

Matthew 21:33-43

33 "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 went away on a journey. **34** When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. **35** "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. **36** Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. **37** Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. **38** "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.' **39** So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. **40** "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" **41** "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." **42** Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' ? **43** "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

We are only one generation away from losing the Gospel. That doesn't mean God's message will disappear from the face of the earth. It will always remain in the world until Jesus returns. But in one generation it can be lost in any group's midst. Think of this group gathered here this morning. Think of your own family. Before you dismiss that thought as impossible – No way! Not here! Not in our generation! –, don't you think that's exactly how every gathering of God's people felt? But we learn time-and-time again, families did lose it. Entire groups lost it. Think of how several letters of the New Testament were written to groups of believers in modern day Turkey. Some individuals undoubtedly carried the Christian faith with them to new places. Others just as certainly lost it.

We are always only one generation away from losing the Gospel... and we dare not forget: that generation could be us.

Those who don't learn from history are... destined - doomed - to repeat it.

Jesus' lesson, here in Matthew ch.21, had been preached before. Isaiah sang it (ch.5:1-7). Recall...

The vineyard was God's Old Testament people, Israel. The Lord planted faith in His people, protected them with His might power, and rained down blessings upon them from heaven.

And yet, there is a strain of tragedy woven in-and-out of Isaiah's song about the Lord's love to his people. Israel – the majority of the people in the nation – time-and-again in their history sang their own tune, discordant and deviant to the Lord's truth. They caved in to peer pressure from the nations around them and reveled in sick, perverted worship to gods of their own making.

The Lord called to them. The Lord called on them to listen to Him, to trust Him, to serve Him – He alone is God, and there is no other; He alone is our Savior (Isaiah 45:22).

There was nothing wrong with Isaiah's sermon, the Lord's call to Israel through his servant. But it didn't have the desired effect on most of its listeners. They stopped listening. Otherwise they could have seen, heard and understood (Isaiah 6:9-10).

Ultimately, God himself came in the flesh.

Jesus repeats the vineyard message. A new audience had gathered. Precious souls again needed to hear this truth. Jesus put in parable form what Isaiah sang. He added an element to the vineyard imagery, specifically addressing the religious leaders of His day. He reached out to them too!

There was nothing wrong with Jesus' ability to communicate the Truth. In fact, Jesus taught his lesson so well that his listeners were drawn along, and at the conclusion offered the correct verdict. But after Jesus confirmed their answer **and** made clear the meaning, the chief priests and the Pharisees went away with their fingers in their ears, so to speak. [Think of the image of a child] "We're not listening! – not listening! – no! N.O. – not listening!" They rejected the Truth, though it was so obvious, so clear, so spot-on. So spot on.

They plotted in poisonous hatred until: "They crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor. 2:8) - "Killed the author of Life" (Acts 3:15).

Twice the vineyard sermon was given. Twice the results were heavily tragic.

1,900+ years later... what kind of response do we give to the vineyard sermon?

Jesus calls through this parable: Listen!

What does this parable lead us to analyze about ourselves? How about this...

How often do we follow the same kind of deadly path? You haven't outright rejected Jesus – I know – like the spiritual leaders in Jerusalem in Jesus' day. But what about rejecting a

portion of God's Word here, or a teaching there? Because that's really where everything started to go wrong in the parable. What did the tenants do? They didn't listen to the servants (sent by the Lord). Once. Then, again.

How dangerous is this path? You see the outcome in the parable. Listen to the warning taught in Israel's history.

Israel had lost God's truth, not overnight, but bit by bit. One instance of "I'm not listening to that" led to... an added instance where "I hear it, but I'm not going to follow that." What do we see? A person says "no" to a word from our God, and it is harder next time to say "yes, Lord, I'm listening." (This has happened again-and-again in history.)

It may be that a part of God's Word seems so trivial— so unimportant — so "old school" — so "out of touch" with today! It may be that something sounds "too easy." That we are "saved by grace alone" has been rejected many times, by many groups. "This doesn't make sense!", people have cried. With their reasoning, God's gifts in baptism have been withheld from generations of babies.

Here's an example that hit the news this week. The current pope of the Roman Catholic Church tried to mashup evolution and the big bang with The Bible's account of Creation. He said:

"When we read in Genesis the account of Creation, we risk imagining that God was a magician, with such a magic wand as to be able to do everything. However, it was not like that. He created beings and left them to develop according to the internal laws that He gave each one, so that they would develop, and reach their fullness."

<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-address-at-inauguration-of-bronze-bust-of-benedict-xvi>

Some go all the way back and stop listening to what God says happened "in the beginning." Where does this end?

There are so many other examples, of so many other ways, people reject something that God says directly, clearly to us in His Word. "I'm not listening to that." "I hear it, but I'm not going to follow that."

You know where to apply this in your life. Ask yourself: In what ways most recently have I failed to listen to God? Where have I heard (the message he has sent through his servant prophets & apostles), but failed to listen?

Jesus calls through this parable: Listen! Listen when He comes and identifies your sin, and... Repent!

Listen to all the Truth Jesus tells us today. Because... Jesus is telling us His Story. Jesus, the Son, was sent. He knew He would be rejected. He knew he'd suffer hell for each and every person who would ever live on this earth. But that's not the end of His Story. He rose. He lives. And he holds out his gifts for each and every person, knowing full well that many will reject Him. That doesn't stop him. "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone & capstone." That's him – the Living Stone! "And everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (1 Peter 2:6; Acts 4:12).

You, dear Christian, have been grafted in to God's vineyard. Through faith you now share in the nourishing sap from the Vine – Christ (Romans 11:17). Jesus, the Vine, says to you, "Remain in me."

We are only one generation away from losing the gospel. This saying has been often used in reference to sharing the faith with the next generations. Is this Word – this truth – so important to me that the generations following me see that?

Kids learn by example. Even when we think they aren't listening – or aren't watching, they are. When they watch me, what do they see? What do I want them to see? Someone who is listening. When the Lord speaks, I listen. I listen and take Him at His Word, even when I don't fully grasp how and why. I listen, and I repent, when His Word points out my sin. I listen, and rejoice: He gives me His Word, "I forgive all your sins. In Jesus, you are washed clean." Amen.