

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 21:33-46

Year A - Proper 22, Text: Matthew 21:33-46
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Context leading up to today's text:

In the larger section to which today's pericope belongs (i.e. Matthew 21:28–22:14), Jesus is confronting and attacking the Jewish political and religious leaders (note carefully: *not all Israel*). In doing this, He tells three parables that expose their greed and failure to practice justice.

The day after Jesus attacks the Temple system, He curses a fig tree (a symbol of Israel, Micah 7:1–7; Jeremiah 8:13), which immediately withers and dies (21:18–22). When the chief priests and elders question Jesus' authority (21:23–27), He tells the parable of the Two Sons (21:28–32). The parable of the Wicked Tenants follows (21:33–36). In this parable there is a close correspondence between the details of the story and the situation that it illustrates: God's dealings with His people.

Matthew 21:33-46

Verse 21:33: In Isaiah 5:1–7, the vineyard symbolizes Israel planted by God. The tenants, those responsible for caring for the vineyard, are the Jewish leaders.

Verse 21:34: The produce of the vineyard is to be used to pay the rent. Fruit represents the good works of obedient living. The message to Jesus' hearers is that the produce is the good works demanded by God, and His claim to them is total.

Verses 21:35–36: The series of slaves sent to collect the rent represent the prophets whom God has sent — but whose mission and message the Jewish leaders rejected — and continue to reject (Jeremiah 7:25; Amos 3:7). They beat, kill, and stone them.

Verses 21:37–39: When the landowner sends his son to collect the rent, the tenants throw him out of the vineyard and kill him. In Mark, the son is killed and then thrown out of the vineyard (Mark 12:8). Some scholars suggest that Matthew's order points to Jesus being crucified outside Jerusalem's walls. In relation

to the tenants' plan to kill the son to gain the inheritance: If a Jewish proselyte died without an heir, the tenants of his land had final claim on it.

Verses 21:40–41: The landowner then has the rebellious tenants put to a wretched death, and leases the vineyard to others who will pay the produce/rent at the proper time.

Verse 21:42: The psalm quoted in this verse (118:22–23) was used in the early church as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7). It is a psalm of thanksgiving for rescue from enemies — and here is applied to Jesus whom the leaders reject.

Verse 21:43: Jesus does not proclaim judgment on all Israel. He states that God's Kingdom will be taken away from the Jewish leaders of His day and given to a people that will produce the proper "Kingdom fruit" — to believing Jews and Gentiles, to Jesus' believing community.

Verse 21:44: Many manuscripts omit this verse. However, throughout the parable, the tenants themselves are to blame for the catastrophe that will overtake them — even as those who rejected Jesus' message and ministry were to blame for the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. They brought it upon themselves!

Verses 21:45–46: The Jerusalem leaders reject Jesus' condemnation of them as greedy, murderous thieves. They do not repent. They do not understand Jesus as God's agent and Son. Eventually, they do what the wicked tenants did (vv. 37–39).

