

completely; and at the end of it the dramatist makes him say, " To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche was not for me." The man upon the Cross has become the Judge and King of all the world.

There are other pictures of stones in OT that Jesus uses here.

Matt 21:44 ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

You can trip over a stone. If a stone falls on you it will crush you. Just as the most important stone is Jesus, so here is a warning that Jesus is also like these stones. To fall over the stone is about falling on Jesus, broken in repentance. It is also true that if you refuse to repent, the result is judgment, like the stone falling on you.

The chief priests and Pharisees realized Jesus was addressing them, but they would not repent. Like the wicked tenants they were determined to get rid of the Son.

CONCLUSION

What about us. Today, in this season of "All Saints" we have been celebrating our thankfulness and indebtedness to those who experienced the goodness of God and were 'good tenants' – good stewards of the things God gave them. They have left us an example that should encourage us to follow. Now it is our turn, our time. What kind of tenants are we? Let us acknowledge that all that we have belongs to the Owner of the Vineyard and yield to him our fruits of righteousness.

GREAT THINGS HE HAS TAUGHT US GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE Violence and Murder Matthew 21:33-46

INTRODUCTION

Two farm laborers met one day.

"Well, George," exclaimed the first. "I would never have thought to meet you so far from work."

"I'll tell you what it is," replied the other. "I've left my job."

"Left? Whatever for?"

"It's this way. A while since we'd an old cow died on the farm, and for weeks after we'd nothing to eat but beef. Then an old sheep died, and we'd nothing to eat but mutton." The laborer passed his hand across his forehead. 'Now the old woman's died, so I've left.'

Jesus got his message across by telling parables about everyday life that his hearers could relate to. Everyone knew about landowners who employed tenants to manage their fields and vineyards. This story certainly makes the point. Great things he has taught us.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Isaiah has a song about a vineyard. The vine always symbolized Israel, so the song is about the nation and God's care for his people. The situation for the vineyard was a fertile hill. The ground was cleared of stones, the best vines planted and even a watchtower built to protect the vineyard. It was all to no avail, for the yield was only wild grapes. This was how the nation of Israel had turned out. Despite all God's love and care and protection Israel had proved a disappointment.

Jesus' parable gives the story a special twist. Even more care is given to the vineyard than in Isaiah's picture. The owner builds a wall to keep out animals and a watchtower to guard against thieves and fire. He digs a winepress so that the grapes can be squeezed there on site. He is confident that the vineyard will bear fruit. Then he lets it out to tenants to care for it. They pay rent in kind at harvest time.

God has brought into being a people for himself. Israel's story is how the Lord provided for his people and cared for them. He gave them good harvests, delivered them from their enemies, raised up leaders – kings, priests, prophets. Even God's punishments were part of his care and protection, bringing them back to himself. Yet how many of Israel's leaders were a disappointment and a failure! There were wicked kings and false prophets, but again and again God helped his people through the difficult times created by unworthy leaders.

We can look back on our lives and bear witness to the goodness of God. This is true for us personally, in our families and in our nation. We have had our hard times and disappointments, but God has always been there.

God puts his trust in human beings. The owner of the vineyard did not stand over the cultivators supervising their every move. He went away and left them to their task. God pays us the compliment of entrusting us with his work. Just as he entrusted his work to kings and priests in Israel, so he entrust us with the work on earth that needs to be done.

John had worked for nearly 60 years on the farm. One day his employer ventured, gently, to suggest that it was time he retired. The old man was indignant. "So, it's come to this, has it?" he asked. "I'm not wanted any longer? I worked for you father and for your grandfather and I'll tell you this; if I'd known the job was not going to be permanent, I'd never have taken it on."

THE GREED OF MEN

So why did it all go wrong?

Three people went into a church. The first was a business man who had failed and was contemplating suicide. The second was a prodigal youth, deep in sin, who was planning a robbery. The third was a young woman who was tempted to depart from the path of virtue. The service started. The choir arose and sang an anthem about building the walls of Zion. The minister addressed an eloquent prayer to the Lord and then preached on the theme, "Is Mars Inhabited?" Afterward, the businessman committed suicide, the boy stole and landed in jail, and the young woman began a life of immorality. What might have happened if only the gospel of personal salvation in Christ had been preached!

The tenants forgot they were tenants. Instead of doing the job they were meant to do and paid to do they wanted everything for themselves. We've done all the work why should we pay the owner. Answer, because he is the owner. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son, Isaac. The servant journeyed to where relatives of Abraham lived and there he met Rebekah. The girl agreed to go back with the servant and become Isaac's wife. The servant did his job faithfully. He took Rebekah back to where Abraham and Isaac lived. It was a long journey and however friendly he may have become with Rebekah, he knew that she could never be his. He must take her and present her as a spotless bride for his master's son. The tenants of the vineyard were not like that servant. They wanted for themselves that which was not theirs. When the landowner sent his servants to collect the produce they **seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.** The owner sent more and they were treated just as badly.

The owner of the vineyard was patient. When the harvest was in he sent servant after servant to collect the rent. When the first servant was misused the owner did not immediately punish the tenants. Just so was God patient with those to whom he had entrusted his work. The vineyard owner had sent his servants to collect the fruit. The fruits that God looks for are the works of justice and righteousness.

Isa 5:7 ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

Finally the owner sent his son, thinking he would be respected.

Matt 21:38 - 39 ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Just so the Jewish authorities were not willing to accept Jesus' identity and claims. They would not bow to his authority. And so they got rid of him.

When on a mission we were talking with a teenage boy and witnessing to him about Christ. We presented the gospel as best we could, urging him to repent and accept Christ as his Savior. He refused, saying, "I know that if I become a Christian I must stop sleeping with my girlfriend. I'm not prepared to do that."

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

When Christ is rejected, judgment falls. The vineyard will be taken away from the tenants and given to others who will act as they are meant to and give the owner the produce at the proper time. Jesus concludes the parable by quoting part of Psalm 118.

Matt 21:42 ⁴²Jesus 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 amazing in our eyes'?"

A stone which the builders had decided would not fit in the building, for whatever reason, turned out to be the most important stone that held the building together. Israel had been a nation despised by other nations and threatened on all sides. But it became God's chosen nation, the cornerstone in his purposes for the world. Jesus was rejected by Israel's leaders, just as many reject him today, yet in reality he is the most important person in the world and the salvation of the world depends entirely on him.

Julian, the Roman Emperor, tried to turn the clock back. He tried to banish Christianity, and to bring back the old pagan gods. He failed and failed