

Matthew 21:33-46

³³ “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹ 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.” ⁴² 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’?”

⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Isaiah 5:1–7

¹ Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

² 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.

³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?

When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵ And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.

⁶ I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briars and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷ For 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!

Psalm 118:22–24

²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

²³ This is the LORD’s doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Do you have people in your life who hear what you say, but don't really listen?

Perhaps you share what's going on in your life with your parent, sibling, or spouse but they don't listen to the underlying emotions beneath those words. Are you a teacher who tells your students everything on the test but on exam day they suddenly complain about never seeing this concept before? Maybe you're a doctor, plumber, or arborist and no matter how you explain it, your clients never understand how serious their problem is.

In this week's passage, Jesus speaks to Pharisees who *hear* His words but don't *listen* to what He says.

2. Have you ever been confronted about something because you were wrong? Was it hard to listen to?

When I was a kid, there was one phrase I absolutely hated to hear. My mom would tell me to do something again and again and again. Like practice the piano, do your chores, or prepare something for church. I would get so frustrated and annoyed, eventually saying, in Taiwanese, "I know!" Then my mom would say, in Taiwanese, "If you heard me, why didn't you do it?" ARGH!! Of course, I had no excuse. I couldn't say, "Yes, mother. I heard you, but I was in the middle of rocket surgery or having a serious moment of prayer so I could not attend to your request." I was usually watching TV or goofing off. I was guilty.

In this week's passage, Jesus confronts the Pharisees for rejecting God's messengers and they aren't happy.

3. Is there an image or metaphor in the Bible that resonates with you? Why?

We see God use lots of imagery and metaphors to make lofty ideas relatable to regular people in Bible times. Jesus talks about a vineyard and a landlord/tenant relationship. In other passages, He uses fishing (Matthew 4:18-19, 13:47-50), camels (Matthew 23:23-24; 19:23-24), and sheep/shepherds (Matthew 25:31-46; 26:31-35). Jesus' love for His people is like a mother hen's for her chicks (Matthew 23:37). The members of a church are like the parts of a human body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). God decides to do whatever He wants like a potter decides what is made out of clay (Jeremiah 18:1-12). God's Word is a lamp that their paths (Psalm 119:105). Wisdom and foolishness are like women calling out to people (Proverbs 9). Israel worshipping other gods is like a woman cheating on her husband (Hosea). The list goes on and on! Do you have an image that clicks with you?

In this week's passage, Jesus uses the image of ungrateful, evil tenants to explain how the religious leaders rebelled against God.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. Why are we prone to be ungrateful?

Pastor Ray pointed out that the landlord had done all the heavy lifting to get the vineyard ready. He planted the vines, put up fences and a watchtower for protection, and made a winepress to process the grapes into wine. It was a lot of work! They could have been grateful so both the tenants and landlord could benefit.

God does so much heavy lifting in our lives, providing families, health, skills, relationships, joys, and so on. All of this when we haven't deserved any of it. In fact, we only deserve God's punishment, because we all turn away from God often to enjoy His blessings more than Him. But Jesus did the hard work of coming to earth to die on the cross, taking on our punishment. In doing so, Jesus gave us a clean record, the blessings He deserved, eternal life with God, and more. That's even more we should be grateful for! But are we always grateful?

5. Would you do things differently if you were the landlord? Why?

I don't know about you, but I would be completely different. If they only said no and turned the servants away, I'd send more intimidating servants with baseball bats or cool kung-fu weapons. If they killed my servants, I would have sent a small army. I'd even come along to ensure the tenants get their just desserts. "I let you harvest *my* grapes in *my* vineyard after *I* built everything with *my* money and *my* hands. And *this* is how you repay me? This is Sparta!" Something like that. Lots of righteous rage and revenge.

I definitely wouldn't send my son, unless he's with my fully armed battalion and knows how to fight. I wouldn't risk my son with those terrible, murderous lowlifes.

Thank God that He's not me. God is willing to sacrifice so much for us unworthy and ungrateful people, even giving up His precious Son. I'm saved only because God doesn't think like me. Whew.

6. In what ways might we act differently than how we believe? When is this right or wrong?

The Pharisees consistently believe Jesus is evil. They think He's blaspheming when He forgives sins (Matthew 9:1-3) and says He's equal to God (John 5:18). He breaks the law by breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-2) and not doing ritualistic hand washing (Matthew 15:1-2). He hangs out with some really unholy people (Luke 15:1-2). In their eyes, there is more than enough to public condemn, shame, and kill this Jesus guy. But their fear of the crowds prevents them from doing what they think is right (Matthew 21:26, 46).

How about us? Are there things we know are right but we're afraid of doing it because of others?

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

7. Who were God's servants who were abused or killed by God's people in the Old Testament?

You probably know some of the famous ones. Elijah defeated evil prophets so Queen Jezebel put a bounty on his head (1 Kings 19:1-4). Jeremiah was stuck in a muddy cistern and slandered because people hated his message (Jeremiah 38:5-6). Amaziah accused Amos of conspiring against King Jeroboam (Amos 7:10-11).

Some lesser-known guys include Zechariah who was stoned to death by order of King Joash (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). Uriah was hunted down and killed by King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Some traditions hold Jeremiah was stoned by Israelites in Egypt and Isaiah was sawn in half by King Manasseh after summoning a tree and failing a stealth roll (Yevamot 49b).

Many people want to be like the prophets of old to speak out against the evils of our culture. They dream of having a big platform with a huge podcast, speaking at conferences, shutting down the other side on live TV, and book deals. But we see throughout the Bible that speaking God’s truth often leads to persecution and hardships (John 15:20).

8. What fruit was God looking for? Which one(s) do you struggle to give Him?

Obviously, God isn’t expecting everyone to give Him wine. Pastor Ray listed some of the things God eagerly wanted from His people. I’ve included them here:

- Trusting, surrendered, obedient hearts (Matthew 21).
- Obedience to the Great Commandment: Love for God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love for their neighbors (Matthew 22).
- They were to be a light to the nations, sharing who God was through their worship and daily life – a society marked by humility, justice, and mercy.
- The nations were to come to Israel to learn God’s ways (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Are there other examples you can think of?

9. How are we tempted to enjoy God’s blessings without God? How can God’s love and patience help us enjoy Him?

The tenants wanted the vineyard that the landlord provided but didn’t want anything to do with the landlord. The Jewish leaders wanted to use God’s worship system (the temple, priesthood, rituals, etc.) without anything to do with God. They wanted to profit from the temple, enjoy status from being God’s middlemen, and design a worship system that fit what they liked. They didn’t care about the people connecting to God, which is what God wanted (Matthew 21:12-16).

Here are some possible ways:

Money	“It’s my money, I’ll spend it however I want. I don’t need to share.”	Give back to God by giving to the church. Love the people God created by giving to the benevolent fund, paying for others’ meals, or sponsoring a child.
Relationships	“I only like people who make me feel happy and do things I enjoy.”	Ask God how He wants us to love, encourage, and serve others, even when it’s hard. Find ways to help them grow closer to Jesus.
Eternal Life	“I have eternal life, so I can do whatever I want and it won’t matter.”	Share the Good News about Jesus so others can have eternal life, too.

Possessions	"It's my stuff, so I'll use it however I want. I don't need to share."	Offer rides to people without a car. Host newcomers or Life Groups at your home. Give away or lend your things to people who could use them.
Time	"I've spent enough time with God today. I don't need to worry about Him until tomorrow."	Continually find moments throughout the day to be with God through prayer, Bible meditation, or being with other believers.

How does Jesus' love for us help us reconsider?