

The Parable Of The
Evil Vinedressers

Matthew 21:33-46

MEMORY VERSE

MATTHEW 21:43

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

As many small prizes as the number of children in your class (pencils, stickers, etc.) and assorted items for tasks for the children like, jars, boxes, pencil containers, wash rags, etc.

As many plastic communion cups as the number of children in your class, paper and markers.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

True Blue Friends

Ask for three to four volunteers to come before the class to share about a special friend. Ask them what makes a special friend? Are they someone you can rely on? Are they kind to you and devoted? Can you trust them? Are they "true blue"? True blue means "faithful". A "true blue" friend is one that is honest, trusted, reliable, devoted, loyal and dependable.

After your volunteers have had an opportunity to share with the class, explain that they are going to learn about faithfulness and unfaithfulness in today's lesson. How does God view faithfulness and what does He want us to do? **God rewards His faithful servants.**

LESSON TIME!

Jesus was in Jerusalem, and when He entered the Temple, the Chief priests and Pharisees began to question Him. The Chief priests were the spiritual leaders of the Jews, and they did not like the things that Jesus taught. Jesus knew that they questioned His authority so He spoke to the people in parables to show how the Pharisees and the Chief priests were wrong.

In today's lesson, we will learn the lesson of the Parable of the Evil Vinedressers that Jesus told the religious rulers. We will find out that **God rewards His faithful servants**. Jesus began by saying:

MATTHEW 21:33

"Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country."

In talking about the vineyard, Jesus was using a picture that all of the people could understand. He was referring to the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, chapter five, where God says that He is the landowner and that Israel is His vineyard. God had protected Israel and cared for them, and He expected them to be fruitful by serving Him. The vinedressers represent the Chief priests and Pharisees who had the responsibility of leading Israel spiritually.

What kinds of responsibilities do you suppose Israel had since they had this special relationship with God? Unfortunately the religious leaders did not take their responsibilities seriously. Instead of serving others, they used their positions to gain power and serve themselves. When Jesus came, it was a threat to their power. They wanted to get rid of Him. Even though some wanted to get rid of Jesus, we will see that **God rewards His faithful servants**.

MATTHEW 21:34-36

"Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit."

"And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another."

"Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them."

When God looked for fruit or obedience from Israel, His vineyard, He sent His prophets. These are the servants in the parable. The prophets' job was to preach the Word of God and get the nation of Israel to turn from their ways and back to the Lord. Israel's leaders persecuted and killed God's prophets because they did not want to listen to them. They were too comfortable in their sin.

It is sad that the very ones who God sent to help His people were the ones that His people mistreated? It is also sad that the leaders who were supposed to serve the people and lead them to God were responsible for hindering God's prophets. God only desired to have a relationship with His people. Just as the religious leaders in the Old Testament hindered God's Word from the prophets, they tried to stop Jesus' Words of love and salvation from reaching the people.

MATTHEW 21:37

"Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"

In the parable we see that the landowner finally sends his son. This is a picture of God who finally sent His own Son, Jesus. Surely Israel would respect Jesus, God's only Son. Unfortunately they did not. They sought to kill Jesus, just like all of the prophets who came before Him.

How sad it is that these leaders, who said they represented God, could be so disobedient that they would kill God's only Son. We need to be careful not to allow our hearts to become so hard that we reject Jesus, who was sent to bring the forgiveness of our sins.

MATTHEW 21:38-39

"But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.'"

"So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him."

The chief priests and Pharisees were like the vinedressers because they took Jesus, the Son of God, and had Him killed so that they would not lose their power. When Jesus told this parable, He knew that He, the Son of "the landowner," was going to be killed.

How do you think Jesus felt, knowing that He would be rejected by His own people? We see Jesus often saying that He desired to see Israel saved. If they would only turn from their stubbornness to Jesus.

MATTHEW 21:40-41

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus asked the religious leaders how the vinedressers should be punished. They responded that they should be killed, and other vinedressers should be put in charge. The religious leaders condemned themselves with this statement without even knowing it. They, like the evil vinedressers who killed the landowner's son, would be the ones to kill God's Son, Jesus.

Israel rejected their Messiah, Jesus. Now, the "good news" of the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world, to Jews and Gentiles. Anyone who believes on the name of Jesus can now be saved. Those who receive Jesus will bear fruit and enter into the kingdom of heaven. **God rewards His faithful servants.**

MATTHEW 21:42-44

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

"And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

Jesus asked the people if they had read a passage from Psalm 118. The cornerstone Jesus talked about was Himself. Though He had been rejected, He would become the head of the Church, and He will return to rule on earth one day.

Then Jesus declared that the kingdom of God would be taken from the Chief priests and Pharisees and given to others, speaking of the Gentiles, just as the people said the vineyard should be given to new vinedressers. He would give the kingdom to those who would respond to Him and bear fruit. Whether we are Jew or Gentile, the important thing is that we believe in Jesus for our salvation. **God rewards His faithful servants.**

Task Course

Set up a series of tasks that must be done by volunteers in your class. They can be things like closing a cabinet door, putting away pencils, cleaning a spill, putting a lid on a jar, etc. Let the volunteers perform the tasks to your specifications while you are blindfolded. When they are done, take off your blindfold and examine their work. Reward the volunteers that have performed perfectly with a small prize (pencil, sticker, etc.).

Explain to your class that those children who performed perfectly were faithful to your instructions even when you could not see what they were doing. Remind your class that **God rewards His faithful servants.**

Jesus explained in verse 44 the two kinds of relationships we can have with Him. We can be broken and come to Him in submission, allowing Him to be our Lord, or we can receive God's judgment for our sin if we refuse to turn to Him.

MATTHEW 21:45-46

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

The chief priests and Pharisees realized Jesus' parable was about them, and they wanted to kill Him, just as the vinedressers in the parable wanted to kill the landowner's son. They could not, however, take hold of Jesus; the people would have prevented them because they believed Jesus was a prophet of God.

God expects obedience from us today, and He has sent His Son that we might have a relationship with Him. It is important that we give Jesus the respect and honor due Him. It is also important that we accept God's gift of salvation through Jesus so we do not have to face God's judgment. **God rewards His faithful servants.**

When we turn to Jesus we will bear fruit for the Kingdom of Heaven. When we allow Jesus to live in us and through us, we cannot help but bear fruit. All of those wonderful fruits listed in Galatians 5 will come out of our lives: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Praise the Lord that the wonderful news of His salvation has come to us.

Vines and Branches

In John 15:1-13 we read about how we are branches and Jesus is the vine. We must abide or always stay in Jesus in order to bear fruit in our lives. This craft will help us to remember that. You will need plastic communion cups, paper and markers.

Give each child a communion cup and paper. Have the children turn the communion cup upside down and use a marker draw several circles, forming a cluster of grapes. On top of the cluster they can draw leaves, branches and vines, and color their picture. Inside of the grapes have the children write one word in each of the grapes from the following statement, "Jesus is the vine, I am a branch". For the younger children you will need to write the words for them in the grapes and maybe make the circles larger.

Review what it means to abide in Jesus with the children.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to be faithful to God's call on our lives. If any children have not yet responded to the gospel, give them an opportunity to do so.