolate* because you have severed relationship with your heavenly Father, the head of the house.

Notice the parable reveals more about the lack of willingness on the part of these workers to submit to the *master* and to those sent on his behalf! The concern brought out in the parable is not only the *fruit* of the harvest but also the lack of proper “fruit” or behavior displayed by the workers in **their**

**relationship with the *master*.** The primary “fruit” which our relationship with our heavenly Father should display is that of submission to Him as owner and Lord of His Church, not us!

However, the parable is also a reflection of God’s patience! Notice the master in the parable didn’t give up on his vineyard but continued to send more servants to the tenants! He didn’t just wipe them out of his way and then collect his fruit. His heart cared for **all people** involved with His vineyard! 2 Peter 3:9 says that the LORD is providing this time before Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming because *He is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that **all** should reach repentance.*

God has called us to be fruitful workers in His vineyard, His Church, by His grace. Such responsibility begs us to take inventory: Upon what will our “work ethic” be based? Our own selfish desires in the Church or God’s desire for His Church in Christ? Does the way we “workers” in God’s Church function lead people to Christ or turn them away from Christ by our actions and words? Do we desire to take over the Church through personal preferences and manipulation or be submissive workers **of Christ** in the Church?

The parable applied specifically to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Jesus allowed them to condemn themselves in vv. 40-41. He asked them: *“When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those*

*tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”* Unfortunately they were more concerned about their worldly position and authority in the Church even to the point of killing God’s own Son! Following the raising of Lazarus from the dead, John 11:47-48 tells us that they *gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”* Thus, not only did they refuse to believe in Jesus as God’s Messiah but they led others to do the same! Ironically, in His great wisdom and mercy, God used the murder of His Son to work their salvation!

Thus, Jesus warns His opponents that rejecting Him will ultimately lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom in v. 43 → *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.* Judgment is based on one’s reaction to Jesus. Those rejecting Him are excluded from God’s kingdom and are consigned to the only other option: an eternity apart from God in hell.

The picture of the Church as a vineyard in relationship with our heavenly Father through faith in His Son was used by Jesus to describe His Church in John 15:5 where Jesus says: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever*

*abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* We are people connected to The Vine, Jesus Christ, whom God expects to “bear fruit” for Him in obedience to His will, even at the risk of losing our wonderful worldly lifestyles and popularity!

Being a proper “worker” in God’s Church begins by repentance and continues by acting as submissive servants of Christ on the basis of His grace and forgiveness in our lives! The picture of producing fruit is a wonderful picture of the flow of God’s grace through you and into the lives of others. Fruit is produced by the plant based upon its identity. You cannot force fruit out of a plant. The plant produces it naturally. Your behavior as a Christian is described in Galatians 5:22-23 as *the fruit of the Spirit* consisting of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. It is not something you force out of yourself or anyone else but rather look submissively for the Holy Spirit to produce through you and your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ!

Thus, you were not mean to just be passive “spectators” in this relationship which you have with Jesus Christ in His Church but also workers who will produce *its fruits*, even in the midst of rejection! We are God’s vineyard, His choice planting. He has created us and provided the Way for us to be His people by forgiving us in Jesus Christ! What is your response to this call? Will

you reject His call because of your various selfish desires or will you repent and submit to God's will for you in Christ Jesus as His Spirit produces His work through you? The burden of your sins has fallen once and for all on Jesus! In that forgiveness the Holy Spirit produces fruit in His Church, through His Church for the praise of God's glory! Amen

As workers in God's vineyard, His Church, we remember the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:58 →

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable,  
always abounding in the work of the Lord,  
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

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