



THE NONCONFORMIST

THE **PUZZLING** STORIES
OF JESUS

11



THE BIBLE LAB®

YES, NO + MAYBE

1. I don't like it when someone else takes credit for my work.
2. I know some people who rent a home and are really disrespectful to their landlord.
3. I take offense when people treat me disrespectfully.
4. God does not treat bad people as harshly as He should.
5. I produce a lot of spiritual fruit.

DIG DEEPER

● **READ Matthew 21:33-46** (NLT)

33 "Now listen to another story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. 34 At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. 35 But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same.

37 "Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.'

38 "But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' 39 So they grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him.

40 "When the owner of the vineyard returns," Jesus asked, "what do you think he will do to those farmers?"

41 The religious leaders replied, "He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest."

42 Then Jesus asked them, "Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures?"

'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.'

43 I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. 44 Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on."

45 When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. 46 They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.

✦ **33 Tenant farmers** - Galilee had many tenant farmers. They worked the land for its owners, often absentee landlords, and paid them as much as half the resulting produce. Everyone regarded the killing of unarmed messengers as treacherous.

✦ **34 He [the landowner] sent his servants to collect his share of the crop** - "There were three modes of dealing with land. According to one of these, the laborers employed received a certain portion of the fruits, say a third or a fourth of the produce. The other two modes were, either that the tenant paid a money-rent to the proprietor, or else that he agreed to give the owner a definite amount of the produce, whether the harvest had been good or bad. Such leases were given by the year or for life; sometimes the lease was even hereditary, passing from father to son. There can scarcely be a doubt that it is the latter kind of lease which is referred to in the parable: the tenants being bound to give the owner a certain amount of fruits in their season" (Edersheim, "Life and Times of Jesus").

DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

+ 35 Beat one, killed one, and stoned another - The beating, killing, and stoning of the three messengers represented Israel's rejection of God's messengers (and God himself) over the centuries. One of the most recent examples of this rejection was their treatment of John the Baptist (17:12-13).

● Why do you think that the religious leaders had such a difficult time recognizing God's prophets?

+ 36 So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants - God is incomprehensibly kind to his enemies. The landowner here is too nice; no one would recognize in this figure the benevolence of any patron they knew. No one would expect the benevolent landowner to remain benevolent indefinitely; indeed, the worse landlords sometimes even had their own hit squads to take out troublesome tenant farmers. Everyone also knew that the state would always side with the landlord (even if he was a bad one); in a case of obvious wrong like this one, the murderers of his servants would be executed or enslaved. In antiquity the way people treated a messenger was the way they would treat the sender (compare 10:40-42; t. Ta'anit 3:2). By continuing to appeal to their sense of honor, the landowner has made himself appear a fool; to maintain any vestige of honor, he must retaliate against their repeating shaming of him (B. Scott 1989:250).

+ 37 Finally, the owner sent his son - Quite in contrast to expectations, however, the landowner acts with such benevolence that ancient hearers could have regarded his action merely as utter folly: he believes that the murderous tenants will at least respect his son as his own representative.

● What does it say about God that he responds with more patience than we would expect? How is this different from the picture of God that you grew up with?

+ 38 Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves! - Then the landowner sent his closest and best representative—his son. The mistreatment of his servants had been a slap in the face, which deserved punishment. But this final gesture by the landowner was a measure of the landowner's patience and grace toward the tenants. The thought that they might mistreat his own son was inconceivable. But the tenants were so conceited that they fooled themselves into believing they could obtain the son's inheritance by killing him.

● In what ways do religious people try to rob God of His own vineyard

+ 40-41 What do you think he will do? - At this point, Jesus invited his critics to finish the story, asking what a landowner under these circumstances would do to those tenants. In their answer, the critics pronounced their own sentence—execution and replacement. Jesus' opponents were guilty of the worst kind of sin—leading God's flock astray and abusing them for personal gain and then killing God's messengers, his prophets, including his Son. The leaders' response included a play on words by the use of wretches and wretched. A literal translation of the passage would be, "The bad ones, he will destroy them badly."

● What does it say about God that He will not respond in the same way that we think?

+ 42 Didn't you ever read? - Jesus pointed out to the Jewish leaders that they had just pronounced judgment on themselves. Have you never read in the Scriptures was Jesus' way of telling the teachers of Israel that they should have known better. Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23, which makes a surprising statement. The stone that the experts considered unusable ended up as the most important stone in the whole building plan: the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

● How frustrating do you think it must have been for Jesus to be rejected by the foolish religious leaders?

+ 43 Taken away from you and given - What does God do with the rebels in the vineyard? The parable makes it clear that God will not give up. He is determined to bless this world, with or without the tenants' help. If they fight Him, He'll replace them. Lest anyone miss the moral, Jesus spells it out: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit"

● What does it tell you about God that His greatest priority is to have His people produce fruit, even if he has to find outsiders to do it?



MY PRAYER...

1. How possessive am I regarding how willing I am to allow God to bring new things to my church?
2. How much am I producing fruit in God's vineyard
3. What new aspect of God's character does He want me to know?