

Ears to Hear

Getting to the Point of the Parables

5. Grapes of Wrath

The Parable of the Tenants

Mark 12v 1-12

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.

Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.

In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.

Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.

This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.

Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8

Grapes of Wrath: The Parable of the Tenants

Possessing the Promised Land was a deeply significant part of Israel's history and ongoing heritage as God's chosen people. What God had promised, He had delivered, along with strict instructions on how Israel should conduct her national life. Even a cursory reading of the Old Testament will reveal how often the nation struggled with this, falling into compromise and its resultant sin. God's yardstick had always been clear: observe the law and stand out as the covenant people of God; a shining light to the surrounding nations. In a world of idolatry, immorality and oppression, the Jews were called to be set apart and holy. When they were, God would always give the increase in battle, in bounty and in blessing His people. However, when they lapsed into sin, the nation could expect to lose wars, endure hardship and know the absence of God's favor. This resulted in foreign occupation as God would use pagan nations to judge His errant people, teaching them humility, repentance and the need to return to Him for future prosperity.

At the time of Christ, the Romans were occupying Israel. The once promised land had been cut up into smaller sections and bought up by wealthy Roman investors. God's once prosperous people had become a peasant people, often eking out a frugal existence, renting land back from those who had come and taken it. Despite history's warnings, the religious leaders had become entrenched in pride and power, declaring they were God's people, rather than demonstrating it. Likewise, the people were equally entrenched in their resentment of Rome. They needed to heed the voice of Christ, humble themselves and return to God and His ways. But instead and with hardened hearts, they were more interested in rebellion than repentance. So Jesus, in demonstrating His authority as God's servant, tells the parable of the tenants: a plotline painfully reminiscent of what the people were facing, but, as always, with a twist in the tale.

Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:

A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:

Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?

Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?

Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?

Read: Mark 12v 1-12

Key words: vineyard, farmers, harvest, servants, son,

- **The Scene is Set: Walls, winepresses and watchtowers – 12v1-2**
Jesus' introduces the parable using everyday images to convey crucial points about God's purposes in Israel's history and in Christ.
- **The Servant is Seized: Beatings, bloodshed and bodies -12v3-5**
As the drama unfolds, a sinister resistance is revealed as the tenants conspire against the landowner, usurping his plans with their own.
- **The Son is Sent: Menace, motive and murder – 12v6-8**
Ultimately the story warns of coming judgement for those who choose to resist rather than receive God's message found in Christ.

Ears to Hear?

- **Begin with the Background:**

To what extent is the backdrop to this parable significant? (11v 27-33)

Where does Jesus actually tell this parable? Is this significant? How?

Read Isaiah 5v 1-7. What is Isaiah describing? How would the crowd have interpreted Jesus' parable in the light of this prophecy?

- **The Point of the Parable:**

What is the main point of the parable? Explain it in your own words.

How would you apply its teaching today?

Who would you compare the characters in the story to? (The owner, the farmers, the servants, the son)

Why do you think the owner is so patient in dealing with his tenants?

What does the parable tell us about God and about people?

- **Jesus and Judgement:**

The treatment of the son seems to be the trigger for judgement. How comfortable are you with thoughts of Divine judgement? How should we be emphasising this in our evangelism? Do we?

This parable highlights blessing, grace and judgement. As sent "servants" how should our lives reflect these key gospel concepts?