

THE PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN

Mark 12:1-12

Probably the delegation from the Sanhedrin had not left Christ when He turned to the crowd and delivered what has been called the parable of the wicked husbandmen. The details of this parable were certainly clear to the religious leaders.

A man had planted a vineyard, and had supplied it with every protection and facility. A fence surrounded it; a wine-vat had been scooped out of the rock; a watch-tower had been built; a tenant had acquired it; and the owner had left.

The vintage season came, and the owner sent to the tenant a bond-slave that he might receive part of the produce of the vineyard, but the latter was seized, flayed and dismissed empty-handed. The owner then sent another bond-salve, and he was hit with stones, wounded in the head and reviled. Then another was sent, and he was killed. Finally, the owner sent his only and dearly-loved son, believing that he would be treated with respect, but alas he was seized, killed and thrown out of the vineyard. It was supposed that when the heir was gone the place would be theirs.

As the members of the Sanhedrin recognized that the parable was about themselves, so we should not have any difficulty in understanding it. Read in the light of the consciousness of these men it will be a mirror in which we may see reflected a large part of their national history.

The owner of the vineyard was God. The vineyard was Israel, the chosen nation. The vineyard was given every equipment. There was a wall to mark out its boundaries, to keep out thieves and robbers and to defend it from the assaults of the wild animals. In the vineyard was a wine press in which the grapes were trodden down with the feet. Beneath the wine press was a wine vat into which the pressed out juice flowed. In the tower the watch was kept from robbers at the time of harvest, the wine was stored and the cultivators had their lodging. The cultivators stand for the rulers of Israel. The servants whom the owner sent stand for the prophets. The son is Jesus Christ Himself, the promised deliverer, whom the religious leaders had already determined to destroy.

This parable tells us certain things about God.

1. That God is generous.

The vineyard was equipped with everything that was necessary to make the work of the cultivators easy and profitable. God is generous in what He gives to men.

2. That God is trustful.

The owner went away and left the tenant to run the vineyard. God trusts us enough to give us freedom in living our lives according to our choices.

3. That God is patient.

Many times the owner gave the tenant the opportunity to pay the debt which he owed. He exercised a courtesy and patience which was little deserved.

4. That God is just.

Men may take advantage of the patience of God, but in the end there will be judgment and justice. God may bear long with disobedience and rebellion but in the end He will act. Men still think that they can act against God and get away with it, but God is very much alive and the day of reckoning will come. If a man refuses his privileges and his responsibilities, they will pass on to someone else.

The history of Israel here set forth is one of opportunities neglected, of privileges abused and of trust betrayed. Let us remember that responsibility is always in the measure of privilege, and that we have no right to presume upon God's patience. Where there is faithlessness, sooner or later there will be deprivation. Christ has a right to expect fruit from us. Privilege always entails obligation. As Christ said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). To reject Christ is to destroy self.