

OSL 167 The Vineyard the Son and the Stone 2

What is the meaning of the story of the Vineyard, the Son, and the Stone? There is so much to learn. The story that Jesus told was familiar to the people of God. Seven hundred years before, Isaiah the prophet told a similar story. God was the owner, Israel was the vineyard and the men of Judah were the workers in the vineyard. God came expecting good grapes but he found only worthless ones. The worthless grapes were the injustices and the violence of his people and because of their sin, God, the owner pronounced judgment upon his people.

Jesus used this story and created new characters in it to teach lessons for the people living then and to teach lessons for us today.

First, who were the servants in the story? The servants were the prophets of God, men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. Men who came to God's people, God's vineyard and pleaded with them and preached to them that they must turn from their idols and wicked ways and return to the Lord. The prophets were treated shamefully. Some were tortured. Some were mocked. Some were whipped and chained and imprisoned. Some were stoned, one was sawn in two, some were executed with the sword. And those who survived death were so poor they could only dress in sheepskins or goatskins. They were destitute, afflicted, ill-treated and wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. Prophets of God – treated like this! And we must remember that it was not the pagans who were treating them this way. It was the people of God who were treating the prophets of God this way.

Jesus was reminding the rulers that their attitude towards him – their constant questioning, their harassing, their yelling, their rebuking was just like their fathers who killed the prophets of old. Jesus was reminding them that his coming into the temple was in keeping with what the prophets did. Jesus came with a prophetic ministry. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God. Would they receive his words or would they treat him shamefully as the people of old had treated the prophets and as the workers in the story treated the servants?

Second, in the story, the workers in the vineyard lost touch with who they were and who the owner was. The workers were workers, not the owners. They had no right to usurp the vineyard for themselves. It did not belong to them.

A thousand years before Jesus told this story, another prophet who was also a king wrote these words:

- 1 Only fools say in their hearts,
“There is no God.”
They are corrupt, and their actions are evil;
not one of them does good!
- 2 The Lord looks down from heaven
on the entire human race;

he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,
if anyone seeks God.
3 But no, all have turned away;
all have become corrupt.
No one does good,
not a single one!
4 Will those who do evil never learn?
They eat up my people like bread
and wouldn't think of praying to the Lord.

What a description of these workers from Psalm 14. But friends, is this not also a description of some who listen today and who act as if there is no God and who treat the things of God and the prophets of God with dishonor and never give a thought to seeking him, to praying, or living in a way that is pleasing to him?

I hope this is not a description of you. I hope you are not like those workers in the vineyard who beat the servants and treated them shamefully. I hope you are not like those servants who killed the son and who said, "The inheritance can be ours!"

Friends, everything we have is a gift from God. We are not the owners, really, of anything. Everything we are and everything we have is from God. Our treasure, our time, our talents, our friends, our family, our home, our bodies, our lives and every breath we take is a gift from God. We are not the owners. He is the owner of all. We would do well to take care of those things that belong to him and bear fruit and give the fruit that rightfully belongs to him.

This is such an important matter. I must ask you again – do you consider yourself to be the owner, the master of your life? Have you given your life to God and let him have what is his? In the audience on this day when Jesus told this story was Peter. Peter was the leader of his apostles and years later he wrote these words: "God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." One wonders if Peter thought back on this story about the workers who thought they could become the owners. Only God is the owner of all things. He created us and he purchased us from our slavery that we might belong to him.

Third, the story teaches us about the coming of Christ himself. For centuries God sent his prophets, many of them we know and we have their writings in the Bible. They were men who faithfully preached God's word to his people in order to bring them back to God. After sending prophet after prophet, God finally sent the greatest prophet of all – John the prophet – who prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. John preached in the wilderness and multitudes came from the land to hear him preach and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins but the religious leaders did not respond to him.

Finally, after this greatest of all the prophets came, God sent the Messiah, the one to whom all the prophets pointed. This one is the beloved Son in the story. This one is the heir. Jesus is the beloved

son in the story. Jesus is the heir. Jesus is the anointed one. Jesus is the king and he came to his people in the temple and it was up to the people to decide what they would do to him.

The common people loved him, but the rulers hated him. They hated him because he did not do things the way they wanted them done. They hated him because he was a threat to their power. And they plotted for the right moment to kill him and at this moment in the temple when Jesus told this story, he was really telling a story of what they would do to him. They would kill him in an effort to protect their little piece of land and power that they had seized for themselves.

And in killing him, those leaders brought the judgment of God upon themselves. When Jesus asked, “What will the owner of the vineyard do to those workers?” They replied, “He will bring those wretched men to a wretched end.” They pronounced judgment upon themselves!

Jesus said that all this took place in fulfillment of prophecy! When Jesus entered Jerusalem for his last week, the people excitedly quoted from Psalm 118, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” In that psalm were other words of huge importance. Psalm 118:22-23 says, “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful to see.”

The stone that the builders rejected! The builders were the religious leaders. The stone was the Messiah, and the builders rejected him! The religious leaders were focused on literal stones, the stones in the temple that Herod was building for them. They were the keepers of the Temple. But Jesus had come into the city saying that the temple of God had become a den of robbers! Jesus had come into the temple saying that not one stone would be left upon another, that judgment would come because the religious leaders had missed the purpose of God. Jesus said there was another kind of temple that God was interested in. It was not a temple made with hands but it was a temple made by God and the stones of that temple were people. God was interested in building a temple of praise for himself through the lives of people renewed by his grace and the cornerstone of that new temple was Jesus himself.

He was the cornerstone, he was the son, he was the heir. The vineyard belonged to him. Do you belong to him?