

**Matthew 21:33-46** <sup>33</sup> " 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. <sup>34</sup> "Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. <sup>35</sup> "And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> "Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. <sup>37</sup> "Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup> "But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup> "So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him*. <sup>40</sup> "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" <sup>41</sup> They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Have 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'? <sup>43</sup> "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. <sup>44</sup> "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." <sup>45</sup> Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. <sup>46</sup> But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

Isaiah begins nearly the same the parable with the implication that this is a love song. And certainly this parable is a love song from the Lord to His people. True it contains also a dire warning if they will not listen, but the fact that Jesus cares enough to warn his people is part of the indication of His great love for them. Remember that this takes place during holy week, just days before his coming death. Yet his concern is not for His death but the death of His people.

### **The Lord provides everything His people need.**

Both parables, the one in Isaiah and in the Gospels, begin the same way with a description of everything the Lord has done for his people.

He planted the vineyard on a fertile hill. He put a wall around it to keep out wild animals and those who might seek to steal the fruit. He dug a winepress. This is no easy thing. A winepress is a large basin and has to be solid stone. So really He chipped a winepress out of stone. He also built a tower. It was common in that time to build towers and set a guard in them during the time of harvest to make sure that no one came to steal the fruit when it was ripe. All of this is to say the Lord did everything possible to make sure the vineyard thrived.

In the case of Israel we see this intensity of the Lord grace to give them all that they needed. He brought them out of Egypt. He provided for them in the wilderness. He drove the Canaanites out of the land before them. They often sinned against Him and were attacked again by the heathen nations, but when

they cried out for mercy he raised up judges to deliver them. He himself was there king. He gave them the temple, and the sacrifices, and the ceremonies. The purpose of all of these was to act as a wall keeping them from sliding into the paganism of the nations that surrounded them, and to remind them of the Savior who was to come and die for their sins.

In our case also the Lord has given us so much. He gave us a school to teach our children the wonderful things of God, as well as the knowledge of earthly things. He brings us together as a church and a congregation, a group of people who are here to support and encourage one another. He has given us His word. Without His Word we would be blind, wandering in darkness, not knowing who we are or where to go. He has given us the sacraments to remind us of His love.

And yet we often despise these things by thinking that they are not important. Imagine again the watchtower in the vineyard. Sitting up there night after night, nothing happens. No thief comes to take the fruit. It could be easy to image that you are wasting your night up there staying up all night for nothing. It could be easy to skip a night. But of course that might be the night a thief comes. It's easy to have the same attitude towards the church and the sacraments. Do we really need these? But the enemy is real and waiting. "Walking about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."

### **The Lord Looks for Fruit**

Having given us and them everything, the Lord expects to find fruit when He returns. Now this is one of two places where the parables diverge.

In Isaiah there is no fruit. This is because Isaiah is speaking to the nation of Israel at a time when they had turned their backs on the Lord. And indeed for generations had been ignoring his warnings and following after pagan gods.

In the gospels however there is fruit. And we see that fruit in the ministry of Jesus. Crowds went out after him. A few days before this parable the multitudes welcomed him into Jerusalem with joyful shouts and palm branches. Finally after so many years of hard work and pruning on the Lord's part, Israel was bearing fruit. But the leaders would not deliver up to the Lord the fruit of His harvest. Instead they were jealous that all the people were following after Jesus. They saw it as their nation, their work, their people, and their fruit. They wanted the honor and the glory and the praise and so they sought to kill the Son and keep the fruit for themselves.

It can be easy for us also to think look at what I have done. When our business is doing well, when our farm produces a large harvest, it is easy to think look at what I have done. After all was it not my hands that worked all summer long in the field? But then on the other hand whenever things go bad we are so quick to blame the Lord. Why did you let this happen, Lord?

The Sunday school children next week are going to hear the story of Gideon and see this exact reaction in his life. Gideon begins by complaining against the Lord. If you are there Lord why do you allow these

Midianites to do all this evil? Then after the Lord gives victory to Gideon he starts to keep some of the glory for himself. Look at what I have done.

### **God's Reaction to Their/ Our Unfruitfulness**

Yet how does God react? When they kill his servants He sends more. When they kill them also He sends more still. When they still kill these others He sends His own Son.

Remember a few weeks ago when I told you to look for the absurdity in the parable, and then you will find its meaning and the love of God? Here we have just such an example. Who would do this? Send servant after servant, then when they kill the servants send his own son?

But God does. The Father does it because He loves the vine-dressers, because He does not wish to come and destroy, because He wants them to repent and return and He will save them.

For this reason He sends even His own Son, knowing full well that they will kill Him that through His death He might save men.

### **The Stone Which Crushes**

This is the meaning of the statement Jesus makes later. "He who falls on the stone will be broken but on whom it falls it will grind him to powder." I think we get this statement confused because two verses previously Jesus was the stone, and so we assume that here also the stone is Jesus. But I don't think so. Jesus picks up on the idea of a stone but uses the image in a different way. If we go back to the parable we see that Jesus is the one who falls on the stone.

He is in fact saying to the Jews, "Yes you will kill me. I will be broken. But the judgement of God will come upon you and crush you to powder." This saying of Jesus is the exact same idea as Gen 3:25 except the picture is with a stone instead of a serpent. Jesus will be broken He will die, but through His death He will vanquish his enemies and be victorious.

### **The Stone which the Builders Rejected.**

This is why Jesus is the stone which the builders rejected. Stone masons are very picky about making sure that cornerstone is the most perfect stone. They reject Jesus because they do not think he will make a very good savior. He is not from a human standpoint the hero or legend upon which to build a movement that will change the world. They are looking for Hercules not a poor Hebrew carpenter.

Yet God says He is the only one upon whom He will build His church. It all comes down to what are you looking for? A great warrior full of strength and valor? Or humility, love and forgiveness?

We would never choose Jesus on our own. Yet the Lord has chosen Him, and has by His grace opened our eyes to see His plan. With our eyes thus opened to understand we see that the Lord's way is so much better than ours. "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."

We rejoice that our Savior has done everything for us, including dying for the forgiveness of our sins. We rejoice with Paul that He has forgiven our sins, and we count our own works and fruits as worthless so that we might partake in the far more excellent fruit of Christ.

**AMEN**

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.