

Good morning, we're continuing our series in Matthew and today we come to Chapter 21:
to two parables about vineyards:
the parable of the Two Sons; and
the parable of the Tenant Farmers.

Two parables about vineyard owners, and sandwiched between them is one of the most shocking statements in the New Testament, In v31 Jesus says to the Chief Priests and the respected Elders of Jerusalem – (to the religious leaders, to the morally upright)
v31 "I tell you the truth, even tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Now I guess we don't really feel the full force of this
but this is an astoundingly outrageous statement by Jesus.

Jesus is talking here to the moral leaders / to the religious leaders of his time.
People who are morally without reproach,
people who are respected upright citizens
And he is saying to them...
I tell you, even cheats, and traitors, and the blatantly sexually immoral
are discovering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

even cheats, prostitutes and traitors are finding God before those who see themselves as morally upright
and scrupulously religious

And the punch-line **for us** is: what was true then, is absolutely true now.

People with shocking moral track records are more likely to find God than your average person who calls themselves good and devoutly religious.

And if we are to understand **why**, then we need to understand the two parables either side of Jesus' words.

We need to understand
who the Tenant Farmers are (and why they act the way they do)
who the two Sons are (and why **they** act the way they do); and
who the final messenger is (and why he acts the way he does)

Jesus said "even tax collectors and prostitutes are entering finding the Kingdom of heaven before the religious and the morally good".

Why is that?

Well let's look at The tenant farmers, the two sons and the final messenger.

1. Let's begin with the Tenant farmers

In v33, we are introduced to a landowner who is an investor,
He buys a piece of land, he plants it, equips it and protects it and only then does he rent it out to some Farmers.

He goes away but looks for a return on his investment.

He looks for what he is due.

However, whenever he sends anyone for to collect it
the Tenant Farmers mistreat them, beat them and expel them.

Whenever he asks for what he is owed
the Tenant Farmers resist it to the point of even killing those who come in his name.

The Farmers

don't want to recognise that the owner has provided them with everything;
they don't want to pay what they owe;

they don't want to be "tenants" they want to be "owners".

And anyone who comes along,
and who reminds
that they aren't,
that everything they have is from the owner,
that they owe him their living,
they are simply attacked, beaten and even killed.

right lets get down to it and apply this to our own situation.

Here is our world (the vine-yard) and it is beautiful,
Here is our eco-system – it is amazing,
Here are the laws of universe that surround us and they are brilliantly balanced.

There is an ozone layer to shield us from harmful radiation,
there are natural checks and balances in nature to maintain our environment
there is even our own body's defensive systems to keep us well!

Everything we have, everything that we are, everything we inherit, everything that surrounds us is a gift from God.

We didn't make it. We didn't create it. We didn't design it.
Everything is given as an act of Creative grace by God

And it is given that we may flourish in it
it is given that we might give to God his due; and
it is given as a loan

YET

there is within us an almost irresistible natural urge to say
my life if mine,
my existence is for me to control; and
I don't ever want to give it back
I want to act as if I am the owner and not simply a tenant.

This parable is a vivid illustration of the natural condition of the human heart.
God has given us everything by Grace – yet we act as if we own it
God says "you owe me your living" – and we say "we owe you nothing"
We act as if we are owners and not tenants.

The tenants get everything from the owner
they are given everything necessary for their flourishing – everything
But they act as if it is all theirs and they reject the owners claims on them.

And people do the same today.
Deep down we understand that we **MUST** be tenants,
(we didn't create this world, we design any of the laws of the universe, we didn't create life)
deep down we **MUST** understand we are tenants
but we act as if we are the owners.
It is "my life, my money, my time" we say!

The human heart
is naturally in conflict with the idea that we owe God everything.
It naturally hates the idea that if **everything we have is a gift** then we owe God our living
it is naturally in conflict to God's claims on our life.

Now who specifically are the tenants in this parable.
You would be forgiven in thinking that Jesus is talking here about Atheists.

Yes Atheists!

They are the ones that reject God's grace,
they are the ones that reject God's claims on their life,
they are the ones who want to be owners and not tenants.
And in a sense that is fair enough

But what is really surprising here is that Jesus is talking to the religious and the moral people!

You say "what??"

Yes, look at the context, Jesus is talking here to scrupulously religious and morally upright!
The Tenant Farmers (are not atheists) they are those who go to church, they are those who become Bishops, they are those who are at the top of respected society!

how does that work?

First of all, Religion (all religions, Judaism, Christianity every religion) encourages people to think that "by performing their religion" God owes them recognition.

...Follow me on this...

by performing religious practices we can be tempted to think
God, you owe me for all the good things I have done,
for the sacrifices I have made,
for all the prayers I have offered.

You owe me the benefits of doing those things,
you should bless me if I am good,

you should answer my prayers if they are sincerely offered

Since I have tried to be good, since I have tried to do right, since I have given up things to do your will.

Surely you should arrange things to go my way.

Surely you owe me that much!

I have denied myself.

I have disciplined myself.

I have castigated myself

Don't you owe me??

Religion, according to Jesus, puts us in a place where we don't so much feel "we owe God" but that "he owes us".

And that's why when things go wrong in our life,
things that remind us that we are not in control,
we get so upset with God.

God have I not done all this for you and you cannot do this little things for me!

religion tends to do this to us.

Secondly, it encourages us to look down on those people who don't perform the truth as we see it.

Do you know the film "The Shawshank Redemption".

Do you remember the Warden?

He is a perfect example of someone who uses his religion to think that he is morally / religiously superior to the prisoners who don't practice the truth as he sees it.

Religious people are tempted to look down on people who don't perform the truth as they see it.

And the BBC are past masters at portraying monks and bishops and priests as people who use religion to say "I am better at performing truth than you"

Fundamentally every one of us

wants to reject the idea that we owe God our lives

every one of us wrestle with the idea that we owe God our everything

We all want to say "it is MY life, MY time, My Money" – I am the owner.

And if anything God "you owe me" for all the good I have done on your behalf!!

Who are the Tenant Farmers? **we are**, the religious are, *everyone* is.

The question is, how, having seen that, should we respond?

2. Well this is where the parable of the two sons comes in.

v28 - There was a man who had two sons.

He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

'I will not,' he answered,

I will not! - straight, flat, defiant, refusal.

No explanation, no negotiation. Just No.

This is shockingly rude!

You've got to remember that we are talking about a family in a highly Patriarchal Hierarchic society.

This is not me asking one of my children to do the hovering and them giving me a bit of resistance!

This is a son refusing, point blank, to do what he is told.

In ancient Jewish culture this was unbelievable defiance!

So v30 the father then went to the other son and said the same thing, and he answered, 'I will, sir,'

Now this is more like it.

The other son is obviously **much** more polite and respectful

In fact he calls his Father "sir" it is the Greek word Kurios, it means "Lord". "Yes Lord".

The first boy is obviously "bad" (unbelievably defiant)

The second boy is obviously "good". he is the perfect son, the well-behaved, well mannered, respectful son.

He is the sort of son that every Father wants.

And so if you had to say

which son represents the Tax Collectors and

which son represents the Good, Moral and Religious people?

It's obvious!

The stubborn, wilful, rebellious son represents the Tax Collectors; and

The polite, respectful, dutiful Son represents the Religious

But then the sting in the tail comes when we discover that the Good Son despite all his fine words and respectable image doesn't actually

DO what his Father would have of him.

Whereas the Rude, Stubborn, Defiant Son changes his mind and does.

v29 but later he changed his mind and went

And here is the key.

The first Son changes his mind

The word is repent.

It means "a change of heart"

He has a change of heart and he submits to the authority of his Father

He didn't just change his mind about this one particular incident

He has a change of heart about the whole way he has been responding to his Father.

He repents –

he recognises his rebellion,

he recognises that he has been in defiance of his Father's authority,

he realises he owes his everything to his Father,

he has a change of heart and repents.

The second one doesn't do that

He says to his Father "you are Lord", "I will do what you ask",

he makes out that he is good
yet the reality is he never really means it, he never does it,
he never lives his life for God – he just looks from the outside like he does.

This is incredibly challenging.
We are all Tenant farmers –
every one of us wants to reject the idea that we owe God our lives
every one of us wrestles with the idea that we owe God our everything
We all want to say “it is MY life, MY time, My Money” – I am the owner.
We are all like this...

The question is, which Son are we like?
are we like the **second** Son
that seems to be so good and respectful
that calls God “Lord” and yet doesn’t live their life for God (but really for themselves)
that says “yes” but whose life says “no”; OR

are we like the **first** Son who realises to their horror their natural rebellion and defiance
who thinks hang on God has given me everything and longs for me to flourish and be blessed
and so submits their **everything** to God.

Is our life spent on ourselves; or
Is our life spent in the vine-yard, for the kingdom, for God?

Why would we do that?

3. Well that is where the final messenger comes in.

In verse 37 we have the Owners final appeal to the Tenant Farmers.
v37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

Up to this point, they have beaten and abused and pushed out each messenger that he has sent. So now he says “I shall send my son. Surely they will respect him”.

Now you have to say, this is where Jesus’ story gets a little far-fetched,
because who of us would have reacted to these Tenants like this?

They have abused or killed everyone sent to them
Who here would send, would risk, their Son to them?

I wouldn’t!

I would have probably called in the police, the bailiffs and the army
after the very first messenger had been beaten up!
Surely this is incredible??

And that is the point. It is Incredible.

And it is the very incredibility of it that has the power to change our hearts.
The owner says “surely” they will respect my Son.

What is he after?

Is he after rent? Is he after a few bunches of grapes?
Is he only in it for the money?

NO!

The owner is after something far deeper and more important.
He is after respect, he is after a careful respectful intimate relationship with these Tenant Farmers.

He isn’t some Alien Landlord trying to eek out a buck from some slum rental!
He creates the most lavish, beautiful, secure environment for his tenants in a chaotic universe;
He gives them everything they could wish for to flourish; and

even when they reject him he still comes to them, in his Son,
...so that they might respect him!

He gives them honour in return for their shame,
faithfulness in return for their rebellion
love in return for their disdain.
This is Incredible.

This is the God who comes to you and me and says
give me your everything,
give me your life
work for me in this vine-yard
because you can see how much honour and love I give you.

There are three responses to the grace of God in our lives

1) we can live practical atheists who say “we are not tenants we are owners” it is my life, my time, my priorities and I will resist everyone and anyone who tries to tell them the opposite;

2) we can live like people who see themselves as good and upright. I don't need your grace, its not all from you I do my bit too, I am hoping and earning your approval. I say “you are Lord” but in reality I am not working in the vine-yard I am not living for the Kingdom I am still living for myself.
I say I am a tenants but act like an owner; OR

3) we can say “God it is all you”
You have given me everything
I owe you everything – you owe me nothing...
I see your grace, I behold your love
and I realise I am no more worthy of your goodness towards me than any Cheat, Traitor or Prostitute.

And that's when the Kingdom of God (the reign of God) dawns in our life.

That's when we receive a deep security because
we know that God does not love us because of our performance, but **despite** our performance.
we know that God does not love us because we love HIM but because (from before the beginning of time, before we were ever placed in this vine-yard, God had designed and built and tended and provided something brilliant and planned something incredible for us - because he loved us)..
Then we know that we don't have to be good, or moral or religious to be accepted – because we simply ARE accepted.

Listen, if I say to my life “I love you because you have a beautiful body” does that bring security of insecurity?

if I say to Amanda “I love you because you make such great cake, I love you because of your sparkling intellect, I love you because of all the things you do for me”

Is she more or less secure?

She is infinitely LESS!

Because now she know I love her for what I get out of it – my love is selfish!

She know if she wants my love she needs to perform.

But what if she can't – does that mean now I love her less!

People who know that they bring nothing to the party when it comes to God

People who know (in comparison to God) they are NOT good, or moral or deserving
have a DEEP security – because they know that God loves them DESPITE their inadequacies; and
therefore they have a DEEP gratitude –

God, look at all you have done for me – creation grace

God, look at all you have sacrificed for me in Jesus – redemptive grace

God this is INCREDIBLE!

And this changes our hearts.

This brings us to humble repentance.

This leads us to say...

My life is your life, my time is your time, my everything is yours.

You have hired me to work in your vine-yard

And I WILL go

I will serve the Kingdom of God in my life

I will help people know you

I will help people find respect IN you

love so amazing so Divine demands my life my soul my all.