

Being Fruitful

Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

Central Idea: In these last days, we need to have an attitude of action and produce good fruit!

Introduction

Well, the new year has started. It's for many a fresh start. Some people want to make changes in their lives. Other people want to ignore it and just keep on trucking. I like to use it to initiate new ideas or try new things. I also like to use it as a way to recommit myself and my life to God for His use. It is a special time because we put so much significance on being new.

So I have a new series for you. For a new year. Because the other side of the coin is that while it is a new year, for some a new beginning, for the believer it is another year closer to the return of Jesus Christ. That should give us a whole bag of mixed feelings. At first, it should make us happy and bubbling over with joy, because we are closer to meeting our Lord in the air. But it also should make us sad, because there are still millions, maybe even billions who don't know Christ and won't be going with us to heaven. Even in our own families, there are people who do not know Christ.

So as we wait in these last days, between God's promises that have been given and the final fulfillment of those promises, what should be our attitude? What is expected of us? How do we wait? I've been in several waiting rooms, and they're weird places. They have magazines so that you don't get too uncomfortable sitting there with total strangers. Many people bring something to do. I play with my phone. But we are in a waiting room, as it were, as we wait on Christ. And we are not supposed to sit around and distract ourselves from all those around us! We have a mission to do. Let's take a look at a parable that speaks to us about our attitude in these last days.

Text – Matthew 21:33-46

³³ “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹ They said to him, “He will put those

wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

I. We must accept God’s messengers.

A. God has sent prophets and ministers.

- i. Throughout Matthew 21, Jesus has been speaking parables about authority. As He was teaching in the temple, the religious leaders questioned His authority to teach the people.
- ii. Jesus responds by explaining that it’s ironic for them to come to Him and challenge His spirituality and authority, because they have used their authority to turn away from God!
- iii. This parable is about that; the tenants are the religious leaders and those who ignore God’s constant interaction with this world, who turn away from every opportunity He provides.
- iv. We live in a world today and in these last days that is exactly like these religious leaders. It seeks to kill the son. It seeks to ignore the warnings and messages from God. It seeks to mock God’s servants.
- v. And so Jesus makes a parallel in the parable about the attitude of this world and of Israel’s leaders in the Old Testament, who chased down and destroyed the prophets of God and the works of God.
- vi. The question then becomes, “What is the vineyard?” The answer in Jesus’ day is that the vineyard is Israel, God’s people. I would expand it today to talk about the vineyard being the Kingdom of God.
- vii. **Application:** The same message given, then, by Jesus for those back then is still true of us today. Are we like the leaders of Israel who turned not only a blind eye to God’s messengers and servants, but also persecuted them? Do we need to be careful today about how we judge leaders and servants in the Kingdom of God? Do we persecute those God sends to us?

B. God has gifted people to serve Him.

- i. God has never stopped sending people into the world. God has never stopped sending leaders and prophets to His Church. And yet there are times when we belittle those God has sent.

- ii. We ignore them because we think we know better. We think that we are mature in Christ, and we don't want to hear what some of the messengers God has sent into our own lives because we know better than them.
- iii. So we treat the prophetic word with ignorance or arrogance. We toss aside what God is saying through someone else to us. We question their character instead of the message.
- iv. To be sure, there are leaders and prophets that are false today and act more out of the flesh than the Spirit. But there are other times when we refuse to heed a word for us, knowing that God is speaking through them, and we don't want to obey.
- v. I have been there, humbled by people I pegged as charlatans and God has used them to speak into my life. It's a lot harder to hear God when you don't like those He uses. I think that God might even do it on purpose to teach us to receive His Word humbly from whatever source we can get it.
- vi. **Illustration:** Most people know that I'm not much for most TV preachers. I tend to disagree with their methods, their selling of books and weird objects as part of their fundraising, etc. More often than not I don't like their theology or approach, and I wonder many times if some of them realize how unchristian their message can sound. But every once in a while, God speaks through these people, I think in spite of them. Every once in a while, I hear something very much like what God wants me to hear, and I have to humble myself and do business with God.
- vii. There's coming a day in our world when the Word of God will not be preached, proclaimed and prophesied so regularly. We need to have a gratitude for the servants and messengers that God sends, and we need to be open to hearing from Him in whatever form He brings His Word to us.
- viii. **Application:** One of the attitudes we need to have in these last days is to be open to hearing from God despite the messengers and methods He uses to speak into our lives. We should accept a word from God even when it comes through someone we've decided can't be used of God. God will surprise us with the channels He uses to speak into our lives. We must always be cautious, but not ignorant of the word He has for us. Be open to God's messages through all His channels!

II. We must accept God's Son.

A. God has sent Jesus to be with us.

- i. But that's the difference between the attitude of openness that we should have, and the attitude regularly demonstrated by Israel's leaders. Even though Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, is standing before them, they have no inkling of listening to His prophetic words.

- ii. In fact, the text tells us that they perceive Jesus is speaking of them, but they are not repentant or soft hearted toward His message. They want to kill Him.
 - iii. While they were aware enough to know that they were represented by the crude and hard-hearted vineyard tenants who are abusing and even killing the messengers sent to them, they do not have the spiritual insight to realize that in wanting to kill Jesus, they will fulfill the killing of the heir that the tenants want to do!
 - iv. The irony of this parable is astounding, and we see a people who have just enough spiritual insight to hang themselves, to manage to completely fulfill the caricature of the tenants.
 - v. The image Jesus presents is that the messengers and servants who have come to the vineyard and been brutalized by the tenants are those messengers and prophets of Old.
 - vi. But the owner, who represents the Father, decides that He will send His Son to speak to the tenants and that they will listen to the son out of respect for the owner.
 - vii. But that is not what happens. The tenants are so greedy for power that what was supposed to be a guided respectful approach from the Father turns into killing the heir so they can steal the vineyard.
 - viii. The tenants are so dark hearted and hard hearted that they actually take the purpose of God to bring their respect and turn it into a deceptive plot to murder His beloved Son. And this is not just the story of a vineyard. It is the story of History, played out over and over!
- B. God has waited for us to receive Him completely.
- i. There are many ways to reject Jesus. I'm reminded of passages in the Bible, one of which Jesus will quote about the Son, that talk about stumbling over Jesus.
 - ii. God sent Jesus to us literally over 2000 years ago, and there are many who have not accepted Him. With the knowledge of God and of His plan comes the knowledge of Jesus, who is God's way of salvation.
 - iii. And yet, even after we surrender our lives to Christ, and become Christians, we can live in such a way that negates Jesus' leadership in our lives and His power for living.
 - iv. When we don't listen to God's Holy Spirit, we are doing the same thing that these leaders did while Jesus was standing right in front of them. When we don't obey Jesus, we are rejecting Him.
 - v. When we sin against Jesus, we are rejecting the Son sent for us. The writer of Hebrews in chapter six gives us a vivid image of crucifying Jesus all over again when we choose sinful living over Christ's freedom.

- vi. There are two facets to the Son's being sent to us. The first is that the world rejects Him, and we are to be His witnesses in this dark world. But the second is that we also can easily reject Christ even after becoming His people.
- vii. Don't forget that the people rejecting Jesus in His day are the religious people. They are the ones who know and study the Scriptures, who think they understand God. They are the ones who are rejecting God's messengers and Son.
- viii. **Application:** We must be careful to not become like these religious people ourselves. We can very easily become a stiff-necked people. There are so many warnings for people who think they know and understand God. We must be continually humble before God about His Word and His Son. We must be careful not to reject Jesus when He speaks to us, sends people to us, and commands us to do something.

III. We must accept God's mission.

A. God has sent us on a mission for Him.

- i. The key to understanding why Jesus teaches this parable is in verse 43. The parable is about true authority, which belongs to Jesus, not to the religious leaders.
- ii. Only those who demonstrate the kind of fruit that God expects will receive the Kingdom of God. The religious leaders did not have the kind of fruit that God wanted. They were too busy destroying His plans and servants instead of listening and being humble.
- iii. The Pharisees don't even focus on the fact of the passage about the stone the builders rejected. They don't realize that Jesus is speaking about Himself. Instead, they selfishly focus on themselves, and so fulfill the point the Scripture makes!
- iv. We must be sure to produce the kind of fruit, the character and deeds, that please the Lord. Part of our mission on this earth is to show others the goodness of God.
- v. Beyond this, demonstrating good fruit only serves as evidence that God really has changed our lives in salvation. People can see a difference when we produce good fruit.
- vi. The fruits we produce are part of the byproduct of the Kingdom of God. In other words, it is not that we try our hardest to do what pleases the Lord. It is that in living for the Kingdom, we produce good fruits. They are the nature and norm of the Kingdom believer. God works them into us through obedience.
- vii. **Application:** The fruit that we bear happens when we are in constant communion with Christ and offer ourselves to Him humbly, knowing that

obedience will bring His very best into our lives. We are the Kingdom, and we produce good fruit. When we sin or miss the mark, God forgives and we get right back to being who we really are, and the fruit follows those who believe. What kind of fruit are you producing?

- B. God has prepared us to do what He has called us to do.
- i. Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22-23 when He quotes from the Scriptures about Himself, the stone that the builders rejected. Stone is one of the key images for the Messiah in the Old Testament.
 - ii. But the surprise is that the builders, the leaders of Israel, rejected this Stone or Messiah. And yet, still, because He is God's chosen servant, the Stone becomes the corner stone. The corner stone is the first stone laid in a building upon which all other stones are placed.
 - iii. Jesus is the basis for our mission and our actions, for our words and our thoughts. When we do and think and say things that please Him, He is our corner stone. He is our foundation, and we accept His will in our lives.
 - iv. But when we speak and do and think in ways that are contrary to Christ, we reject Him as the builders and leaders have done in the past, and our rejection of Him leads to our loss of His Kingdom.
 - v. As members of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, we are then required to bear the right fruits, fruits that Jesus is pleased with. This image of a stone reminds me of 1 Corinthians 1:21-25.
 - vi. This passage talks about how different types of people stumble over Christ. But we are to lead them to Christ and help them to see Him as He is, not as a stumbling block, but as Savior!
 - vii. I am reminded of another passage when we are concerned about our fruits. What are the fruits of the Christian life? There is the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 and there is the fruit of the light in Ephesians 5:7-10.
 - viii. **Application:** Let us then live in the light and fruit of the gospel of Christ! Let us boldly live in such a way that God is pleased and the Son is pleased with us, so that we might obtain and maintain our place in God's Kingdom. Let us not allow religion and our own ideas of God to keep us from seeing what God is doing and hearing what God is speaking!

Conclusion

We have an opportunity to show this world the glories of Christ, to be fruitful for God's Kingdom, to accept and obey Jesus the Son of God. We could be like these religious leaders, Pharisees, and those who as leaders rejected the messengers of God, or we can stand for God in a world that rejects all that He is and has to offer it. Let us bear witness to God through our obedient fruit and character and actions! The challenge is before us to produce fruit that bears the

mark of God's reign in our hearts, the Kingdom of God through us on this earth! Let us be equal to the task!

Action Points

- Are there times in your life when you have ignored the message of God because it came through a channel you didn't expect to hear God through? We must be open to God's message no matter who God uses to speak it to us!
- Have you ever crucified Jesus all over again, ignoring His leadership or not making Him your example as you grow into godliness? We must not kill Jesus with our sinfulness, unrepentant hearts or ungodly attitudes.
- Evaluate your life, your actions and behavior, your thoughts and motives, and your actions. Do you bear godly fruit? If Jesus saw and heard everything you are doing, would He be pleased? What kind of fruit are you bearing for God? Or are you bearing rotten fruit?