

The Wicked Husbandmen

The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen gives the clue to an understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Jews. The Jewish nation was God's vineyard, over which he had placed civil and ecclesiastical rulers, whose business it was to cultivate the fruits of righteousness.

At intervals the Proprietor sent prophets to demand the expected fruits. There is conflict of authority, for the husbandmen not only refuse the prophet's demands, but maltreat and murder the owner's agents.

The refusal of God to punish his husbandmen increases their bitterness, until they are ready to kill the Proprietor's son and heir. They know they have no moral right to the vineyard; they know they are antagonizing rightful authority; they know they intend to kill him who will heir the property.

In a word, it is wrong endeavoring to overpower right; injustice throttling justice. If there is any sanction in moral law, the husbandmen must be destroyed. The moral sense of Jesus' hearers compels them to see the fitness of penalty, for they say, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen who will render unto him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21:43, 45).

The penalty was not inflicted. Instead of the husbandmen's death, the heir died. He had the right to punish them; he had the power to execute the penalty; but he waived the right and restrained his power, and allowed the wicked seemingly to triumph. Wrong seemed victorious. It would have been so in fact, if the Son had not foreseen that his return to life in glorious elevation would convince his enemies that he had voluntarily died in their stead, and so soften their enmity and awaken their love. Historically the death of Jesus was literally in the place of the death of the Jewish rulers.

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