

Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #61

Judgment on Christ's Rejecters

Matt 21:33-46

Introduction:

1. Jesus continued to respond to hostile retaliation by the hypocritical chief priests and elders, who had demanded that He tell them by what authority He carried on His ministry and especially by what authority He had driven the merchants and moneychangers out of the Temple.
2. After they had refused to say whether John the Baptist's ministry was from God or men, Jesus indicted them by means of the parable of the two sons and explained it by declaring that tax-gatherers and harlots would enter the kingdom before those religionists.
3. He then threatened them further with **another parable**, the second in a trilogy of judgment parables (see also [22:1-14](#)), which even more graphically illustrated their willful rejection of God.

I. The Illustration – vs 33-39

- As always in parabolic teaching, Jesus told a simple and understandable story, often including a shocking element, to explain a profound truth that was unknown or generally misunderstood.

A. The Vineyard – vs 33

33 Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

1. There was Planting
 - a) *To get grapes, you have to plant grapes*
 - b) *The ground must be prepared*
2. There was Protecting
 - a) *The hedge was usually a thorny one*
 - b) *It would keep animals and people out*
 - c) *In the tower a watchman would guard the vineyard*
 - d) *Those details emphasized the owner's great care in developing the vineyard.*
3. There was Leasing
 - a) *It was a common practice to rent or lease a vineyard*
 - b) *The renters would pay a certain percentage to the owner and then keep the rest for their work / reward*
4. There was Leaving
 - a) *The owner leaving the vineyard provides a test for the renters*
 - b) *What will they do when the owner is not looking over their shoulders?*
 - c) *These renters were a corrupt bunch and it showed when it was time to pay the rent*

B. The Violence – vs 34-39

1. Prompting of the Violence – vs 34

34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

 - a) *The violence began when it was time to collect the rent*
 - b) *The greediness of these renters is seen when they killed the son of the owners to get his inheritance*
 - c) *They were violent because of their greed*
2. People Suffering the Violence – vs 35

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

 - a) *The first ones to suffer violence were the servants of the owner*
 - b) *Here is a picture of Israel's treatment of God's servants*
 - c) *The enemy could not reach the owner, so they attacked his servants*

BYZ **Matthew 21:33** Ἄλλην παραβολὴν ἀκούσατε. Ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν οἰκοδεσπότης, ὅστις ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα, καὶ φραγμὸν αὐτῷ περιέθηκεν, καὶ ὠρυξεν ἐν αὐτῷ ληνόν, καὶ ὠκοδόμησεν πύργον, καὶ ἐξέδοτο αὐτὸν γεωργοῖς, καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν. Hedged it round about (φραγμὸν αὐτῷ περιέθηκεν)

Rev., more literally, set a hedge about it; possibly of the thorny wild aloe, common in the East.

A tower (πύργον)

For watchmen. Stanley describes the ruins of vineyards in Judea as enclosures of loose stones, with the square gray tower at the corner of each. Allusions to these watching-places, temporary and permanent, are frequent in Scripture.

Let it out (ἐξέδοτο)

"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.

BYZ **Matthew 21:34** Ὅτε δὲ ἤγγισεν ὁ καιρὸς τῶν καρπῶν, ἀπέστειλεν τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοὺς γεωργοὺς, λαβεῖν τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτοῦ.

His servants (tous doulous autou). These slaves are distinguished from the husbandmen (geōrgoi, workers of the soil) or workers of the vineyard who had leased it from the householder before he went away. The conduct of the husbandmen towards the householder's slaves portrays the behaviour of the Jewish people and the religious leaders in particular towards the prophets and now towards Christ. The treatment of God's prophets by the Jews pointedly illustrates this parable.

BYZ **Matthew 21:35** καὶ λαβόντες οἱ γεωργοὶ τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ, ὃν μὲν ἔδειραν, ὃν δὲ ἀπέκτειναν, ὃν δὲ ἐλιθοβόλησαν.

3. Patience with the Violence – vs 36a

36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

a) *The owner sent other servants*

b) *See God's patience here as He delays judgment on the persecutors*

c) *God is sensitive to the suffering of the servants, but he also wants to give the persecutors time to repent*

4. Persistence of the Violence – vs 36b

36b ... and they did unto them likewise.

a) *The other servants were also persecuted*

b) *The patience of the owner was perverted into more evil*

- c) *Because divine judgment is delayed some use that time to sin even more*
- d) *They turn the grace of God into lasciviousness – Jude 4*
5. Pinnacle of the Violence – vs 37-39
37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. **38** But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. **39** And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.
- a) *The Conspiracy – “they said among themselves”*
 b) *The Catching – “caught him”*
 c) *The Casting – “cast him out”*
6. Pity from this Illustration
 a) *By the end of this startling and dramatic parable, the interest of the Jewish leaders and the many bystanders was thoroughly piqued.*
 b) *The story generated great pity for the betrayed, grieving owner and resentful rage at the heartless, brutal growers.*
 c) *It was the very uncommonness of the owner's patience and of the growers' wickedness that Jesus' wanted His hearers to notice.*

II. The Conclusion – vs 40-41

A. The Return – vs 40

40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

1. In typical rabbinical fashion, Jesus led His hearers to finish the story themselves, asking, **“What will he do to those vine-growers?”**
2. Judgment will come when the owner returns
3. Judgment will come when Jesus returns to earth – 2Thess 1:8, 9

B. The Ruin – vs 41a

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men...

1. The judgment will be severe
2. The sin was great and the judgment will fit the sin
3. Grace had been offered but grace despised will be grace withdrawn
4. The chief priests and elders readily replied with moral indignation
5. They no doubt were highly pleased with this unusual opportunity to parade their self-righteousness before Jesus.

C. The Replacement – vs 41b

41b ...and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

1. They rightly assessed the proper ending of the parable, that the irate owner would first severely punish the wicked growers and then replace them with others who were reliable.
2. They were completely unaware that, as they fed their pride on Jesus' baited question, they sprang the trap of their own condemnation.

III. The Explanation – vs 42

A. “Did Ye Never Read in the Scriptures” – vs 42a

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

1. At first glance, this comment seems irrelevant to the parable.
2. But the Lord was using a familiar passage from the OT to reinforce the parable's point, and in doing so He changed metaphors.
3. In a sarcastic query He asked the self-appointed authorities on the OT, **“Did you never read in the Scriptures?”**

B. The Cornerstone – vs 42b

BYZ **Matthew 21:36** Πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν ἄλλους δούλους πλείονας τῶν πρώτων· καὶ ἐποίησαν αὐτοῖς ὡσαύτως. **37** Ὑστερον δὲ ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτοῦς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, λέγων, Ἐντραπήσονται τὸν υἱὸν μου. They will reverence my son (entrapēsontai ton huion mou). Second future passive from entrepō, to turn at, but used transitively here as though active or middle. It is the picture of turning with respect when one worthy of it appears.

38 Οἱ δὲ γεωργοὶ ἰδόντες τὸν υἱὸν εἶπον ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ κληρονόμος· δεῦτε, ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτόν, καὶ κατάσχωμεν τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ. Take his inheritance (schōmen tēn klēronomian autou). Ingressive aorist active subjunctive (hortatory, volitive) of echō. Let us get his inheritance.

BYZ **Matthew 21:39** Καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὸν ἐξέβαλον ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος καὶ ἀπέκτειναν. **40** Ὅταν οὖν ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος, τί ποιήσει τοῖς γεωργοῖς ἐκείνοις; **41** Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Κακοὺς κακῶς ἀπολέσει αὐτούς, καὶ τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἐκδώσεται ἄλλοις γεωργοῖς, οἵτινες ἀποδώσουσιν αὐτῷ τοὺς καρποὺς ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτῶν. He will miserably destroy those miserable men (kakous kakōs apolesei autous). The paronomasia or assonance is very clear. A common idiom in literary Greek. "He will put the wretches to a wretched death" (Weymouth). Which (hoitines). Who, which very ones of a different character.

1. Jesus reminded the religious leaders of **the stone which the builders rejected that became the chief cornerstone.**
2. A **cornerstone** was the most basic / essential part of a building and it determined the proper placement / alignment of every other part
 - a) *If the cornerstone was imperfectly cut or placed, the symmetry and stability of the entire building would be adversely affected.*
 - b) *Sometimes **the builders rejected** a number of stones before the right one was selected.*
 - c) *In this account, one such rejected **stone** eventually **became the chief corner stone.***
 - d) *For centuries, Israel had been the **stone which the empire builders** of the world had rejected as insignificant and despised.*
 - e) *But in the Lord's divine plan, Israel was chosen to be the **chief corner stone** in the redemptive history of the world, the nation through which salvation would come.*
 - f) *The greater **stone** than Israel is Jesus, and **the builders** who **rejected Him** were the Jewish leaders. Acts 4:10-12*
3. **The stone... rejected** was the crucified Christ, and the restored **chief corner stone** is the resurrected Christ.
4. Jesus tied the messianic psalm to the parable in order to reinforce His point. The rejected Son and the rejected stone both refer to Christ.
5. The Jewish leaders who rejected Him were without excuse, that, like the evil vine-growers, they knew He was God's Son but refused to accept and honor Him as such.
6. They wanted Him dead not because He was evil and ungodly but because He threatened their evil and ungodly control of the Temple and of the entire Jewish religious system.

IV. The Application – vs 43-44

A. The Message to Unbelieving Jews

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

1. With those straightforward, unambiguous words, Jesus removed whatever uncertainty may have remained in the minds of the chief priests and elders about what He was saying to them.
2. In the first half of [vs 43](#) and [vs 44](#), the Lord reiterated the *judgment* on unbelieving Israel and her ungodly leaders;
3. In [vs 43b](#) He reiterated their *replacement* by believing Gentiles.
4. **The fruit** is the demonstrated righteousness produced out of a life turned from sin.
5. The unbelieving religious leaders would not turn from their sin and repent, and therefore they could not produce kingdom **fruit** (genuinely righteous behavior).
6. By grace through God's unconditional promise, Israel will one day return to God and bear fruit for His kingdom.
7. "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew," Paul assured his fellow Jews.
8. And when "the fulness of the Gentiles has come,... all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob" ([Rom. 11:2, 25-26](#)).

B. The Threat

44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

1. **And he who falls on this** rejected **stone**, that is, Jesus Himself, **will be broken to pieces.**
2. The Jewish leaders who, as it were, fell on Jesus and put Him to death would **themselves be broken to pieces.**
3. And on **whomever it**, Jesus the stone, **falls, it will scatter him like dust.**
4. Those who will not have Jesus as Deliverer, He becomes Destroyer
5. Just as the Father has given all salvation to the Son ([John 14:6](#)), He has also "given all judgment to the Son" ([John 5:22](#)).

42 Λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς, Λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας· παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη, καὶ ἔστιν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν;

The stone which (lithon hon). Inverse attraction of the antecedent into the case of the relative.

The builders rejected (apedokimasan hoi oikodomountes). From Psalm 118:22. A most telling quotation. These experts in building God's temple had rejected the corner-stone chosen by God for his own house. But God has the last word and sets aside the building experts and puts his Son as the Head of the corner. It was a withering indictment.

43 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀρθήσεται ἀφ' ὑμῶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ δοθήσεται ἔθνοι ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς.

Shall be taken away from you (arthēsetai aph' hūmōn). Future passive indicative of airō. It was the death-knell of the Jewish nation with their hopes of political and religious world leadership.

^{BYZ} **Matthew 21:44** Καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται· ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσῃ, λικμήσει αὐτόν.

Shall be broken to pieces (sunthlasthēsetai). Some ancient manuscripts do not have this verse. But it graphically pictures the fate of the man who rejects Christ. The verb means to shatter. We are familiar with an automobile that dashes against a stone wall, a tree, or a train and the ruin that follows.

Will scatter him as dust (likmēsei). The verb was used of winnowing out the chaff and then of grinding to powder. This is the fate of him on whom this Rejected Stone falls.

V. The Reaction – vs 45-46

A. The Recognition – vs 45

45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

1. There was no mistaking that these wicked religious leaders, typified by the **chief priests and Pharisees**, were the objects of Jesus' denunciation and condemnation.
2. Beyond any doubt, **they understood that He was speaking about them.**
3. They knew they were the son who falsely told his father he would work in the field but then did not go and that they were the wretched vine-growers who despised the vineyard owner and beat and killed his servants and eventually killed his son.
4. They knew they were the builders who had rejected the stone that would become the chief corner stone and that, because of that rejection they themselves would be rejected by God and forbidden entrance into His kingdom.

B. The Rejection – vs 46

46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

1. But as always, in spite of what they understood, the Jewish leaders took nothing Jesus said to heart.
2. They heard but refused to heed.
3. They knew he spoke of their ungodliness and their condemnation, but they did not take even a moment to consider whether His charge against them was true.
4. They would not be convinced, and hence could not be convicted.
5. They would not repent, and therefore could not be forgiven.
6. They knew the gracious truth about Jesus but would not follow Him, and they knew the damning truth about their own sin but would not turn from it.
7. Their only thoughts were of self-justification and revenge, so their reaction was **to seize** Jesus and put Him to death, just as they had been plotting since the beginning of His ministry.
8. The hindrance to that happening was that **they feared the multitude, because they held Jesus to be a prophet.**
 - a) *They were not God-pleasers but men-pleasers.*
 - b) *Consequently, they held off arresting Jesus until they were convinced they could turn the people against Him, which a few days later they succeeded in doing.*
 - c) *Finally disillusioned with the Messiah who would not be their kind of savior and with the King who would not be their kind of lord, **the multitude** gave the rulers no more cause to fear them.*
 - d) *When given the choice of releasing Jesus or the insurrectionist Barabbas, they chose Barabbas.*
 - e) *And when Pilate asked what he should "do with Jesus who is called Christ," they cried, "Let Him be crucified!" ([Matt. 27:21-22](#)).*

BYZ **Matthew 21:45** Καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ ἔγνωσαν ὅτι περὶ αὐτῶν λέγει.

Perceived (egnōsan). Ingressive second aorist active of ginōskō. There was no mistaking the meaning of these parables. The dullest could see the point.

46 Καὶ ζητοῦντες αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι, ἐφοβήθησαν τοὺς ὄχλους, ἐπειδὴ ὡς προφήτην αὐτὸν εἶχον.

Took him (eichon). Descriptive imperfect of echō, to hold. This fear of the people was all that stayed the hands of the rabbis on this occasion. Murderous rage was in their hearts towards Jesus. People do not always grasp the application of sermons to themselves.

Conclusion:

1. This amazing passage portrays God's gracious provision for men, His patience with their unbelief and rejection, and His love in sending even His only Son for their redemption.
2. But it also displays His righteous judgment that will be executed when His divine patience has run its course.
3. The passage also portrays Jesus' deity as the Son of God, His obedience to His Father's will, His willingness to come to earth and die for man's redemption, and His resurrection.
4. But it also displays His coming one day as the instrument of divine judgment, to destroy and break in pieces those who have rejected Him.
5. And the passage portrays sinful mankind, its great blessings and privileges from God, its opportunity to receive truth from His prophets and eternal life from the Son.
6. It portrays their responsibility and their accountability before a loving but just God, before whom they will be either redeemed because of faith or condemned because of unbelief.