

LESSON 10

Parable Of The Wicked Husbandmen

By J.R. Graves

(Historico-Prophetical)

“THERE was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits

thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.” - Matt. 21:33-45.

The interpretation and application of this parable is clearly learned from the forty-second and forty-third verses. The only possible question that can arise is, What institution did Christ refer to by the phrase “the Kingdom of God?” We should have a clear conception of this Kingdom.

1. It must be a visible local institution, or it could not be visibly removed from one locality to another, or from one nation to another, and such a removal or change of place be seen to have taken place; otherwise the Jews, nor others, could not have known whether the prophecy of its removal had ever been fulfilled.

This Kingdom, then, could not have been the ideal conceptional invisible Kingdom of Christ of some, consisting of all the saved of all nations and in all ages, known in the Scriptures as “the ‘family’ of God” (Eph. 3:15); for this family is nowhere called a kingdom. It was never set up or organized. It has no organization, and is therefore not an institution, and cannot properly be called a kingdom, which implies organization, and cannot be or exist without it. Such a body could not be said to be removed from one locality to another, as from one nation to another, since it never was, and never can be, confined to one people or nation; for it is a

truth that God is no respecter of persons: “But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.” (Acts 10:35) “To Him [Christ] give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43.) It can therefore never be given to one nation exclusively, or taken from one nation and given to another; nor is this spiritual family of God entered by baptism, as is the Kingdom of Christ referred to: “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” (John 3:5.) Something, then, existing.

2. This Kingdom cannot refer to that peculiar system of religion known as the Jewish economy, because that was intended for the Jews only, and never has been, and never will be, transferred to another nation. Its design has been consummated, and that economy has been forever abolished from the earth.

3. Nor can it refer to the Jewish commonwealth, called into existence by the covenant of circumcision God made with Abraham, because that is an everlasting covenant; and its promised blessings, and the token and seal of that covenant (circumcision), can never, by the express declaration of God, be transferred to any other nation or people, save the natural descendants of Abraham.*

*If it can be supposed that, in after ages, anything, as water baptism, has been substituted for circumcision - it remains equally

true that no other people, or persons, save the Jews, can receive water baptism.

The Kingdom, therefore, which Christ refers to in this parable, must be that Kingdom which Christ, by His prophet Daniel, foretold He himself would set up on this earth in the days of the kings or emperors of the fourth and last universal empire, which was the Roman. (Dan. 2:44.) It must be the Kingdom which He sent His herald, John the Baptist, to proclaim as at hand in the days of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1), and which Christ Himself, in His first public proclamation, also declared was at hand.

It was a visible and therefore local kingdom, which, according to the word spoken by Daniel, He came to this earth to set up - an institution that He could remove from one nation to another. A kingdom is composed of parts - constituents - integers. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, we learn from Daniel, was constituted of provinces as its parts, or integers - one hundred and twenty; and these provinces were the only executives of the laws of the kingdom, and were the only visible form of his kingdom. These provinces were composed of peoples in professed subjection and loyalty to the one supreme head of that kingdom. This Kingdom of Christ must likewise consist of parts - constituents - integers - the executives of it corresponding to the provinces of earthly kingdoms. It is universally admitted that local institutions called Churches are the only executives of Christ's Kingdom; and, therefore, we conclude that local Churches - and there are no other Churches save local bodies - are the parts, constituents, or integers,

of Christ's Kingdom; and these give visibility to it, and are the only visible form of His Kingdom.

The most authoritative writers on ecclesiology endorse this position.

A. P. Williams, D. D.: "Jesus Christ has a kingdom on earth, and He has churches. No one of His churches is His kingdom, but each one is an integral portion of His kingdom." - *Work on Commentaries*.

Then it follows that the aggregate of Christ's true churches constitute His kingdom.

E. J. Fish, D. D.: "The churches are the executives of the laws of the kingdom." - *Ecclesiology*.

H. Harvey, D. D.: "The church [*i.e.* churches] is the visible, earthly form of the Kingdom of Christ, and is the divine organization appointed for its advancement and triumph. Organized and governed by the laws of the invisible King, and composed of the subjects of the heavenly kingdom, who, by the symbol of fealty, have publicly professed allegiance to Him, the church[es] fitly represents that kingdom. Hence the apostles, in receiving authority to establish, under divine inspiration, the form and order of the church, received 'the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.' Whenever they gathered disciples, they organized a church; and, at their death, they left this as a distinctive and only visible form of the Kingdom of Christ on earth." - Pages 24, 25.

As one province may constitute a kingdom, and so long as there is but one, that province and kingdom would be synonymous terms, indicate and refer to the same institution; and as one State may constitute a republic, so one church could, and did, represent the kingdom of Christ so long as there was but one body; but when the churches were multiplied, then the kingdom was no longer represented by one organization, but by the sum total of all of them.

A Church of Christ is composed of peculiar subjects, not of this world – merely carnal - but in professed spiritual subjection and loyalty to Christ, and this implies a prepared people.

So Christ sent John the Baptist before His face to make ready a people prepared for Him - the proper materials for a Church were to be the nucleus of His Kingdom. John prepared these by preaching the doctrine of repentance towards God, and faith in the Christ to come, and baptizing them upon this profession, and satisfactory evidence given him of it.

This people, so prepared, Christ received, and they constituted this perfect Church on earth, and it alone represented His Kingdom, “the Kingdom of Heaven,” so long as He had but one Church. This was at first, and during the ministry of Christ, given to and confined to the Jewish nation only. Its subjects and officers were Jews only. Its privileges and honours were offered to Jews only.

As some teach that the Kingdom of Heaven was not in existence during Christ’s ministry, I submit the following

Scriptures demonstratively proving that it was, so that only a mere caviller will dispute it.

1. Both John and Christ declared in their first proclamations that “the kingdom of heaven was at hand.”¹

2. Mark tells us that John’s preaching was the beginning of the gospel of Christ. (Mark 1:1.)

3. Matthew 11:12: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence [*i.e.* is assailed, assaulted or opposed], and the violent take it by force” [*i.e.* seek to destroy it]. An invisible or non-existing kingdom could neither be assaulted, nor would its enemies, if it could be conceived to have any, seek to destroy it.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is here (Matt. 11: 12) conceived of as not simply near, but as in actual existence, and as having begun to exist with the beginning of John’s ministry.” – *Broadus’ Commentary in loco.*

It was, therefore, a visible, real kingdom composed of His true Churches.

4. “The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the Kingdom of Heaven is preached, and [the correct rendering is] every one [all men] assault [or oppose] it.” This rendering agrees with Matt. 11:12, while the common rendering would contradict it. The kingdom could not be assaulted or

¹ In answering a letter we often say, “Your letter of the 1st inst. is at hand.” What do we mean?

opposed, and, at the same time, all men so love it as to press into it.²

5. Matthew 21:31-32: “Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.” And it was by faith and obedience they entered.

They certainly could not enter the kingdom before it was set up - in existence. But how did those publicans enter the kingdom? “And the people that heard Him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of Him.” (Luke 7:29-30.)

2 We submitted, some years since, our translations (*i.e.* Matt. 11:12; Luke 16:14) to Prof. J. R. Boise, D. D., LL. D., of Morgan Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, and this was his reply: “Your questions suggest a new and, to my mind, more satisfactory interpretation of Matt. 11:12. I think the clause may be rendered literally: ‘The kingdom of heaven is treated with [hostile] violence; and violent persons are trying to ravage it [harposonin, used de conatu].’ This meaning is certainly in keeping with the classic use of the words, and also with the verses following.” Touching the passage in Luke 16:14, he says: “The ordinary use of the words does seem to me more naturally to denote the *violence* of hostile forces - that of the scribes and Pharisees, which resulted in the crucifixion of our Lord. Nor can I see that this interpretation is inconsistent with the context, particularly that which follows in Matthew. That *eis*, with the accusative, may mean against is unquestionable. *Kai pas eis auteen biazetai* (Luke 16:16) may certainly, so far as the Greek is concerned, be rendered, ‘Everyone is violently opposing it.’ In this remark our Lord may have had in mind the rich and powerful - the leaders of society; and this thought may naturally have suggested the Parable of the Rich Man. (Vs. 19-31). This view of the verses in question is adopted by Lightfoot, Scheekenberger and Hilgenfeld.”

6. Luke 17:20-21: “And when He was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, Lo there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is among or in the midst of you.” (See marginal reading and American Revision.)

The Kingdom of God certainly could not have been in any sense within - i.e. in the hearts of - these wicked Pharisees, but it was among or in the midst of them.

7. Luke 11:20: “But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the Kingdom of God is come upon you.” Christ did cast out devils by the finger of God, for He Himself was the very God; and who will presume to doubt that the Kingdom of God had then, when Jesus spoke this, come upon or among that Jewish nation?

THE PROPHECY

Christ foretold that His kingdom, which was given to the Jews at its first establishment on earth, and had continued solely with them during the ministry of John, His own and that of His seventy disciples, should be taken from them. This was literally fulfilled a few years after His crucifixion, by taking the gospel of the kingdom from them and giving it to the Gentiles, and thus transferring His kingdom from them to the Gentiles: “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, “It was necessary that the

word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting [*i.e.*, Gk. ‘aionian’ or ‘age-lasting’] life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles,” (Acts 13:46).

When during the ministry of Christ it belonged to the Jews only, in no sense can the kingdom now be said to belong to them or any considerable number of them, to be members of His Kingdom; nor am I warranted by Christ’s own declaration in believing that the kingdom will in any degree be restored to them, or they brought into it during this gospel dispensation, and therefore I do not consider that Gentile Christians are in duty bound to expend their time and means in preaching the gospel to them.

Mark also the statement of Paul: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in,” (Rom. 11:25). When this has been accomplished, this gospel dispensation will close, and Christ appears. The Jews are not forever cast away, they are yet to be saved as a nation, all of them, but not until after the advent of Christ, and, as Paul was, they will be convicted, and be brought to accept Him by the brightness of His appearing.

Let us read a few prophecies as to the manner of their conversion to Christ.

They, as a people, are again to see His face in the midst of great affliction: “Ye shall see Me henceforth no more till ye shall

say, ‘Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,.’” Matt. 23:39.

“And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south,” Zech. 14:4.

“And I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one is in bitterness for his first-born.” - Zech. 12: 10.

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” - Zech. 13:1.

Thus those who fall on this stone in sorrowful penitence are broken to be healed and lifted up, but the rebellious and impenitent upon whom it falls will be ground to powder. How could the Jews who heard Him fail to perceive that He spoke of them?

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