

Overall Goal: The overall goal for all the lessons by Fig Tree Ministries is to help people deepen their understanding of the biblical text.

Class Learning Objectives: A more expansive understanding of the Parable of the *Wicked Tenants*. This is a parable that points towards Jesus' identity and the actions of the religious leaders.

Cultural Background: Jesus, as a master communicator, tailors his parables to his intended audience. In the case of the Wicked Tenants – the audience is 'priests' and 'teachers of the law.' Since both of these people groups are well versed in Scripture, Jesus weaves a masterful parable from an array of Old Testament passages.

Jesus using **Parable** interwoven with **Scripture** is genius for several reasons:

- a. A parable causes the listener to wrestle with and think about the intended message. It becomes a process of self-discovery and the intended message is revealed to you *internally* rather than given to you directly by the speaker.
- b. If Jesus had given them a message they disagreed with directly – they could reject it because they didn't like him. But since the message is conveyed indirectly and the process of discovery happens internally, it is much more difficult to reject your own answer! You came up with the meaning.
- c. Finally, by using Scripture as the basis for the message, you now have God speaking into your self-discovery, and who can argue with God? If you didn't like the message of the Parable, you now have to take it up with God.

1. **Preparation** – Before watching the lesson, we recommend that you review the following Scripture: **Isaiah 5**, **Psalms 2**, and **Psalms 118**. This is a complex parable that weaves the "meaning" of these Old Testament passages together to create a new message for Jesus and his audience. The more familiar you are with the underlying Scripture and the scriptures accepted meaning in the 1st-century, the easier it will be to see how Jesus is putting them together.

Notes:

2. “Son of David” – By the 1st-century the term ‘Son of David’ takes on the meaning of a Messianic Title. To refer to someone as ‘Son of David’ is to refer to them as the Messiah – the anointed one – or in Greek – the Christ.

Mark uses the literary device – irony – to introduce Jesus as having the title 'Son of David.' The story surrounds a man called Bartimaeus, who happens to be blind but is able to recognize Jesus as the coming Messiah.

	The word for "Son."
Hebrew	<i>Ben</i>
Aramaic	<i>Bar</i>

3. Review of the Characteristics of a Parable:

1. Story – stories captivate, inspire, and can transform us.
2. Fiction – not intended to relate a set of historical events
3. Carry Truth – the story itself carries the truth inside of it – even though it is fictional
4. Jesus adds twist/shock – Jesus often shocks his listeners by adding a twist for emphasis

4. Common Parable topics and comparisons

Unknown / Difficult	Known
Kingdom of God	King
God/Humanity relationship	Shepherd
Human / Human Relationship	Father
Commandment	Farmer

5. Mark 12: 1-12 – The Wicked Tenants

Unknown / Difficult	Known
Jesus' True Identity	Isiah 5 w/ twist
Actions of Religious Leaders	Psalm 118 – David
	Psalm 2 – Son
	Cultural Thinking of Messiah/Israel

Notes: _____

6. **Alternate Endings:** Matthew 21:44 and Luke 20:18

It is important to note that Matthew and Luke add an additional sentence that Mark leaves out. This sentence has cultural meaning and will be addressed in the second half of the teaching. You should be aware that there exists a variance within the Gospels.

7. **Isaiah 5** with a twist – Jesus brings Isaiah 5 – the "Song of the Vineyard" - into his Parable, but he adds a twist. If we were familiar with Isaiah 5, we would immediately recognize that he is changing things:

Isaiah 5	Mark 12
Vineyard is Israel	Vineyard is Israel
No Tenant Farmers	Tenant Farmers
Bad Fruit	Fruit!!

The main issue we must understand is that in Mark 12, Israel is producing fruit, but the Tenant Farmers – thus "wicked" – are not allowing the landowner (God) to receive the fruit. This speaks to the corruption of the religious leaders in Jesus' day, which is of primary importance throughout the entire narrative of the Triumphal Entry and Jesus clearing the temple courts.

8. **Psalm 2:** the setting –

In the ancient Near East, it was customary to deal with surrounding nations through covenants and treaties. A strong king – such as Saul in Israel – would be able to dictate favorable terms for his kingdom.

When a change of power took place in Israel, an opportunity existed for those nations around them to re-work their international agreements. But to do so – it was best if all the countries agreed and did it at the same time.

Psalm 2 speaks of this transition of power and how God steps in on Israel's behalf.

Notes:

9. When Jesus uses **Psalm 2** as a backdrop to his parable the implication is that the Priests and the Teachers of the Law are acting just like the surrounding pagan nations and are conspiring to overthrow the “Son” – the rightful heir – and keep the inheritance.

10.

Unknown/Difficult	Known – Psalm 2
Jesus' True Identity	Installed King
	Son
Actions of Religious Leaders	Conspire against Son
	Compare to "Nations"

Faith Principle 1: Judgment of the Temple and Temple Authorities

A significant theme of the final week of Jesus’ life is that God is arriving to “judge” the temple and its authorities. The temple activities had become corrupted. Corruption needs to be judged so that renewal, rebirth, and transformation can happen.

The story of the arrival of Jesus to Jerusalem is that God is judging his temple/religious authorities so that there can be renewal and transformation (see the Pentecost events of Acts 2) into a new temple – a temple of “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5).

The “Church” is the new house for God’s spirit. Now, we must act like it!

Faith Principle 2: Religious Leaders Beware!

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is significantly more concerned with the actions of the religious leaders (Priests, Levites, Sages, Teachers of the Law, or Pharisees) than he is with the ordinary people.

Religious leaders have a tremendous responsibility to represent God to the people and to the world accurately. When religious leaders become corrupt – God’s name is soiled.

This parable is a warning for religious leaders everywhere – even within the Church today – that God will not tolerate corruption, and judgment will come for those who have despicably represented God to His people.