

Tenants Of The Master's Vineyard

Matthew 21:33-46

February, 1 2026

Imagine for a moment that you are the owner of the Long John Silvers Corporation and someone bought a franchise and opened a store in Woodstock. If only. Being from the area, you had a personal interest in this particular store and so you did all you could to make sure it was successful. Because your corporate offices are in Kentucky, you haven't been back to Woodstock in quite some time but you've gotten emails from customers that the food was poor quality and that general cleanliness was horrible. Even worse, the employees had treated some customers rudely and forced some to leave when they asked to speak to the manager. Because of your busy schedule, you're not able to come right away, but your daughter happens to be in the Valley for a wedding so you send her by to check on things. When she points out a cockroach in her cold cod, the manager cusses her out and has her arrested by his friends in the police department. You're the owner of the entire chain. Whatcha gonna do? We find a similar situation in the parable Jesus told in our Scripture today.

Please open your Bibles today to Matthew 21. Pew Bible. Since the beginning of this year, we've been focusing on the 2026 theme for Antioch, which is what? Bearing Fruit for Jesus! I pray that you've been doing exactly that. The first Sunday, we looked at Jesus' explicit command in John 15 for His followers to bear much good fruit that will last. The second Sunday we talked about the fig tree that Jesus cursed for failing to produce and figs, and the third Sunday, we talked about many different specific varieties of fruit, salvation, sanctification, glorification, edification, unification, righteousness, holiness, love, joy, peace, etc. If you missed any of these messages, go back and listen either on YouTube or our website to get caught up.

Today, we come to yet another passage that emphasizes Jesus' desire for us to bear Him good fruit. Like the passages the first two weeks, it too comes from Jesus' final week. In fact, Jesus tells this parable immediately after He cleared the temple on Palm Monday which He did right after He cursed the fig tree that morning. In response to the Jewish leaders' questions about what authority Jesus had to clear the temple, He adds this parable to His explanation. If you are able, please stand to honor the Words of our Savior. Matt 21:33-46 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. 35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same

way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: ""The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? 43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who **will** produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Say vineyard. Below our home on Sherman Road is a vineyard that belongs, I understand, to a man in Loudoun County. I've never met him and I'm not even sure he's ever been to the vineyard, but I do see workers in it from time to time mowing, pruning, spraying, etc. There is very high fence all around it to try to keep out the deer. I've got a better solution. Each fall, the grapes are picked and shipped to some winery. I'm not sure where, but there they are crushed and turned into wine. So, Jesus' parable is very fitting for I can imagine if I owned the vineyard below us and if I sent someone to collect the grapes each year and they beat them up and threw them out, I would not be happy. Nor would you.

Some of Jesus' parables are more challenging to understand than others but this one is pretty straight forward. He's speaking to those who are in charge of the temple and they know it. The chief priests and Jewish leaders are the tenants to whom God entrusted His cherished vineyard. What was His vineyard? Say His Kingdom. God's Kingdom which He entrusted to Israel. The Jews knew instantly who Jesus was talking about for many times in the Old Testament, God calls Israel His vineyard. One of the clearest references is in Isaiah 5 where it says, "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. (sound familiar?) Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit....Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled...The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." The Jewish leaders would not have missed the similarities to Jesus' parable 800 years later.

From the very beginning, God has been drawing people closer to Himself as well. He loves every person He created. He wants all to be saved. He wants a personal relationship with every one of us and to make that possible, He chose Abraham through whom His Kingdom would come. In so doing, He did, if you will, select Jewish soil for His vineyard that would bear those types of fruit we discussed earlier. He revealed His laws and ways to Moses who in turn taught them to the nation. He brought the vine that was Israel out of Egypt and planted it in the fertile soil of the Middle East between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. He put a wall of protection around it by protecting Israel from other nations. Under David and Solomon, He expanded the boundaries of His vineyard all the way up to the Euphrates River and east into Moab, Edom, and Ammon.

He dug a winepress. I think of the Lucy episode in Italy. Perhaps in this parable the winepress is a place where God's Word could be understood, processed and cherished. That place was Jerusalem. The gem of all nations. A true city on a hill from which His truth and light would go out to all the world. And He built a watchtower to protect it. God did all this! And it is marvelous in our eyes!

Then He assigned the stewardship of this vineyard to some farmers, who were the Jewish leaders. The hard work was done. The vineyard was established. The train was moving. All the tenants had to do was maintain and manage it.

Let's back and ask why did God plant this vineyard of Israel? For the same reason the man from Loudoun County planted one on Sherman Road. Perhaps he wanted good wine, but one man can only drink so much. Although I don't know him, I'm guessing he was after profit. Increase. Financial gain. Why would God plant the vineyard of Judaism? Because He wanted profit! Increase! He wanted a return on His investment. Not in dollars or shekels but in the delicious fruit we've discussed. So it was only reasonable that when harvest time came, He would send someone to collect his check, to load up the ripe grapes and haul them to Him.

But it didn't happen. Who were the messengers in Jesus' parable that came to collect? Say the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, etc. And what did the tenants do to the prophets? They ignored them at best and persecuted them at worst. They threw Jeremiah down in a well where he sunk into the mud. Elijah had to run for his life into the wilderness. John the Baptist got his head chopped off. God, the vineyard Owner was trying, but the tenants were rebelling. "Who do you think you are?" they sneered. "This is our vineyard! We're the ones in charge here!" Oh what a fatal mistake!

And it had reached its peak in Jesus' day. The Jewish leaders were consumed with their own greatness and power. So much so, that when the Owner sent His own Son, who was standing in front of them at that moment telling this parable, they killed Him on Golgotha just outside the vineyard of Jerusalem that Friday. "We'll show You who's

boss! We'll show you who really owns this vineyard!" And they did. In Mark's version of this parable, Jesus says, (6) "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved." Now God loved the servants too, the prophets, but this was His precious only Son, Whom He loved, and whom they killed and tossed outside.

Jesus' parable is very powerful for at the end of it, He hands them a question. "What will the vineyard owner do to those tenants?" Even a child can answer that. We can put ourselves in the place of the owner and become unbelievably angry about our own child being rejected and killed on our own property by people we trusted to do the right thing, like the Long John Silvers manager in Woodstock. Vs 41 They replied, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Throw the bums out.

And that's exactly what Jerusalem's owner did. As we mentioned a few weeks ago, less than 40 years after this conversation in 70AD, the Temple was burned, Jerusalem was totally destroyed, the Jewish leaders were killed along with hundreds of thousands of branches with them when Titus sacked the city and left not one stone on another as Jesus would also prophesy a day or so after this parable.

So the vineyard was taken from those wretches as they were brought to a wretched end. Who then did the Owner rent the vineyard to? Say us. The church became the tenants responsible for God's Kingdom in the world. To produce good fruit for Him. To put a smile on the Owner's face. And 2000 years later the care of that vineyard has come down to you and me. We are His tenants.

Unfortunately the Owner has been away so long we sometimes are tempted to make the same mistake the Jews did. We begin to think we own the place. That we can run the vineyard however we want and eat all the profit ourselves. God forbid! The Owner has given us a manual for caring for His vineyard and we do not have the authority, as His tenants, to ignore and change it as some are doing. We do not have the right to turn the church into a money-making machine as happened just before Luther's reformation in the 1500s. Have you ever borrowed something and kept it so long you began to think it was yours? We've been in charge so long, we begin to think the Church belongs to us. Let us never think such! The vineyard ain't ours! We're tenants! CBC is not any person's denomination nor many people's denomination. It and Antioch both belong to God! And we all have a responsibility to produce as much good lasting fruit as we possibly can, not for our benefit, not for our glory, but to present to our Owner.

Let me ask you a question. Does our Landlord still want fruit from His vineyard? If you say no to that question, you've been braindead the last month. You weren't listening to the call to worship this morning where we found Scripture after Scripture highlighting God's desire for us to bear Him good fruit! So you and I, as branches in His vineyard have a responsibility to our Landlord! As individuals and especially those of us

in church leadership, who are like the Jewish leaders, the ones in charge of running the vineyard. Let us not get lazy or selfish. Let us not forget that one day the owner **will** return and ask, “Where’s my fruit? The profit?” Not financially, and perhaps not even numerically, but the spiritual fruit we’ve talked about. Instead, may we hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful tenants! Good and faithful branches! Good and faithful vineyard.” That’s my prayer!

God forbid we hear Him say what Jesus said to those Jewish leaders next. “You took my vineyard and turned it into a circus. Into a showplace. For God’s sake No! Anyone who steps in front of the congregation in worship, in song, in sermon, in leadership, should do so with fear and trembling. Realizing it’s not our church. It’s not my church. The vineyard is His church! Every branch is His. Every piece of soil is His. Every grape grown is His.

We learn from Jesus that we do well to respect the messengers He sends. Listen to them. Do not mistreat them. And even worse, do not reject His Son when He comes to collect the harvest! For the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone! Jesus, whom they rejected and were about to crucify became King of kings and Lord of lords. There was a Jewish tradition that when the temple was being built, a worker rejected one stone that ended up being chosen by the head architect to be the chief capstone which was the most visible. Some churches have rejected Jesus and thrown Him out. They say He’s **not** the only way, He’s **not** even God’s Son, and other such heresies. Oh my friend, don’t reject Jesus! For if you do, you insult His Father, the vineyard Owner who will one day bring all such wretches to their wretched ends.

As we’ve mentioned before, God has planted the Antioch vineyard in a very favorable spot, He’s dug a winepress and put up a watchtower. He’s provided for and protected us. Not to look pretty, but to bear Him fruit. What will we do with it all? He’s planted each of us individually in good soil and given us every advantage and built a wall of His protection around us. Will we use His provisions to benefit us or Him? Jesus said the owner will give the vineyard to those who **WILL** bear fruit for Him. Not those who promise and don’t deliver. Not those who are so consumed with their own side hustles or whatever else we’ve got going on. Not because of apathy, piracy or mismanagement. If God didn’t spare Israel, let us not think He’ll spare those Gentile congregations that fail to produce His good fruit.

Let’s go back to the Long John Silvers Woodsstock where we find the manager squandering the business away, sitting in the back watching TikTok instead of waiting on customers or frying shrimp. He’s making no effort to advance, expand, or even maintain the business. What’s the owner going to do? Especially after he mistreated his own daughter? Imagine further the franchise owner in Strasburg works his fingers to the bone and turns a big profit. Which store is the owner going to entrust with more resources? Which will he recognize and promote? Which will he reward at yearend? We’re not the

owner. We're the franchisee. The tenants. As such, we should manage God's vineyard, His Church with such skill and effort, with such intention and purpose to put a smile on our Owner's face. To produce the fruit we've been talking about and to enlarge His vineyard by recruiting more branches. By telling everyone we know about Jesus and inviting them to be grafted into THE True Vine of Jesus Christ.

Before we finish today, I want us to recognize God's mercy, grace, and patience. For He was exceedingly gracious in allowing extra time for the tenants to repent and produce His good fruit and to respond to His messengers. But when they rejected His only Son, the gig was up. Friends, God has been exceedingly patient with us all. He has given you your whole life to repent and turn to Him and bear His fruit. If you reject His Son, He will reject you and, like those tenants, you too will be brought to a wretched end. Please do not squander your opportunity today. Receive Jesus as your Savior and produce His fruit.

Today is a day to present some of our harvest fruit to our Owner. During our song of response, please bring those clusters of paper grapes with your fruit on them up and hang them on one of these two crosses. On the grapes, if you haven't already, write some type of good fruit you are producing for Jesus. Salvation, etc, righteousness, justice, holiness, love, joy, peace, etc. No one has to see, just bring them up and give your fruit to the Owner as we sing, Take my life/fruit.