

**GOD HAS GIVE MUCH AND EXPECTS MUCH  
(SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2011)**

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**SCRIPTURE READING:** ISAIAH 5:1-7; MATTHEW 21:33-46

**INTRODUCTION**

A couple of summers ago, the theme of Vacation Bible School was the 7 “C’s” of History. *Do you know the 7 “C’s”?* Creation – Corruption – Catastrophe – Confusion – Christ – Cross – Consummation. As a basic introduction to the Bible, this summary is helpful. *But what is missing in this summary?* There is a huge gap that extends from Genesis 11 through Malachi 4. I have come up with my own 14 “C-sounds” of history, which I will not share here, but in between the Tower of Babel and the coming of Christ *what major events cannot be missed?* You have God’s calling of Abraham and His covenant with him. You also have the covenant sign of circumcision, the giving of the commandments, the Davidic covenant and kings of Israel and finally the captivity and return from captivity.

In Exodus 19, when the nation of Israel was gathered together at Mt. Sinai, God declared to them, “**Ex. 19:5** Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. **6** And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Much of the OT is the account of how God’s people failed in obeying God’s voice, keeping His covenant, and living as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God had given much and expected much from His people. To whom much is given, much shall be required.<sup>1</sup>

As I have mentioned before several times, Matthew has written his gospel showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s long history and also how He repeated key parts of Israel’s history. Where Israel failed, Jesus triumphed.

Here in Matthew 21 we see again the connection of Israel’s failure and Jesus’ victory. Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph as the Messiah, but those in Jerusalem could only ask, “Who is this?”<sup>2</sup> Jesus symbolically cleansed the temple and pronounced judgment on it. He cursed the barren fig tree. He answered the challenge of the chief priests and elders of the people.

**What did the failure of God’s people in receiving their Messiah mean for the work of Jesus and for them?** The answer to this question and similar questions is answered at the end of Matthew 21.

The failure of God’s people in receiving their Messiah led to the cruel and unjust death of their Messiah. The failure of God’s people in receiving their Messiah would also lead to their great judgment. But their failure is thankfully not the end of the story, just as Jesus’

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:48

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 21:10

death is in no way the end of the story. Where Israel failed, Jesus triumphed. The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone. Death leads to resurrection. Failure becomes God's way of bringing that which is new and greater. Where **sin abounds**, grace abounds much more.<sup>3</sup>

Our focus today will be on what is called the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers found at the end of Matthew 21 verses 33-46. We will first look at some of the details of the parable, then we will consider further its interpretation and application.

**God has given you much and so He expects much of you.** But in considering your great responsibility you must always keep in mind that your own failure is not the failure or frustration of God's faithfulness.

### 1. PARABLE OF THE WICKED VINEDRESSERS

Recall again the pattern that we find in Matthew 21 and 22.<sup>4</sup>

1. Three symbolic actions of Jesus – 21:1-22
2. Three polemical or critical parables – 21:28-22:14
3. Three hostile questions and answers – 22:15-40<sup>5</sup>

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers is the second critical parable that Jesus told while He was in the courts of the **temple**. In verse 23, we are told that Jesus was challenged by the chief priests and elders of the people. In verse 45 we read of the chief priests and Pharisees. All the major groups who were part of the political and religious leadership of Israel challenged Jesus. And Jesus boldly met their challenge. As I have mentioned several times, the boldness of Jesus along with His great humility is given to encourage you and challenge you to act in a similar way. We don't need more arrogant Christians, but there is a great need for bold and humble Christians isn't there?

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers is another example of a judgment parable similar in style to the parable Nathan told to King David.<sup>6</sup> We read earlier from Isaiah 5. There is a very clear connection between this parable and Isaiah 5.<sup>7</sup> Haven't we noted already that there are many connections between Matthew and Isaiah?

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:20

<sup>4</sup> The only problem with this outline is that it leaves out **Matthew 21:23-27**, which deals with the authority of Jesus in relationship with John the Baptist.

<sup>5</sup> France, 770.

<sup>6</sup> Snodgrass uses the term *juridical*, but this term is not so easily understood. Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids), 11-15.

<sup>7</sup> Hagner notes: The detailed description of the setting up of the vineyard, although realistic in itself, is based on the LXX text of Isa 5:2, where each of Matthew's first four clauses, beginning with **ἐφύτευσεν ὄμπελῶν**, "he planted a vineyard," and including reference to the hedge, wine press, and tower, is found in almost exactly the same language (although the order of the clauses in the LXX is 2, 1, 4, 3). Hagner, 620.

Listen again to Isaiah 5:1-2 and Matthew 21:23

**Is. 5:1** Now let me sing to my Well-beloved  
A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:  
My Well-beloved has a vineyard  
On a very fruitful hill.

**2** He dug it up and cleared out its stones,  
And planted it with the choicest vine.  
He built a tower in its midst,  
And also made a winepress in it;  
So He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes,  
But it brought forth wild grapes.

**Matt. 21:33** “Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

Not surprisingly, this parable presents a very realistic scene of a wealthy man who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress, built a watch tower, and then leased it to **tenants** or **vinedressers**, **grape farmers**, who were to take care of the vineyard in the owner’s absence.<sup>8</sup>

The remainder of the parable is both realistic and surprising.<sup>9</sup> **The season for fruit drew near**, verse 34 literally could read. Fruit is a key word in this parable and also the book of Matthew. The owner sent His slaves to get this fruit.

Here Jesus summarizes much of the history of the OT in verses 35-36. The slaves the master sent were beaten, others were killed in ways not mentioned, while some specifically were stoned to death. Verse 36 shows that this was not the exception but the rule. Even some of the better kings of Judah treated the prophets God sent in very harsh ways.<sup>10</sup>

Finally the owner determined to send his son. **They will respect my son.** The wicked vinedressers recognized the son. They were not acting in ignorance, but they were fully aware of what they were doing. It doesn’t matter how they thought that killing the son would give them the right to own the vineyard. Criminals often act in very illogical ways. What they wanted was to seize that which they knew did not belong to them. And so they took the son, cast him out of the vineyard, and then murdered him.

Verse 40 provides the conclusion to the main part of the parable in the form of a question. What will the owner do to the wicked vinedressers?

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<sup>8</sup> Snodgrass, 291.

<sup>9</sup> France, 813.

<sup>10</sup> See for example the story of King Asa as told in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10.

The chief priests and elders of the people gave the correct answer. The owner will put the wretches to a wretched death.<sup>11</sup> He will lease the vineyard to other vinedressers who will render him the fruits in their seasons.

## 2. INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE

Parables are allegorical but this does not mean that we have a license to allegorize all the details of a parable.<sup>12</sup>

This parable is allegorical in that it is not just about a vineyard but rather it is a summary of Israel's history. We don't have to try to understand every detail of the parable in light of Israel's history. Some of the details are given simply to enhance the main storyline of the parable.

Now not every aspect of Israel's history is captured in this parable. There were times of great joy in the life of the nation. There were even times of obedience and faithfulness as well as seasons of true reformation. **But in summary, the history of the OT is a very sad history.** God gave His people so much in comparison to the surrounding nations, and yet Israel failed to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

The failure of Israel is especially seen in her treatment of the prophets.<sup>13</sup> In the parable as recorded by Matthew, Jesus spoke of the beating, killing, and stoning of the prophets. Listen to a few OT passages which record this treatment of the prophets.

**Jeremiah 20:2** Then Pashhur [priest and chief governor] struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that *were* in the high gate of Benjamin, which *was* by the house of the LORD.

**Jeremiah 26:23** And they brought Urijah [a godly prophet] from Egypt and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

**2Chr. 24:21** So they conspired against him [Zechariah the prophet], and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.

According to Jewish tradition Jeremiah also was stoned to death.<sup>14</sup>

**Nehemiah 9:26** "Nevertheless they were disobedient And rebelled against You, Cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets, who testified against them To turn them to Yourself; And they worked great provocations."

And yet the greatest failure of Israel as a nation is not found in the OT but in the NT.

**What rebellion could ever compare to the rejection Jesus faced from those of His own people?**

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<sup>11</sup> Weymouth – quoted by Robertson. *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, s.v. Matthew 21:41.

<sup>12</sup> Snodgrass, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Hagner, 620. He provides the following references.

<sup>14</sup> France, 813 cites *Liv. Pro.* 2:1.

It is significant to see in verse 37, that Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of God. This is not the first time this point is made in Matthew's gospel, but it is the first time that Jesus made such a public identification of who He is. The original listeners would not have understood the full Trinitarian implications of such a claim, but Jesus was giving a very important testimony here.

Verses 38 and 39 do not exactly parallel the actions of the religious leaders and others, but a parable doesn't have to describe a given situation in every detail.<sup>15</sup>

We have already noted from verse 41 that the religious leaders of Israel gave the correct answer to Jesus' question. They show that they understood but their understanding is an unyielding understanding.<sup>16</sup> Their understanding is like a child who knows what is expected and yet refuses to do what he is asked to do. While we are very familiar with these details our hearts should still be moved in considering the awful picture presented here.

So far this parable is quite easy to follow and understand. Beginning with verse 42 and ending with verse 44 there are a few challenges.

### **What is the connection of verse 42 with the parable?**

Let me share several connections that Psalm 118:22-23, which Jesus quotes in verse 42, has with this parable.

First, there is a word play in the original language spoken by Jesus – either Aramaic or Hebrew. The word son in Hebrew is the word *ben*. And the word stone is the word *eben*. This was a commonly known play on words. Josephus reports that a generation later when the Romans were launching huge stones at the walls of Jerusalem the watchman would give a warning by declaring, the son [stone] is coming.<sup>17</sup> So there is a verbal link between the parable and this part of Psalm 118 – the rejected son and the rejected stone.

Second, Jewish tradition linked Isaiah 5 with the Temple.<sup>18</sup> And Psalm 118 was one of the songs to be sung by pilgrims going to the Temple. Verses 19-27 of Psalm 118 are about building the Temple, celebrating in the Temple, and sacrificing in the Temple.<sup>19</sup> Remember that a portion of Psalm 118 has already been introduced in the praises of the Galilean crowd when Jesus rode into Jerusalem and also in the praises of the children when Jesus entered into the temple courts. It was very appropriate then for Jesus to use Psalm 118 in connection with his teaching in the Temple courts.

Third, Psalm 118 is about rejection and vindication, which is related to Jesus' parable. In Psalm 118, Israel or the king of Israel was the one rejected by the other nations. The faithful in Israel were to still sing the praises of God despite the fact others mocked them. Do you see the irony and the judgment Jesus was bringing now to Israel and her leaders

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<sup>15</sup> Hagner, 621.

<sup>16</sup> Kingsbury, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Snodgrass, 277. Citation comes from Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 5.272.

<sup>18</sup> Snodgrass, 288.

<sup>19</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 498-501.

in using this Psalm against them?<sup>20</sup> Jesus in the Temple used a Temple Psalm against them. Jesus is the rejected stone who would become the chief cornerstone – the most important stone used in a building.

And so while the Parable speaks only of the death of the Son by quoting from Psalm 118, Jesus shows again that death was not the end. There would be judgment on those responsible for His death and even more there would be resurrection and exaltation.

Next, let us consider the words of verse 43.

**“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation/people<sup>21</sup> bearing the fruits of it.”**

This is a controversial verse and key to this parable. God had given His people much and expected much from them. In their rejection of Jesus, in their failure, there was a severe consequence.

There is debate about the **you** of this verse. Is the **you** only the Jewish leadership or does it refer more generally to the entire nation. I believe that the **you** must be more than just the leadership.<sup>22</sup> Jesus speaks of the transferring of the kingdom to a new nation or people who would produce fruit.

Now I don't think it is correct to simply say, the kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. The new nation is not just a nation of Gentiles. It is a new nation formed of all those who believe in the rejected Messiah – both Jew and Gentile. It is a new nation based on the resurrection of the rejected stone. It is a new nation that far surpasses in its glory and beauty the old kingdom identified with the people and land of Israel, though even in the Old Testament there were those from the nations who came to a true understanding of God.<sup>23</sup> Jesus already declared, I will build my *ekklesia* – assembly or church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

**1Pet. 2:9** But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Verse 43 is not something unexpected, but it is a clearly spoken judgment against the current leaders and people of Israel.

Further in verse 44 Jesus declares, whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.

Here Jesus declares the judgment that will be faced by those who reject His claim to be Messiah the Son of the Living God.

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<sup>20</sup> NET Bible note, s.v. Matthew 21:42.

<sup>21</sup> ἔθνει - dative, neuter, singular.

<sup>22</sup> In agreement with France, Hagner, and others *contra* Snodgrass and Keener.

<sup>23</sup> France, 816-817. Hagner, 623.

There are two passages which Jesus brought together in this verse. The first comes from Isaiah 8:14-15. The second comes from the great dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2.

**Is. 8:14** He will be as a sanctuary,  
But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense  
To both the houses of Israel,  
As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.  
**15** And many among them shall stumble;  
They shall fall and be broken,  
Be snared and taken.”

In Isaiah 8, the LORD, YHWH, declares that He will both a place of refuge and also that which causes men to stumble and fall – that is those who reject Him will face great judgment. **Jesus applied these words to Himself.** Jesus also then applied to Himself the great description of Daniel 2 – a stone cut without hands that destroyed the other kingdoms and then became a great mountain which filled the earth.

C. S. Lewis famously said, Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. And indeed Jesus is who He claimed to be or He is the greatest liar and deceiver of all times. Jesus is either worth nothing or He is worth everything. There can be no middle ground.

Consider again the heresy of any attempt to find a common salvation in the goodness of man or the attempt to bring together all the religions of the world. I have mentioned to you the growing influence of the Emergent Church movement, which continues the push to try to find common ground in all the major religions of the day – Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians all coming together. It is easy to spot the heresy but I assure you that it has a very powerful and persuasive influence on our nation. It is the theology of all our recent Presidents and political leaders of our nation.

We are told today by the Emergent Church that the kingdom that Jesus brought means basically that every person who lives a good life, who is sensitive and compassionate, is in the kingdom. The goal is not to convert people but really to help them be better Muslims, Hindus, etc.<sup>24</sup>

But consider from this passage how there can be no common ground. The hope offered to sinful men and women who live under the wrath of a Holy God is that there is only one way of salvation, which is found in Jesus Christ. Let us never be ashamed of boldly standing for this truth. Resist the seduction of those who offer an approach that seems so loving and accepting and yet leads to eternal damnation.

Verses 45-46 reveal that the chief priests and Pharisees did not miss what Jesus was saying. They knew clearly He was speaking to them. They would have arrested Jesus right there but that was not God’s timing. At this point, they still feared the multitudes, though just a few days later things would change.

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<sup>24</sup> For an example of some of this see <http://apprising.org/2011/01/31/tony-campolo-goes-on-a-tirade/>

### 3. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION:

#### 1. **God has given you much – He expects much from you.**

This parable is not about earning the favor or love of God. This parable is certainly not about self-righteousness or earning salvation through human effort. It is about receiving the person and work of Jesus Christ. And throughout the book of Matthew there is the demand in light of God's grace to bear fruit, especially in light of God's gift of grace in Christ.

**Matt. 3:8** Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.

**Mat. 7:18** A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Consider also here the words of Paul from Romans 11. Romans 11 should be read and studied in light of the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers.

**Rom. 11:19** You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." **20** Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. **21** For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. **22** Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. **23** And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. **24** For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

The application is not just for individual consideration.

Think of all the incredible blessings that God has given to us as a local church. For a small congregation we have been given incredible opportunities. And rather than have any sense of pride or accomplishment we should be instead humbled by what God expects of us in light of all that He has given to us.

The key to humility is to realize how much God has given to you and how much you are then responsible in light of His many gifts and blessings.

God expects much of this local church – leaders, families, young men and women, and children.

2. Let us rejoice that God's purposes do not fail even when His people do not live as they should. Though we long to see true revival and reformation and to see many brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ, be very careful that your focus is not on the frailty and folly of men and women but on God's faithfulness despite our own failures.



**2Tim. 2:11** *This is a faithful saying:*  
For if we died with *Him*,  
We shall also live with *Him*.

**12** If we endure,  
We shall also reign with *Him*.  
If we deny *Him*,  
He also will deny us.

**13** If we are faithless,  
He remains faithful;  
He cannot deny Himself.

**Closing Hymn: 439**

**Benediction – Hebrews 12:1-2**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.