

## WICKED VINE-DRESSERS

– *AUGUST 16.* – *MATTHEW 21:33-46.* –

**"The Stone that the builders rejected, the same is become the Head of the corner." – Matthew 21:42.**

NOT only did the Redeemer teach chiefly by parables, but additionally nearly all of those parables related directly or indirectly to the Kingdom. The reason for this is plain. The Divine Plan calls for the setting up of the Kingdom of Righteousness by Divine Power for the overcoming of the Prince of Darkness and his reign, which for six thousand years has been a Reign of Sin and Death. While not directly telling of the Kingdom, the lesson of today points to it indirectly.

While the whole world was lying in darkness and sin and under Divine sentence of unworthiness of life, God planted in the world a root of promise, a hope. This Promise, made to Abraham, foretold that his see, or posterity, would eventually become very great and powerful, and would cause the blessing of God to fill the earth, instead of the curse, which it would roll away. In due time this Promise came to the nation of Israel, as the natural posterity of Abraham and the heirs of the Promise. Thus God planted a vineyard in the world, the Jewish nation, a special and peculiar people bound to Him, and He to them, by the Law Covenant negotiated through Moses. God set a hedge about this nation and gave them special provisions of Divine favor "every way." (Romans 3:1,2.) The Divine hedge was the Divine promise that as long as the Israelites would be faithful and loyal to God, they would be thoroughly protected against their enemies.

The vineyard had a watch tower, as was common in those days, that from this tower watchmen might guard against robbers. So the Lord declared Himself to be Israel's High Tower. He placed

watchmen, even the Prophets, who cried aloud and warned the people from time to time in respect to any and every breaking down of the wall, or partition; for this protection could be broken down only by disloyalty, carelessness, sin, on the part of Israel. The statement that the Lord, after having made this arrangement with Abraham's seed, went into a far country implies that the arrangement was intended to stand for a long time.

### **THE ORIGINAL VINE-DRESSERS**

While in this parable the entire nation of Israel is represented by the vineyard, the husbandmen, or caretakers of the vineyard, were the religious leaders, of whom Jesus said, "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." (Matthew 23:2,3.) These vine-dressers became conceited, got to feel a proprietary right in the vineyard, acted as though they were the real owners, and not merely the Owner's servants. Even in their speech they became accustomed to refer to the masses of Israel as the laity and to themselves as the clergy. They referred to the people as "our people," "my people," etc. In other words, they failed to glorify God properly, and therefore in thus taking honor to themselves felt themselves more than the servants of God, honored in being permitted to be vine-dressers in His vineyard.

As centuries rolled on, it was only proper to expect that the operation of the Law Covenant would produce good fruitage amongst the people – that through their inability to keep the Law they would become stronger in character; that these united experiences would make them more reverential, more loyal to God, more earnestly desirous that the typical kingdom should give place to the antitypical one, when the Owner would be present, either directly or through some especially appointed representative. In due course of time, the Owner, Jehovah, sent His servants, the Prophets, to Israel, sometimes with one message,

sometimes with another. These servants and their messages became tests as respected the love, devotion and loyalty of the vine-dressers, and tests also relative to the character-development of the people of Israel.

But alas! the very ones who should have been glad to welcome the Owner's representatives, and glad to have [R5505 : page 221] manifested to them the fruits of holiness amongst the people, showed their own disloyalty by mistreating the servants. They reasoned that to acknowledge those servants and the reproofs which they gave would mean an acknowledgment that they themselves were merely vine-dressers, and not in any sense of the word owners of the vineyard or an especially preferred class not held responsible under the general Law governing all. Therein their pride and their desire to show off before the people prompted the mistreatment of the Owner's special representatives, the Prophets. As the parable shows, some of these were beaten, others killed, others stoned.

### **"IT BROUGHT FORTH WILD GRAPES"**

Finally the Owner of the vineyard sent His Son, saying, Surely they should reverence My Son. As a matter of fact, the Bible informs us that God knew that the rulers of Israel would not reverence His Son, but would crucify Him; and that He sent His Son with this foreknowledge of their intention.

But the parable is stating the matter from a different standpoint – as though the Owner had said, as He might well have said, "They will reverence My Son." Surely the rulers of the Jews should have revered the Perfect One – "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." Surely they should have recognized this One, of whom the people declared, "Never man spake like this Man." Surely they should have hearkened to His Message, should have repented of their sins, should have come back through Him into harmony with the Father, [R5505 : page

**222]** and thus have obtained forgiveness and a blessing. Whatever reasons there might have seemed to be for their thinking that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Malachi and others of the Prophets were deceivers, none of those arguments would hold against the Owner's Son, whose credentials were manifest in His holiness, in His miracles and mighty works, and in His mightier words of life.

However, the spirit of selfishness and self-conceit is powerful, and often leads those who possess it to monstrous acts which afterward appal even themselves. The Jewish Doctors, the clergy of that time, perceived that Jesus, the Son of God, the Representative of the Owner of the vineyard, by His words and deeds was exerting a mighty influence over the people. His claim to be the Owner's Son was backed by numerous signs which the people were disposed to recognize. We read that He departed into a mountain alone, when the people would take Him by force to make him a King. The clerical class reasoned that to whatever extent His cause should prevail, their power over the people, their influence, their titles, their honors of men, would diminish in importance.

### **"BEHOLD OPPRESSION – BEHOLD A CRY"**

The rulers of the vineyard, shown by Jesus' description to be the Pharisees and the Sadducees, had become very unbelieving as respects the declaration of the Prophets that the King would eventually send Messiah with great blessings and power for the glorification of that vineyard and the widening of its influence in the whole world. The Sadducees, including many of the Scribes, as a class were agnostics – disbelievers in the inspiration of the promises and the prophecies. The same spirit affected the Pharisees to a considerable extent. All were self-seeking. Jesus styled them "money-lovers," and declared that they sought chiefly the honor of men rather than that honor which cometh alone from God.

In their exasperation against Jesus, in their realization that His victory meant their defeat and the defeat of all the institutions which represented their wisdom and teachings, they determined that it was necessary for Him to die. By this they meant that His death was necessary for the success of their theories and plans, because His theories, His teachings, were so different from theirs. They could not endure the thought that the great institutions which they had so laboriously constructed out of human traditions which made void the Word of God should all fade away. To them it seemed that to surrender their plans to Jesus and for Him to carry out the plans which He preached would mean the ruin of the vineyard, the nation. They did not realize that the course which they were taking was the very one which would lead to the destruction of that typical kingdom of God, that typical vineyard.

Jesus carried the parable up to His own time and foretold His own violent death at the hands of those wicked vine-dressers who treated the Lord's heritage as though it were their own. Then, in conclusion, Jesus asked His hearers what they would expect the Owner of that vineyard to do with those wicked husbandmen when He should come to take possession and to redress the wrongs. The answer was that He would miserably destroy those wicked vine-dressers, and would let out His vineyard to other husbandmen who would render Him the proper fruits at the proper time.

Jesus did not Himself give the answer, but His silence was confirmatory of the answer of the people. And so the parable was fulfilled. God's judgments came upon the Jewish nation, with the result that it was entirely overthrown in the year 70 A.D. Speaking of this, St. Paul says, "Wrath is come upon this people to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16), that all things written in the Law and the Prophets concerning them should be fulfilled. Their nationality was utterly overthrown and has never since been restored – nor will it be until the time foretold by the Prophets, when Messiah in glory shall establish His Reign of Righteousness

and when under His Kingdom those faithful servants, the Prophets, who were slain, stoned to death, etc., will be made associates and given authority and power as Messiah's representatives in the earth. – Psalm 45:16.

## **THE NEW VINE-DRESSERS**

The Lord said that those originally appointed were wicked vine-dressers. He appointed new ones; namely, the twelve Apostles, St. Paul taking the place of Judas. Moreover, He started a new vineyard, putting into it only the true Vine, inspired with faith and loyalty toward God. Those faithful servants, although they long ago fell asleep, continue through their words, their teachings, to influence, to guard, to keep, the true Vine of the Lord – the Church, the Body of Christ. Of this vineyard our Lord declares, "I am the true Vine; ye are the branches." Century after century these true branches of the true Vine have been planted by baptism into death with their Master and have been bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Ere long, we believe, this fruitage will all be gathered and, by the resurrection "change," be transplanted to the Heavenly condition.

Meantime, however, the same spirit which was manifested by the vine-dressers of the Jewish Age has manifested itself again. Other vineyards have been started. In numbers, wealth and influence these quite outrank and outshine the Lord's vineyard, which alone bears the precious fruit which He desires. The two vines are spoken of in the Bible. The one is said to be "the Vine of My Father's right hand planting." The other is styled "the vine of the earth." The fruitage of the one is manifested in the character-likeness of Christ, faithfulness unto death. The fruitage of the other is manifested in boastfulness, pride, show – a form of godliness without the power thereof.

There is to be a gathering of the fruitage of the vine of the earth at the Second Coming of the Master. We read that it is to be

dealt with in the winepress of the wrath of God in the great Time of Trouble with which this Age will pass away, giving place to the thousand years of Messiah's Kingdom for the world's uplift.

## **THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE**

The Scriptures give us the thought that the Church of Christ is represented by a pyramid, which has five corner-stones, the chief one being the top-stone – a perfect pyramid in itself, the lines of which control the entire structure. Jesus, rejected by the Jews, crucified, is the Chief Corner-Stone of this great Temple of God which is the Church. Already He is glorified. During this Age His footstep followers, shaped in harmony with His character-likeness, are being prepared to be united with Him in Heavenly glory.

Thus, as our Lord declared, the Kingdom of God was taken from Israel – the natural seed of Abraham – to be given to Spiritual Israel. God is thus developing or creating the new nation, a holy nation, a peculiar people, separate and distinct from all others, gathered out from Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, from every nation and denomination.

Christ Jesus, the Top-stone, is indeed "a stone of stumbling" to many. By stumbling over Him they injure themselves; but if He should fall on them, in the sense of condemning them, it would signify their utter **[R5505 : page 223]** destruction; their cutting off in the Second Death.

The chief priests and the Pharisees heard the Master's parables, and perceived that He spoke of them as the wicked vine-dressers. They sought to lay hold of Him and destroy Him forthwith; but they feared the multitude, who, although they did not recognize Him as the Son of God, did esteem Him the great Prophet, or Teacher.

