

# The Wicked Tenants

## Summary and Goal

One of Jesus' most famous parables about judgment was the parable of the wicked tenants. In this story we see the privilege and responsibility that comes with God's calling on our lives. We also see the grace of God in His warnings to sinners and the judgment of God in His retribution toward those who reject His Son. This parable's stark imagery reminds us that we are called to bear the fruit of repentance and mission and thus fulfill our purpose as God's people.

### **Main Passage**

Matthew 21:33-46

### **Session Outline**

1. The wicked tenants reject their responsibility as stewards (Matt. 21:33-35).
2. The wicked tenants reject God's warnings and God's Son (Matt. 21:36-41).
3. The wicked tenants are rejected by God for their wicked schemes (Matt. 21:42-46).

### **Theological Theme**

Judgment comes on those who reject God's commands, God's warnings, and God's Son.

### **Christ Connection**

Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants is one of the clearest denunciations of the religious leaders in His day. The story implies that God is the vineyard owner, Jesus is the owner's son, and the religious leaders are the ones who have rejected God's Word. Applying Psalm 118 to Himself, Jesus saw Himself as the cornerstone—the person in whom God's judgment and salvation come together.

### **Missional Application**

God calls us to bear the fruit of repentance and mission, fulfilling our purpose as His people.

# The Wicked Tenants

## Session 6

### Introduction Option

Show the video “Is God Different in the Old Testament Than He Is in the New?” with David Murray to supplement the Introduction.

[www.godtube.com/watch/?v=F9JCFJNU](http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=F9JCFJNU)

Then ask the following questions:

- Do you agree with the speaker’s assessment of why people typically see discord between the Old Testament’s view of God and the New Testament’s? Why or why not?
- In what ways does the New Testament also emphasize the judgment of God?

### ? For Further Discussion

How would you respond to the way the farmers treated the servants in the parable?

### Introduction

Address the sharp distinction people sometimes make between Jesus in the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament and how the Gospels speak to this common but false impression (leader p. 70; PSG p. 55).

- ? Why do you think so many people see Jesus as just a “good, nice teacher” and fail to consider His teachings about judgment?

Note that many of Jesus’ parables focused on God’s judgment (leader pp. 70-71). Then summarize this session on the parable of the wicked tenants (leader p. 71; PSG p. 56).

### 1. The wicked tenants reject their responsibility as stewards (Matt. 21:33-35).

Clarify that Jesus spoke in parables to confound people—a sign of God’s judgment (leader p. 71). Then read Matthew 21:33-35. Show how the vineyard imagery evoked Isaiah 5 for Jesus’ hearers (leader pp. 71-72; PSG p. 56).

- ? Based on Isaiah 5, what does the vineyard in Jesus’ parable represent? Whom does the vineyard owner represent?
- ? How have you experienced a greater understanding of Scripture by knowing the storyline and the details of the Old Testament?

Explain that the parable is about God and His people: the religious leaders (tenants) who had been called by God (owner) to watch over Israel (the vineyard) had failed. Express how this was a challenge to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day—and to us as a part of God’s people (leader pp. 72-73; PSG p. 57).

- ? What are the responsibilities that come with our privilege of being God’s chosen people?
- ? What kind of fruit are we to bear as Christians?

## 2. The wicked tenants reject God’s warnings and God’s Son (Matt. 21:36-41).

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 21:36-41. Call attention to the vineyard owner’s patience, and connect the tenants with the leaders of Israel and the servants with the Old Testament prophets (leader pp. 73-74; PSG pp. 58-59).

- ❓ We tend to think of warnings as something bad, a message of judgment. How are God’s warnings to us a sign of His grace?

Connect the vineyard owner’s son with Jesus and the way the religious leaders would treat Him (*use Pack Item 3: Jesus’ Ministry Map to point out that Jesus was in Jerusalem the week prior to His crucifixion when He told this parable*). Stress how this parable serves as a warning to those who reject the Son and ignore God’s warnings (leader pp. 74-75; PSG p. 59). *Ask groups of 3-4 to work through the questions in the table in the PSG. After a few moments, reconvene and allow time for responses* (leader p. 75; PSG p. 60).

## 3. The wicked tenants are rejected by God for their wicked schemes (Matt. 21:42-46).

Read Matthew 21:42-46. Address a couple of possible misinterpretations from this parable—(1) God was surprised at how His prophets and Son were treated, and (2) God was completely rejecting Israel. Then apply this parable today, noting the religious nature of the people’s rejection of Jesus and the prophets; instead, we must be fruitful (leader pp. 75-76; PSG pp. 60-61).

- ❓ What are some ways we might use religiosity to mask our lack of fruitfulness?
- ❓ What aspects of this parable’s warning apply to us today?

Emphasize that if we were to place ourselves in this story, we would need to see ourselves as the wicked tenants. Say that the question now remains: *On which side of this furious judgment of God will we be found?* The purpose of the parable is to bring us to repentance and faith in the Son (leader p. 77; PSG pp. 61-62). (*Point out on Pack Item 4: Parables of the Kingdom that rejection of the Son is rejection of the kingdom of God.*)

- ❓ What role does “bearing fruit” play in our mission to share and show the love of God?

## Conclusion

End by affirming that we serve a Savior whose is both gracious and just, and we should see ourselves as stewards of His blessings (leader p. 77; PSG p. 62). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 63).

### Point 2 Option

Read the “Essential Christian Doctrine” *Nature of Hell* (leader p. 74; PSG p. 59). Then ask groups of 3-4 to discuss the following questions (consider writing these questions on a board or sheet of paper for groups to have; also available on the DVD in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*):

- What are some popular ideas in our culture today regarding the reality and nature of hell?
- How do we need to respond to these ideas as we share the gospel and call people to repent of their sin and trust in Christ?

After a few moments, call for some responses and reflections from the groups.

**Christ Connection:** Jesus’ parable of the wicked tenants is one of the clearest denunciations of the religious leaders in His day. The story implies that God is the vineyard owner, Jesus is the owner’s son, and the religious leaders are the ones who have rejected God’s Word. Applying Psalm 118 to Himself, Jesus saw Himself as the cornerstone—the person in whom God’s judgment and salvation come together.

**Missional Application:** God calls us to bear the fruit of repentance and mission, fulfilling our purpose as His people.

# The Wicked Tenants

## Session 6



### Voices from Church History

"[Judgment] is no pleasing subject to me, any more than it is to you; but it is my duty to show you the dreadful consequences of continuing in sin. I am only now acting the part of a skillful surgeon, who searches a wound before he heals it."<sup>1</sup>

—George Whitefield  
(1714-1770)

### Introduction

Sometimes people who have only a cursory knowledge of the Bible make a sharp distinction between Jesus in the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament. They see Jesus as a mild-mannered man of goodness and grace, as opposed to the Old Testament God who executed judgment and vengeance upon His enemies and even punished His own people for their sins. Jesus' command "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged" becomes an overriding statement that blankets all of His teaching.

But when we read the Gospels, we soon discover that Jesus is not the quiet, mild-mannered man dispensing folksy wisdom; He's the King who turns over tables in the temple, excoriates the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, and challenges the kingdoms of this world until He becomes a threat and is taken away to be executed. To see Jesus as merely a good, nice teacher is to flatten Him out, to make Him a one-dimensional person.



Why do you think so many people see Jesus as just a "good, nice teacher" and fail to consider His teachings about judgment?

In our study so far, we've seen that many of the parables of Jesus emphasize grace. The parable of the prodigal son and the parable of the good Samaritan—these two stories, among many more, are vivid pictures of the grace of God and love of neighbor. But we don't do justice to the parables of Jesus until we see that many of His stories get right to the heart of God's judgment:

- Death coming upon the rich man who had no thought of God as he built himself bigger barns for his harvest (Luke 12:16-21)
- The rich man agonizing in hell after having ignored the beggar Lazarus on his doorstep (Luke 16:19-31)
- The parable of the wedding feast, which ends with a scene of shocking destruction (Matt. 22:1-14)

The parable of the wicked tenants is one of the strongest and most pointed of Jesus' parables. Although it may not be as famous as the parables of the prodigal son or the good Samaritan, it shows up in three of the four Gospels. Together with the parable of the sower and the soils, this story becomes a good bookend to our study of the parables. The parable of the soils was told early in Jesus' ministry, and the parable of the wicked tenants came during the week before His crucifixion and resurrection.

### Session Summary

In this session, we will look at the parable of the wicked tenants, one of Jesus' most famous parables of judgment. In this story we see the privilege and responsibility that comes with God's calling on our lives. We also see the grace of God in His warnings to sinners and the judgment of God in His retribution toward those who reject His Son. This parable's stark imagery reminds us that we are called to bear the fruit of repentance and mission and thus fulfill our purpose as God's people.

## 1. The wicked tenants reject their responsibility as stewards (Matt. 21:33-35).

It's common to hear people talk about the parables of Jesus as if they made His teaching easier to understand. Jesus Himself claimed otherwise: He spoke in parables in order to confound people and so that only those with eyes and ears of faith would understand (Matt. 13:10-15). The parables were a sign of God's judgment, a truth that grew more and more evident in Jesus' later ministry, when His parables became more and more pointed. Let's take a look at how the parable of the wicked tenants, one of Jesus' last parables, starts out:

<sup>33</sup> *“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away. <sup>34</sup> When the time came to harvest fruit, he sent his servants to the farmers to collect his fruit. <sup>35</sup> The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.*

If you were to see me drawing a picture of an elephant and a donkey having a battle, you'd probably realize I was doing more than illustrating “Old MacDonald Had a Farm.” In our culture, the elephant and donkey duking it out are stand-in animals for the Republican and Democrat political parties. For me to tell a story about an elephant and a donkey is to make a point about American politics.

### Further Commentary

“The master here is portrayed as a landlord with tenants rather than a father with sons. Both sets of references prove equally appropriate for God and his chosen people. The details of wall, winepress, and watchtower should not be allegorized; they merely underline the care and protection God has lavished on his vineyard, Israel. The farmers will naturally stand for those to whom God has entrusted his nation. The master's departure reflects the common practice of absentee landlords in first-century Palestine and corresponds to the period following God's election of Israel in which he leaves his people to do his will. The time of harvest approaches, and the master wants his due. ‘Fruit’ remains a key term throughout the story (v. 34a, in which ‘the harvest time’ is, more literally, ‘the time of the fruits,’ v. 34b, v. 41b, in which NIV translates ‘crop,’ and v. 43). And it is a key term elsewhere in Matthew (beginning with the programmatic reference to ‘fruit in keeping with repentance’ in 3:8; cf. also 3:10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:8,26; 21:19). The wording in v. 34 may allude to Psalm 1:3.”<sup>2</sup>

—Craig L. Blomberg

### Voices from the Culture

“The one at whom a parable is told clearly knows to whom it is directed.”<sup>3</sup>

—African proverb

### Voices from the Church

“Jesus...told this parable to draw out what was in the hearts of the religious leaders.”<sup>4</sup>

—David Platt

Something similar is going on at the beginning of this parable, but because we’re removed from the original context, we might miss the connection. The image of a vineyard instantly evoked Isaiah 5 for Jesus’ hearers. Take a look at this passage for some background (vv. 1-7):

I will sing about the one I love, a song about my loved one’s vineyard: The one I love had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He broke up the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted it with the finest vines. He built a tower in the middle of it and even dug out a winepress there. He expected it to yield good grapes, but it yielded worthless grapes. So now, residents of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard than I did? Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes, did it yield worthless grapes? Now I will tell you what I am about to do to my vineyard: I will remove its hedge, and it will be consumed; I will tear down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland. It will not be pruned or weeded; thorns and briars will grow up. I will also give orders to the clouds that rain should not fall on it. For the vineyard of the LORD of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, the plant he delighted in. He expected justice but saw injustice; he expected righteousness, but heard cries of despair.

-  Based on Isaiah 5, what does the vineyard in Jesus’ parable represent? Whom does the vineyard owner represent?
-  How have you experienced a greater understanding of Scripture by knowing the storyline and the details of the Old Testament?

Jesus’ parable is about God and His people. As Jesus retold the vineyard story, He made it clear that the religious leaders (tenants) who had been called by God (owner) to watch over Israel (the vineyard) had failed. The people had received the great privilege of being chosen by God. But they had failed to live up to the responsibility that accompanies that blessing. God was looking for fruit from His people, especially from the religious leaders, but no fruit was found.

Instead of apologizing for their lack of fruit, the tenants of the vineyard treated the owner terribly. They resented the intrusion of the vineyard owner through his sending of messengers. Their problem was not that they didn’t bear *any* fruit; it was that the fruit they bore was *bad!* Instead of offering the good fruit of repentance for their failures, they offered the bad fruit of rebellion.

Already in this story we see a challenge to the religious leaders of Jesus' day. But what about us? The apostle Paul claimed that believers in Jesus are grafted into Israel. As part of God's people, we are God's vineyard, given the privilege of being His people but also the weighty responsibility of fulfilling His call on our lives. Until we see ourselves as stewards, we will never understand the nature of our call.

? What are the responsibilities that come with our privilege of being God's chosen people?

? What kind of fruit are we to bear as Christians?

## 2. The wicked tenants reject God's warnings and God's Son (Matt. 21:36-41).

As we mentioned earlier, the parable of the wicked tenants is one of judgment. But the judgment is a long time coming! As the story continues, we watch the vineyard owner exercise an astounding level of patience and restraint. He sends messenger after messenger to claim what is rightfully his. Take a look:



*<sup>36</sup> Again, he sent other servants, more than the first group, and they did the same to them.*

*<sup>37</sup> Finally, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.*

*<sup>38</sup> "But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.'<sup>39</sup> So they seized him, threw him out of*

*the vineyard, and killed him.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"*

*<sup>41</sup> "He will completely destroy those terrible men," they told him, "and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his fruit at the harvest."*

Although the main point of this parable is the judgment of God, we shouldn't overlook the shocking display of patience on the part of the vineyard owner. He keeps sending messengers to the tenants, and the tenants continue to mistreat the messengers.

### Further Commentary

"The parable makes it clear that Jesus sees his own death as the climax of the people's rejection of God's invitation to them to fulfill their proper role, an invitation brought first by the prophets and then by Jesus. But their rejection of the 'son' is not just one more act of selfish disobedience; it is an unparalleled and unprecedented act of rebellion against the 'father.' The implications of the parable for our appreciation of how Jesus saw his own ministry are remarkable. He saw himself as God's last and decisive messenger to the people. He saw himself in continuity with the prophets, bringing the word of God and calling people to serve God, and yet, strikingly, he saw himself as not just a servant like the great prophets of God, but as the beloved Son and heir of the owner of the vineyard."<sup>5</sup>

—David Wenham



## Voices from Church History

"[This parable's] purpose is to illustrate God's 'incomprehensible' concern for man, the lengths God will go to keep on his track and maintain contact with him despite his stubbornness and his blind delusion."<sup>6</sup>

—Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986)



## Voices from the Church

"Jesus teaches that seemingly endless patience of God is extended toward those who oppose him. But when this patience ends at the rejection of his Son, God's swift retribution is sure to follow."<sup>7</sup>

—Simon J. Kistemaker

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 98. Nature of Hell

For those who are not found in Christ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their deeds done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits unbelievers in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever separated from God.

The people in Jesus' day would have made the connection between these servants and the prophets in the Old Testament. The prophets came with God's message: "Thus says the LORD!" or "This is the LORD's declaration!" They spoke on behalf of God in order to remind God's people of their vocation and to call on Israel's leaders to be obedient. The prophets held the people accountable for their sin, pointed them toward God, and urged them to repent.

Just as the wicked tenants mistreated the servant-messengers, so also the religious and political leaders of Israel mistreated the prophets. You'd expect God to respond immediately after having one of His prophets mistreated, wouldn't you? Instead, God continued to warn His people of the consequences of their sin. He continued to send prophet after prophet after prophet, no matter how badly they were treated.

This doesn't seem logical, does it? How many times does the vineyard owner need to send servants—who get mistreated and beaten and killed—before realizing that perhaps something more drastic should take place? How many times does God need to send prophets to warn His people before He takes more decisive action? Logic and reason aren't the focus here but the grace and patience of God. It's not logic that drives God but love.



We tend to think of warnings as something bad, a message of judgment. How are God's warnings to us a sign of His grace?

The parable continues with the vineyard owner sending his own son, and for those of us on this side of the page, reading and listening to Jesus' story, the analogy is crystal clear. Just as God's people had rejected the warnings that had come from love, so also they would reject the Son who came in love. The wicked tenants see the son and covet his inheritance. Instead of responding respectfully and rightly, they throw him out of the vineyard and kill him. The same week that Jesus uttered this parable, the religious leaders would conspire to throw Jesus out of Jerusalem and crucify Him on the outskirts of town.

There is another important feature here. Jesus presents the son as distinct from the servants. He comes last in a long line of servants, but the son's arrival marks a turning point in the story. Similarly, Jesus saw Himself as coming in a long line of prophets, but He saw His own relationship with the Father as distinct from everyone who had come before Him. This parable shows the seriousness of rejecting the Son of God.

Where do we fit in this story? On the one hand, the parable serves as a warning to all who reject the Son of God. Reject Jesus and you invite the judgment of God.

On the other hand, the parable serves as a warning to those who think they belong to God's people but continue to ignore His warnings. We show we truly belong to God by obeying Him, heeding His warnings, and embracing His Son. By failing to heed God's warnings, we take our stand against the prophets and against Jesus Himself.

What words would you use to describe the vineyard owner if he had decided not to judge the wicked tenants?	
Why does punishment seem so proper in this case?	How does this impact the way we view the judgment of God?

### 3. The wicked tenants are rejected by God for their wicked schemes (Matt. 21:42-46).

This parable of judgment ends with Jesus quoting from a psalm, and the parable's analogy blurs into reality as (1) it becomes clear Jesus is issuing a strong judgment against His people's failure to bear fruit and (2) that the religious leaders recognize how this parable was uttered against them.

*<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes?"*

#### Further Commentary

"In the NT, only Jesus asks, 'Have you never read?' (12:3; 19:4; 21:16; Mark 12:10); and in each case he is saying, in effect, that the Scriptures point to him (John 5:39-40). The quotation is from Psalm 118:22-23 (LXX, which faithfully renders MT)...'Stone' symbolism was important in the early church (Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6) to help Christians understand why Jesus was rejected by so many of his own people; and doubtless its effectiveness was enhanced by Jesus' use of it. Jesus now turns to the image of a building. The 'capstone' (lit., 'head of the corner') is most probably the top stone of roof parapets, exterior staircases, and city walls (cf. 1:61). Psalm 118 may have been written about David, the type of his greater Son. All the 'builders'—Goliath, David's own family, even Samuel—overlooked or rejected David, but God chose him. So in Jesus' day the builders (leaders of the people) rejected David's antitype, Jesus. But God makes him the Capstone. Alternatively, and more probably, the psalm concerns Israel. The nation was despised and threatened on all sides, but God made it the capstone. Jesus, who recapitulates Israel (see Matt. 2:15) and is the true center of Israel, receives similar treatment from his opponents, but God vindicates him (cf. 23:39). The building metaphor makes no explicit allusion to the church: the point is christological, not ecclesiastical. The reversal of what man holds dear, the elevation of what he rejects, can only be the Lord's doing; 'and it is marvelous in our eyes' (cf. 23:39)."<sup>8</sup>

—D. A. Carson

## Further Commentary

“Jesus’ words are confirmed by what ‘the chief priests [mostly Sadducees] and the Pharisees’ (v. 45)—the two principal voices of authority in the Judaism of Jesus’ day—understood this parable to mean: ‘they knew he was talking about them.’ Verse 44 is inserted in many [manuscripts]. It is certainly dominical but may be an assimilation to Luke 20:18. A ‘capstone,’ if too low, could be tripped over by an unwary person, sending him over the parapet; if too light or insecurely fastened, leaning against it could dislodge it and send it crashing onto the head of some passerby (Matt. 21:44). There is probably an allusion to both Isaiah 8:14-15 and Daniel 2:35. This despised stone (Matt. 21:42) is not only chosen by God and promoted to the premier place, it is also dangerous. The pericope ends with magnificent yet tragic irony (v. 46). The religious leaders are told they will reject Jesus and be crushed. But instead of taking the warning, they hunt for ways to arrest him, hindered only by fear of the people who accept Jesus as a prophet (see v. 11), and so trigger the very situation they have been warned about—a dramatic example of God’s poetic justice. God in the Scriptures foretells this very event; and these men, prompted by hatred, rush to bring it to pass.”<sup>10</sup>

—D. A. Carson

<sup>43</sup> *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit.* <sup>44</sup> *Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him.”*

<sup>45</sup> *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew he was speaking about them.* <sup>46</sup> *Although they were looking for a way to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because the people regarded him as a prophet.*

It would be easy for us to misinterpret a couple of points in Jesus’ parable, perhaps due to our pressing the parable for too many details. First, the vineyard owner seems like he doesn’t know what will happen if he sends his son to the wicked tenants. In seeing the vineyard owner as an analogy for God, we might think that God was taken aback or surprised at how the prophets and His Son were treated. In contrast, God knew His Son would die, which is precisely the reason He sent Him—to be “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Second, we might think that Jesus’ words about the vineyard being taken away and given to others is a full-blown rejection of Israel. Instead, what is taking place here is not God rejecting Israel altogether but reconstituting Israel around His Son, the Messiah. Jesus is the cornerstone for God’s new people.

Let’s summarize the main truths we’ve learned from this parable. Craig Blomberg sums up the teaching this way:

- (1) God is patient and longsuffering in waiting for his people to bear the fruit which he requires of them, even when they are repeatedly and overtly hostile in their rebellion against him.
- (2) A day will come when God’s patience is exhausted and those who have rejected him will be destroyed.
- (3) God’s purposes will not thereby be thwarted, for he will raise up new leaders who will produce the fruit the original ones failed to provide.<sup>9</sup>

As we apply this parable to our situation today, we should be aware of just how religious the rejection of Jesus and the prophets was. Sometimes we tend to think of people in categories of religious or irreligious, as if the former is good and the latter is bad. But in this case, the people who received the strongest condemnation from God were precisely the religious leaders and the people who bore no fruit. They were religious, but they weren’t fruitful.

- ❓ What are some ways we might use religiosity to mask our lack of fruitfulness?
- ❓ What aspects of this parable’s warning apply to us today?

We fail to apply this parable well if we do not consider our own lives. We cannot rely on our religiosity or our sincerity to escape the wrath of God. We must rely only on Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith, who incorporates us into His people. Belonging to God's people is both a privilege and a responsibility, just as it was in Jesus' day.

If we were to place ourselves in this story, we would need to see ourselves as the wicked tenants. Along with the religious leaders, our voices cried out at the cross: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" It was not just the sin of Israel that put Jesus on the cross but the sin of the whole world, displayed in the historical collaboration of Rome (the Gentiles) and Israel (the Jews).

We are the ones who have spurned God and ignored His warnings. We are the ones who have turned on His only Son. The question now remains: *On which side of this furious judgment of God will we be found?* It is only in embracing God the Son and humbly trusting in Him that we find salvation. Instead of being the cornerstone that crushes us in judgment, Jesus becomes the cornerstone of our new life in Him, the cornerstone of the new people of God to which we belong. The wicked tenants is a parable of judgment, yes, but its purpose is to bring us to repentance and faith in the Son.

 What role does "bearing fruit" play in our mission to share and show the love of God?

## Conclusion

The portrait of a mild Jesus who spoke only of grace and never of judgment is a figment of the imagination. We serve a Savior whose scandalous grace was matched with the ferocious roar of judgment. In this parable, we see a glimpse of God's patience but also His swift retribution. Let this story from Jesus shock your senses and lead you to see yourself as a steward of His blessings.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants is one of the clearest denunciations of the religious leaders in His day. The story implies that God is the vineyard owner, Jesus is the owner's son, and the religious leaders are the ones who have rejected God's Word. Applying Psalm 118 to Himself, Jesus saw Himself as the cornerstone—the person in whom God's judgment and salvation come together.

### Voices from the Church

"Judgment is prominent in the teachings of Jesus, beginning with a notable feature: Jesus will be the judge."<sup>11</sup>

—Scot McKnight

### Voices from Church History

"Although [the chief priests and the Pharisees] were hard of heart and on account of their unbelief and wickedness blunted in their understanding against the Son of God, nevertheless they were unable to deny Jesus' straightforward statements and understood that all the judgments of the Lord were directed against themselves."<sup>12</sup>

—Jerome (circa 345-420)

## Additional Resources

# The Wicked Tenants

## References

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7. Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 89.
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9. Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 249.
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11. Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 184.
12. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 3.21.46, quoted in *Matthew 14-28*, ed. Manlio Simonetti, vol. 1b in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 143.



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Grow with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog at [LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

## Study Material

- "The Rejection of the King and His Authority"—Pages 287-296 from *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew* by David Platt
- "Commentary on Matthew 21:28-46"—Article by Knox Chamblin; find a link to this article at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Early Vineyards," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator). Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

## Sermon Podcast

Crawford Loritts: "It Is Not Your Property"

Find a link to this at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)

## Tip of the Week

### Prayer Requests

Most of us have faced the challenge of getting everything done during a group meeting. Unfortunately, some things get squeezed out if we are not careful. Here are some ways to gather prayer requests and pray when time is limited: collect prayer requests on index cards as people arrive; break into small groups to pray only for that group's requests; guided, conversational prayer time; allow each person in the group to pray for their own requests; take requests at the end of the group time; on some occasions, declare that only requests for others' spiritual condition are allowed.

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