

Jesus, as we know, had a real way with words, he taught, he rebuked, and today was no different as he told another truth through another parable. He had the attention of the Chief Priests and elders already as they'd queried his authority and Jesus directed the parable, again, towards those who needed to listen and understand the most. Jesus particularly addressed the Jewish leaders; the Priests and the elders, about their misuse of God given privileges by going back to Old Testament prophecy - and – he also indicated his foreknowledge of their intentions towards him and what would be the consequences of their actions. So, Jesus told a story about a landowner who had planted a vineyard, carefully tended it, put a fence around it and built a watchtower then leased it out to tenant farmers and goes away believing that his vineyard was in safe hands. This was a common practise in those times as his rent would generally be a fixed proportion of their fruit. At harvest time the landowner sent his servants to collect his share but the tenants rebelled, beat and killed the servants - and the servants he sent after them - until finally the landowner sent his own son who he believed they'd have more respect for - but they didn't care and killed him too.

The vineyard in this context, referred back to the Old Testament; to the Prophet Isaiah so would have been familiar to every Jew who knew the prophets. In Isaiah 5 we read about the unfruitful vineyard; though it was well tended, it harvested wild grapes so it would be destroyed, as it says "For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel." God's chosen nation was supposed to bear fruit and carry out his work, but it only grew bad fruit. In the parable, it

wasn't the vineyard that was bad but the tenants who were given the privilege of looking after it.

Jesus then asked the gathered Chief priests and elders what they thought would happen when the landowner returned and they answered, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." I wonder did this click in their heads at this point. Is he talking about us!! They would have known Isaiah's prophecy about Israel and then Jesus asked them if they'd read in scripture, the words which came from Psalm 118, verse 22, which said, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes."

In Isaiah 28:16 it tells us, "Therefore thus, says the Lord God. See I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation."

So the illustration Jesus used of the cornerstone is important as for one, on a practical point, it showed how one mislaid stone could affect the whole structure of a building as it had to be perfectly placed or the whole building would be skewed, and two, that the picture in Isaiah of the foundation stone, is describing and is summed up in Jesus upon whom everything is built, the cornerstone which holds everything together.

Jesus foretold his rejection by Israel's leaders as it was prophesied and also a great reversal where, in verse 43, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

Great privilege had been given to the tenants by the landowner, as God had given privilege to the religious leaders of Israel. He gave a vineyard which was already cultivated and all they had to do was look after it and bring in a portion of the good fruit, but for their deliberate disobedience were thrown out and the privilege was given to others.

Jesus referred to Israel's history and also its downfall; foretelling his death and his ultimate triumph in his resurrection and through the parable declared quite clearly that He was the Son of God, greater than all the prophets who had come before; the cornerstone who would be a stumbling block to many which would ultimately crush those who planned to be rid of him.

Those who receive God's privileges are those who listen and follow Jesus; who do the work of the kingdom, in God's vineyard, to produce good fruit and a good harvest.

Over the last couple of weeks, Jesus told parables which were about vineyards which is such an important illustration. If the vineyard represents God's kingdom then Jesus is the vine, the true vine, the model to which we should aspire to and bear fruit to bring glory and honour to God when His vineyard is fruitful - and when what is His is returned to him, numerous times over.

AMEN

