

## THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

### Message 9

Scripture: Matthew 21:33-46

INTRO: We have come to the fifth parable. The first three have been addressed to the disciples. In the first parable Jesus has given them some very important information regarding the kingdom of God. Israel's history has been likened to a 12 hour day. The disciples who had been called in Israel's 11<sup>th</sup> hour and had responded to the Lord's message would be the first in the kingdom. In the second parable, because the disciples thought He would set up the millennial kingdom immediately, He told them that He would not set up the millennial kingdom at this time. His own citizens would reject Him and He would be going away for some time. During that time His disciples were to be busy with the work that He would give them to do before He left. Then, in the third parable, the cursing of the fig tree, He indicated to them that the kingdom of Israel had now been set aside and would not figure prominently in the Lord's work until the end of the age, that is the end of the tribulation.

When Jesus is done with these latter parables, He will have given the Jews a brief history of where they have come from and where they are. And He will also show them what they will do in a few days from now and the effect that will have, and that it will last until the judgment at the end of the tribulation.

And now, Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the Passover. He will be crucified in a few days from now. He has cleansed the temple twice, and is now in confrontation with the Jewish leaders, and the next three parables will be addressed to them. We have looked at the first one. The religious leaders had asked Him by what authority He did such things as cleans the temple. He, in turn asked them about the baptism of John, whether it was from heaven or from men. They refused to answer because no matter how they answered they would be in trouble. So Jesus said, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do the things I am doing."

He then gave the parable of the two sons and from it told them that because they had rejected John's baptism, and the tax collectors and harlots had believed John, therefore the tax collectors and harlots were entering the kingdom before them. And furthermore, when they saw the results of John's righteous message in the tax collectors and harlots, they still refused the baptism of repentance.

Jesus had no sooner completed that parable, with its convicting message then He said, "Hear another parable." This next parable is found in Matthew 21:33-46. Remember, as we go on, that He is talking to the religious leaders at the temple in Jerusalem.

E. The Landowner With The Vineyard (Matt. 21:33-41; Mk. 12:1-9; Lk. 20:9-15)

1. The Parable (Matthew 21:33-41)

So, we begin with a brief look at the parable of the landowner with the vineyard (read 21:33-40). Now this particular parable is found in Mark and Luke as well. Because the parable ends with a question, we see that it again is a parable designed to catch them. And when they answer Jesus question, they once more catch themselves. So, let us look at the setting of this parable.

2. The Setting (Matt. 21:28-32; Mr. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8)

The setting remains the same as the previous parable, except that the previous parable becomes part of the setting of this parable as well. Jesus has no sooner made application in the parable of the two sons, when He says, "Hear another parable." Jesus has begun to speak to the Jewish leaders, and in this parable He has further information for them.

So let me refresh our memory on the setting from the previous parable. On the day we know as Palm Sunday, when Jesus arrived at the temple, He drove out all those who bought and sold there and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves and He said, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves!" (21:12-13).

In Mark 11:12-19, we find that the next morning, as He is on His way to the temple again, that He cursed the fig tree. That same day, when He got to the temple, He found them all set up to do business again and so once more Jesus cleansed the temple. You can well imagine that by this time the Jews have almost had enough of this man who claims to be the Son of God.

In the last message we saw from Matthew 21:23-27 that the Jews now asked Jesus by what authority He did such things as cleans the temple. In their minds they are saying, "How dare this man do this? Nobody dares to do something like this to us. Does He now know who we are? What authority does He have over us? Does He not know that we are the leaders of Israel and we know what we are doing? If it was wrong to do these things in the temple we would not be allowing it. Who does He think He is to come here and throw us out? Yet He seems to have authority, but where is He getting it?" So they said to Jesus, "By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You this authority?"

So He said, "Let me ask you a question. If you answer Me, I will answer you. Here is my question for you: The baptism of John, was it from heaven or from man?" We took note in the last message that these religious leaders were not interested in truth. They did not answer according to what they believed, but according to what would be for their own benefit. And since they knew that no matter how they would answer their political ends would not be gained, they said, "We don't know." They did know, at least in their opinion. But to answer truthfully would have gotten them in trouble. And so, since they could not answer without getting into trouble, Jesus said, "Well then, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." It is then that Jesus gives the parable of the two sons that we just read.

Jesus then gave the parable of the two sons. Now, in the parable of the two sons, Jesus likened the first son who said he would not go to work in the vineyard but later regretted it and went, to the tax collectors and harlots of that day. They had rebelled against God but when they heard the preaching of John the Baptist they repented. But Jesus likened the religious leaders to the son who said he would go, but didn't because they failed to repent at the preaching of John.

And now in Matthew 21:33 Jesus says, "Hear another parable." And this parable is of a vineyard owner and it has been read for us.

### 3. Interpretation

So, we go to the interpretation of this parable. Let us begin with verse 33 (read). In a few previous parables I have mentioned that the vineyard pictures Israel. This morning we want to look at that. Turn to Isaiah 5 (read 1-7). In verse 7, we learn that the vineyard pictures Israel.

And so, in our parable in Matthew 21, the landowner planted a vineyard. The ground preparation, with prepared grape mounds, was quite a job in itself. Then he set a hedge about it. He fenced it in. Now I understand that in ancient times they sometimes hedged vineyards with thorny plants. In the lower mainland of British Columbia I have seen fences made with blackberry plants. It is a fence that even a bear won't go through, no matter what is on the other side. Sometimes vineyard owners fenced the vineyard with rock fences, and if you go to Israel, you will know why. And sometimes they had various kind of dirt bricks and sometimes a combination of these would hedge a vineyard. With the hedge, the vineyard was now quite protected from outside. Danger from outside had been mostly taken care of.

And then the landowner dug a winepress in it. Now a vineyard is not made for others to come and look at the vines. It has a purpose and that purpose is grape juice. Grape juice is one of the most prized commodities of Israel in ancient times. It was the coffee, the tea, the Pepsi of the day. And to make that longed for drink, it needed a winepress. This is the place the grapes are placed once they are fully ripe. And in this winepress the grapes are trampled until the juice runs out into another vat. Now, the vineyard God planted had one purpose as well. It was to produce righteousness. And God had done everything necessary for that to happen.

So the vineyard owner had planted his vineyard and fenced the vineyard in. He now made a place to process the grapes. So let us consider this winepress. The winepress had two compartments. There was the upper and larger compartment where the grape bunches were deposited once the grapes were ripe. You might picture something about eight feet square and 1-3 feet deep. Sometimes as many as 7 or 8 people would be squishing these grapes with their feet. Then there was a trench

from this compartment to another lower down. This is where the grape-juice would run into once it was released from the grape. From here it would be scooped into containers and stored.

Now, as you see, all of this is in good order. After this, he built a tower in the vineyard. The book, "Bible Manners and Customs" says the tower was anywhere from 15 feet to 50 feet high. The tower was an important part of a vineyard. During the growing season, a guard was placed here to watch for anything that would endanger the growing grapes, such as people, foxes, or birds. Also, if it was big enough, it provided a place for the guard to stay. And during vintage, it would house workers for the harvest.

Now the vineyard owner in our parable lent his vineyard to vinedressers. This was a very common day. The beautiful Shulamite lady of the Song of Solomon grew up in such a rented vineyard. The renters of the vineyard received a percentage of the harvest.

And so, here is the picture of Israel. God had planted a vineyard. He gave Israel a land and He had done everything necessary for them to grow a crop and bring Him His portion. The crop, the fruit the Lord wanted to produce in this vineyard was, as I see it, righteousness.

Now, in our parable, the landowner who planted the vineyard pictures God. And He did everything necessary for a fruitful, productive vineyard. There was nothing lacking. And when the vineyard was completed, He leased it out to vinedressers, and here we have the nation of Israel and in particular the leaders whose responsibility it was to take care of God's people.

And so, after each harvest time the Lord sent servants to Israel for His share of the crop. These servants picture the prophets God sent to Israel. They warned Israel over and over to produce righteousness. But our text says the vinedressers, Israel, beat one, killed another and stoned another. Mark and Luke add that they treated these servants shamefully and sent them away empty. They refused to pay up. They did not bring forth the fruit. And the landowner sent more servants or prophets, only to have them treated in the same way.

John MacArthur says, "God had prepared a place of great beauty and blessing and then graciously given stewardship of it to His people Israel. It was a place of promise, hope, deliverance, salvation, and security. But Israel misappropriated all those blessings for herself, robbing God of the gratitude, glory and honor due Him. She persecuted the prophets He patiently and lovingly sent to call her to repentance and forgiveness. Jewish tradition held that Isaiah had been sawed in two with a wooden saw (cf. [Heb. 11:37](#)). From Scripture we know that Jeremiah was thrown into a pit of slime, and tradition held that he was eventually stoned to death. Ezekiel was rejected, Elijah and Amos had to run for their lives, Micah was smashed in the face by those who refused to hear his message ([1 Kings 22:24](#)), and Zechariah was actually murdered in God's own Temple ([2 Chron. 24:20-22](#); cf. [Matt. 23:35](#)). Old Testament history bore witness to their murderous hearts, whose wickedness would culminate in killing the Son of God."

We go now to verses 37-39 (read). Well, the landowner sent more, and more servants, and they did the same thing to them. And finally the landowner sent His Son, saying, "They will respect My Son." Now here is Jesus, speaking of Himself. These verses are prophetic, but the prophecy will not be long in fulfillment. What is prophesied will happen in just a few days. Jesus knows this. Let me make a note here. If Jesus had ever been wrong in one of these prophecies, we would know the whole Gospel account is a sham. But since they happened, we know He is the way, the truth and the life, as He said.

At this point in the parable, the religious leaders do not yet know where Jesus is going with this parable. So, having given the parable, He asks this question in verse 40, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will He do to those vinedressers?"

The last time Jesus asked a question that was this easy, they got themselves in trouble by answering. One would think they would now be more careful. But they walk into this trap as well. And so they said, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard out to other vinedressers who will render to

him the fruits in their seasons." They are unaware that in the parable, they are speaking prophetically of themselves.

Some time ago we looked at a parable in the OT which was given by Nathan because David had taken Bathsheba from Uriah the Hittite. And when Nathan asked what was to be done with that man, David did not realize that in answering he was judging himself. Now it is most amazing that without knowing it, these Jews, for the second time, give an answer that is their own judgment as well.

Unbelief and disobedience and sin are spiritually blind. With common sense anybody should be able to see what will happen in certain cases, or what must be done to certain actions. But spiritually blind people cannot see what sin will do. The reason these religious leaders did not see it, is because they were blind. You can read that in the Gospels.

Well, when the vinedressers of our parable saw the son, they said, "Come, let us kill him and seize the inheritance." And Jesus said, "They caught him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard." Now take note. In this parable Jesus is telling these religious leaders about what happened in the past, what they are doing right now, and what they will yet do to Him a few days from now! They are the vinedressers of this parable. He is the Son and God is the vineyard owner!

But while Jesus tells this parable, they, as yet do not understand where He is going with this. And so look at verse 40 (read). By answering Jesus' question, they have done exactly what Jesus set the parable up for. And from the parable and their answer to His question, He will now draw the application in verses 42-46.

#### 4. The Application (42-46)

Jesus now makes the application. We will interpret it as well, and then make a final application. We begin with verse 42 (read). Jesus is quoting here from Psalm 118:22-23. Psalm 118 was one of those Psalms which was sung at the Passover, and it is Passover time right at this very time. This Psalm is what is called a Messianic Psalm, which means it speaks prophetically of

Christ. The cornerstone of a building was the chief stone of the building. And this passage says, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Now, this passage, like many prophecies in the OT found its fulfillment at this very time. The builders were standing right there around Jesus. The Chief Cornerstone is the very One who is speaking with them. And they are rejecting Him, as they speak! Unbelief and sin is so very blind!

Now look at verse 43 (read). From the parable Jesus had given He asked them this question: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" And they correctly answered, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease the vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their season."

Jesus is saying, "I am the chief cornerstone and you are rejecting Me. Like these vinedressers in the parable you have said, 'This is the heir, come let us kill him and seize the inheritance.' Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.'" Now, just how much plainer could He speak to them? Here they are at the most crucial moment of all history, and they are blinded by unbelief and sin!

But then He says something else that is very important in verse 44: "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." What is this talking about? Well, John the Baptist had come preaching repentance. He was preparing them for Christ. Those who recognized their sin, and recognized who Christ was repented. They fell, broken, on the rock. The word 'broken' is the best description of repentance. Only by being broken on this Rock can anyone come to salvation. There is no salvation without brokenness over sin. Repentance is the very thing they missed. Israel lost the kingdom due to that failure.

If there is one great need today in the Church, it is a tremendous conviction of sin, conviction that breaks. We say, "Why can we not get along as Christians? What is wrong with the Church?" First, many who claim to be Christians are not Christians at all. And second, many Christians need to fall on this Rock and be broken



again. My wife and I have been privileged to see some brokenness in a few churches in years past and it is amazing the relationships that are restored in such times. It is amazing the marriages that are restored in such times. We are in desperate need for such a revival today.

But, according to our text, those who do not fall on this Rock in brokenness, this same Rock will fall on them and smash them to pieces! May I ask you, does that sound like unconditional love to you? Does it not sound more like love has run out and justice has taken over? Love has been stressed disproportionately today. One of the message that needs to be stressed today is God's justice! Though God is a God of love, He remains just in His love.

Well, not two months after this very time, Jesus will have been crucified by these very people, He will have been resurrected and have ascended to heaven. The kingdom will have been taken from Israel, and the Church will have begun. Keep your finger on our passage and go with me to Acts 4 and look at a few verses in one of those early messages of the Church where Peter is preaching (read 8-12).

Look now at verses 45-46 in our parable (read). The word translated in verse 45 'perceived' is *ginwskw*. It means to know. They now knew He was talking about them. But the sad thing is that they did not recognize that what He said about them was true! Here is multiplied blindness! And if it had not been for their fear of man, the Jewish leaders would have apprehended Jesus right there, because they understood He had been talking to them. So I ask you, just how blind can religious people get? Just that blind! Here they are doing the same with Jesus' message they did with John the Baptist's message. And now they are so incensed they might have killed Him right on the spot, had it not been for their fear of man.

What has Jesus taught these Jewish leaders? They made a fatal mistake when they failed to believe John's preaching, and now harlots and tax collectors are entering the kingdom before them. Furthermore, God had entrusted to them the management of His vineyard, and they had despised the prophets and done their own

thing. And now, they are about to kill God's Son. And Jesus is telling them that the kingdom will be taken from them and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruit to Him that He desires. Today was the day for them to fall on this stone and be saved, and if they did not, it will fall on them and grind them to dust.

Now I want to make an application from the application for us. In verse 42 Jesus asked, "Did 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.'"

Go to Psalm 118 (read 21-26). Now I ask you, when you read passages like this, would you understand them to be prophetic? Unless we had read Jesus' interpretation, would we understand what it means when it says, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes"? Now this Psalm is a Psalm about the death of Christ. Just a day before our parable was given they had sung hosannas to Jesus. That song came from this Psalm too. They were doing the right thing but they did not know what they were doing.

And now I ask you, how much do you and I study prophecy? Here Jesus gave these Jews a prophecy of what they were doing at that very moment, and they were totally oblivious of it. People say, "Oh, I don't study prophecy. Prophecy is so complicated, who can understand it. Look at all the disagreement about prophecy. I just believe in being ready, and then it will all be OK. I don't have to wrack my brain over all that hard stuff." Psalm 118 was the Psalms they sang as they came to Passover, and they should have recognized the Messiah. But the builders, these Jewish leaders who had the responsibility of the vineyard, were rejecting at that very moment, the chief cornerstone!

And after Jesus had been crucified and been raised on the third day He caught up with two very sad disciples. Go with me to Luke 24 (read 13-27). How did Israel fail? They had failed to understand the prophecies the prophets, the servants of our parable, had given them. And because they failed to understand those, they did not believe John the Baptist's preaching, and they failed to repent. And now, the nation of Israel will be

set aside, and they will no longer be God's primary tool in the world until the millennium.

And coming back to our own day, it now seems most likely that when the Lord returns, most Christians won't have a clue about prophecy either. In Luke 18:8 Jesus said, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" In the original it says, "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find THE faith on the earth?" The Church is dropping prophecy like a hot potato. I got saved in 1972. The imminent return of Christ was a common message. I had only entered an evangelical church a few times before I heard strong preaching on being prepared for Christ because He was coming soon.

And then, let Me give you one more warning. If you fall on this stone you will be broken, and you can live, for to live you have to fall on this stone. John the Baptist gave you the message of repentance so that you might be broken. But you failed to believe him. Those who believed him have entered the kingdom. But here is my warning to you. If you do not fall on this stone, so that you might be broken and have life; it will fall on you, and it will grind you to powder!"

I have long pondered 2 Timothy 2:24-26 in light of some things that have happened locally, which says, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

It almost seems as though a person cannot repent unless God grants them repentance. But Alberta Barnes says this can only happen if God will, and I quote, "Give them such a view of the error which they have embraced, and such regret for having embraced it, that they shall be willing to admit the truth. After all our care in teaching others the truth, our only dependence is on God for its success. We cannot be absolutely certain that they will see their error; we cannot rely certainly on any power which argument will have; we can only hope that God may show them their error, and

enable them to see and embrace the truth", end quote. Truth and the willingness to acknowledge it is at the heart of the issue. It takes tremendous conviction to bring us to acknowledge truth, and that acknowledgement is confession, and confession is the hardest thing to do I know of.

CONCL: So, let me conclude by showing us the progression of the revelation in these latter parables of Jesus this far:

1. In the first parable, the parable of the landowner who hired servants throughout a twelve hour day, Jesus is saying to the disciples, "The Jewish people who responded to the call of God before the eleventh hour of their twelve hour history, will be last, because so few chose to follow God. But, those Jewish people of the eleventh hour who received Jesus as their Messiah will be first in the kingdom because they received Jesus as Messiah when He came. So the last will be first and the first last."

2. In the second parable, the parable of the nobleman and the ten minas Jesus now tells them, "I will not set up the long promised millennial kingdom at this time, as you are expecting. As a matter of fact, I am leaving for a far country, so it will take some time before I return. My own citizens, Israel, will now reject Me and I will be leaving. There will be a lengthy time, and then I will return. Before I leave, I will give you certain responsibilities and I want you to be faithful with that which I endow you until I return and then I will reward each one of you according to what you have done. The Jews who rejected Me, and My servants that were unfaithful will meet their just judgment when I deal with them."

3. THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE: In the parable of the fig tree, the Lord is telling the disciples, "Daniel's 69 weeks ran out yesterday. My own citizens have now rejected Me! The nation of Israel is cursed. Their tree is withered. As of today and until the end of this age, You are finished as God's mouthpiece to the world. You failed to produce the fruit of righteousness God sought from you. But God is not done with you for good. The time will come when you break."

4. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus is now talking to the religious leaders. He said, "There was a vineyard owner who had two sons. He asked them to go work in his vineyard. One said I won't and did, the other said I will and didn't. John the Baptist came and the kingdom lay there before you for the

taking. John was a preacher of righteousness. What was required by John was that you repent and confess your wrong doings and receive your Messiah because John was preparing you for Him. And like the first son in the parable, the tax collectors and harlots, who had openly rebelled against God, regretted that decision because of the preaching of John and they entered and are now entering the kingdom. But you religious leaders are like the second son who said he would work in the vineyard but did not carry through. And when John preached, and you saw the results of his preaching, how tax collectors and harlots became righteous, still you did you change your mind and do the will of God."

5. In the parable of the rented vineyard Jesus told these religious leaders that God had prepared a vineyard and lent it out to sharecroppers. These were the Jews and the nation of Israel. The fruit God expected was righteousness, but when He sent servants, the prophets, to collect, the servants were mistreated and sent back empty. Finally God sent His Son, and they said, "Let's kill Him, and the whole thing will be ours." When this happens, God will remove you, the nation of Israel, from your divine privileges of the kingdom and give those privileges to a nation that will produce the fruit of righteousness for Him.

Now, what we know in hindsight and which they did not know at that time, is this other nation speaks of the Gentiles. And believing Jew and Gentile will become the Church and it will be God's primary tool on earth for the next 2,000 years. We know from history that in less than two months, that work began and to this day it is still going on. But if you watched Benjamin Netanjahu's speech to the UN last week, you will have seen that even now, God is beginning to prepare for the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel and that we are close to some very major changes ahead.

But, Jesus is not yet done with the religious leaders. He has yet another parable for them. This next parable progresses beyond what we have had so far, and we will look at that in the next message on the parables.