

Read: Matthew 21:33-43

A Story about Working in God's Vineyard

Matthew 21:33-41

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus once told a story to people who didn't like him. The story sounds a lot like an ancient song from Isaiah, chapter five. Just like the song in Isaiah, a man plants a vineyard. In Isaiah and in Jesus' story, the man does everything necessary for the vineyard for grapes to grow. He picks good soil, plants good branches, and builds a watchtower to protect it. The people who didn't like Jesus knew all about the story in Isaiah, and they knew that the owner was extremely patient and generous as he waited and waited and waited. After all that waiting, the owner never got any grapes. Everyone could see that the right thing to do was destroy the vineyard.

In both stories, the owner represented God and the vineyard stood for God's people. Then Jesus added a *new* idea. The owner got some farmers to take care of his vineyard while they lived on the land. They were called tenants. God did that too. He sent leaders to take care of his people and live among them. The people who didn't like Jesus, those people were the leaders. They were the tenants. So what did the tenants do in Jesus' story about God's vineyard?

They didn't do their job. They didn't give the owner any fruit. Whenever the owner sent someone to ask for grapes, the wicked tenants killed the messenger. In the same way, whenever God sent prophets to his people, often the leaders ignored them, made fun of them, and killed them. How did God react? He sent more. How patient he is! And when those messengers were killed, what did God do? He sent to the world his one and only Son, Jesus. How generous he is! Of

course, people killed Jesus too. God knew they would, but he sent him anyway because that was how he would save the world from their sins.

Our God is extremely patient and generous to us too. We all ignore and disrespect God and his messengers. So what does God do? He is patient with you. He sent Jesus to forgive you. He gives you everything!

So when the patient, generous God who gives you everything asks you to listen to him and work for him, will you ignore him? Will you fight? No! Work hard for the God you love, for the God who loves you.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- What did the wicked farmers do wrong?
- What are some ways that God is different from those wicked farmers?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- What parts of Jesus' story would change if the tenants were good and faithful workers instead of wicked?
- How does Jesus' story apply to us?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- It's easy to be disrespectful, ignore, or fight with family members. What warning does today's Bible story give about disobedience?
- Think of a way that God has been very generous and patient in your life. Then think of a way you can replicate it as you live out tomorrow.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, help us to see how generous you are toward us. Make us appreciate your patience. Move us to love and work for you all our days. Amen.