



1 And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. 2 And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. 4 And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. 5 And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. 6 Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. 7 But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. 8 And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. 9 What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. 10 And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: 11 This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 12 And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way. (Mark 12:1-12)

The Old Testament Church of the Wilderness wherein was preached the Promise made to Abraham is illustrated by our Lord in today's passage. *This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt. (Acts 7:38-39)* The Jewish rulers who presumed to be the spiritual leaders of the people of God at the time of Jesus were corrupt and unbelieving in their testimonies. But it had been so from Abraham to Jesus, and from Jesus down to our time, that men of questionable heart have infiltrated the Holy Place and brought in false doctrine and egregious error. There is a continual need for the cleansing of the House of God. The Great English and Continental Reformations were examples of that cleansing. How desperately do we need a spiritual Reformation today!

I will lead off this devotion with a quote from the venerable Matthew Henry:

"Christ showed in parables, that he would lay aside the Jewish church. It is sad to think what base usage God's faithful ministers have met with in all ages, from those who have enjoyed the privileges of the church, but have not brought forth fruit answerable. God at length sent his

Son, his Well-beloved; and it might be expected that he whom their Master loved, they also should respect and love; but instead of honouring him because he was the Son and Heir, they therefore hated him. But the exaltation of Christ was the Lord's doing; and it is his doing to exalt him in our hearts, and to set up his throne there; and if this be done, it cannot but be marvellous in our eyes. The Scriptures, and faithful preachers, and the coming of Christ in the flesh, call on us to render due praise to God in our lives. Let sinners beware of a proud, carnal spirit; if they revile or despise the preachers of Christ, they would have done so their Master, had they lived when he was upon earth."

Jesus tells us a parable here of a '*certain man*' (God the Father) who planted a vineyard (those of the Promise made to Abraham - church in the Wilderness). He prepared the soil carefully by calling Abram out from Ur of the Chaldees and making him a separate generations from his kindred. This '*certain man*' set his protection over the vineyard (hedges), and he also dug a provision for a wine vat (the coming redemption of Christ). He also made provision for watchmen (prophets) to keep guard over the walls and gates to prevent any hurtful thing from entering in and to warn of the approach of the enemy. . . . *a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country*. He placed his own people - those called by His name - to keep and dress the vineyard (you and me).

And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. Which season - the season of harvest, of course. So what transpired when God sent His prophet to the Vineyard? Were they entreated kindly and with reverence? Jesus describes the conduct of the husbandmen this way: *And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty."*: *"Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.* (Luke 11:49-51)

The Lord of the Vineyard will not suffer a loss of gathering His rightful fruit. What must He now do in order to gather his fruit? *Having yet therefore one son* (His only Begotten Son), *his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.* *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* (Gal 4:4-5) He had every reason to expect His Son to be treated with reverence - though in His foreknowledge and providential predestination, He knew this would not be the case.

But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. The Son was treated with far greater revulsion than the prophets sent before. *And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified "*without the gate*" (vineyard) on a mount called Golgotha. *Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.* (Heb 13:12) What is the Christian's response to this truth? *Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.* (Heb 13:13-15)

Illustration

The Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, who, as in one triumphal march, conquered the world, observed a very singular custom in his method of carrying on war. Whenever he encamped with his army before a fortified city and laid siege to it, he caused to be set up a great lantern, which was kept lighted by day and night. This was a signal to the besieged, and what it meant was that as long as the lamp burned they had time to save themselves by surrender, but that when once the light should be extinguished, the city, and all that were in it, would be irrevocably given over to destruction. And the conqueror kept his word with terrible consistency.

When the light was put out, and the city was not given up, all hope of mercy was over. The Macedonians stormed the place, and if it was taken all were cut to pieces who were capable of bearing arms, and there was no quarter or forgiveness possible. Now, it is the good pleasure of our God to have compassion and to show mercy. But a city or a people can arrive at such a pitch of moral corruption that the moral order of the world can only be saved by its destruction. It was so with the whole race of men at the time of the flood, with Sodom and Gomorrah at a later period, and with the Jewish people in our Saviour's time. But before the impending stroke of judgment fell, God always, so to speak, set up the lamp of grace, which was not only a signal of mercy, but also a light to show men that they were in the way of death, and a power to turn them from it. (Otto Funcke) Thusly did Noah also preach to those without the Ark for 100 years.

The truth burns as a night torch in the dark skies of the world. The Spirit of God will not forever strive with the spirit of man: *And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man. (Gen 6:3) And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?* We are the favored stones of God with which He is building His Temple; but there can be no building without a Cornerstone, and that Cornerstone is Christ. He is the Head and we are the Body (Church). In building the Great Pyramid at Giza, the laborers drew great pre-cut stones on rollers for many miles from the quarry - stones so large that modern technology would be challenged to move them. They labored endlessly day after day for many years in the construction of that great edifice. But there was a rather sharp and troublesome stone that lay squarely in the way near the base of the pyramid. This stone the laborers cursed because they found it necessary to change their direction in bringing the large stones to the pyramid. It was ALWAYS in the way. But they found no use for the stone. Later, as the pyramid was nearing completion and to their dismay, they discovered that this stone that kept getting in the way was the Chief Cornerstone of the pyramid; but too late to lift it now to its rightful place. So the pyramid at Giza has no Chief Cornerstone to this day. That is the result of doing things "our way" (with apologies to Frank Sinatra).

Our Lord Jesus Christ keeps getting in the way of worldly governments, commercial interests, politicians, and the greedy of the world. They always must navigate around Him. But the day is coming when the light on the walls of Lachish will no longer shine - and the end will be at hand.