

Matthew Chapter 21 Continued

Verses 23-27:

On Jesus' third day of successive visits to the "temple" His authority is challenged by the ever-threatened "chief priests," including the high priest, who was also president of the Sanhedrin, and "elders."

Who were laymen or scribes and also served as members of the Jewish high court.

In their own view, they are attempting to protect their laws and traditions against one who appeared to be a usurper who reinterpreted the law, rejected tradition, and also overthrew the money changers.

They ask, "by what authority" He had done these controversial things.

Knowing that they would never recognize any other authority but their own, He refuses to answer them.

Instead, He asks them about the authority of the "Baptism of John, which they had never officially recognized.

To acknowledge that it was "from heaven" would be to condemn themselves for not receiving it and to claim it was of men" (human origin), would upset the people.

Their reply "We cannot tell" is cowardly and brings His clever response: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

Matthew 21:23 "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?"

"These things":

I.e., both His public teaching and miracles.

They may have also had in mind His act of cleansing the temple on the day before.

"Who gave thee this authority?":

They were forced to acknowledge that He had some source of indisputable authority.

His miracles were too obvious and too numerous to be fraudulent.

Even His teaching was with such force and clarity that it was obvious to all that there was authority in His words.

They realized that Jesus was taking great authority in the temple this time.

They also had no idea who they were speaking to.

The Sanhedrin had quickly met, and decided they must stop Him any way they could.

Instead of realizing these miracles that He performed were authority enough, they were trying to trap Him into saying that God authorized Him, so that they could call this blasphemy.

Verses 24-32:

The parable of the two sons in (verses 28-32), follows as an expose of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, as a vindication of John's ministry, and as a vindication of the true work of God in general.

The first son initially said "I will not" (verse 29), representing the immoral disobedience of the "publicans" and "harlot" who later "repented" under John's and Jesus' preaching.

The "second" son promised to go but did not follow through with obedience.

Jesus asked, "Which did the will of his father?"

By answering, "The first," the religious leaders condemned themselves.

This very effective teaching method is commonly used in the Bible as the judicial parable, whereby the answerer condemns himself by the obviously implied response.

Matthew 21:24 "And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things."

"And Jesus answered and said unto them":

Not by replying directly to their question, but by putting another question to them; whereby he escaped the snare he saw they laid for him.

I also will ask you one thing, word, or question, which if ye answer me honestly and plainly; I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

This was putting the thing in such a form, as they could not well object to for Christ promises that if they would return a plain answer to the question he had to put to them, and one which was not unreasonable.

He would thoroughly satisfy them in this point; and expressly declare his commission and authority, what it was, and from whence he had it.

Matthew 21:25 "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?"

“The baptism of John, whence was it?”:

Jesus caught the Jewish leaders in their own trap.

They had no doubt hoped that He would answer by asserting that His authority came directly from God, as he had many times before, (John 5:19-23; 10:18).

They then accused Him of blasphemy and used the charge as an excuse to kill Him, as they had also attempted to do before (John 5:18; 10:31-33).

Here however, He asked a question that placed them in an impossible dilemma, because John was widely revered by the people.

They could not affirm John’s ministry without condemning themselves.

And if they denied John’s legitimacy, they feared the response of the people (verse 26).

In effect, Jesus exposed their own lack of any authority to examine Him.

Matthew 21:26 "But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet."

"But if we shall say of men":

They reasoned with themselves, that should they give their answer and say that the ministry and baptism of John, were merely human, and what he took up of himself, or which he performed by an authority derived from men.

But they feared the people; that were there upon the spot and in the temple; as many of them were now the followers of Christ.

And more of them had been the admirers of John, and probably had been baptized by him.

Wherefore the Sanhedrin were afraid of them, lest if they should affirm, that the authority by which John acted was human, they would immediately rise up against them.

And, as Luke says, "stone" them: so high a veneration had they for him, and so dear was his memory still unto them as they still held “John as a prophet”.

Matthew 21:27 "And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

"We cannot tell":

This was a direct falsehood.

They could have told; and the answer should have been, "We will not tell."

The reason they said that they could not tell, was that they would not acknowledge that John was a prophet.

For if they did, they saw he could easily show them by "what authority" he did those things and that was by his authority as Messiah.

John came as his forerunner, pointed him out to the people, baptized him, and bore his public and solemn testimony to the fact that he was the Messiah (Matthew 3:13-15; John 1:29-34).

If they acknowledged one, they must the other.

In this way, our Savior was about to lead these crafty men to answer their own question, to their own confusion, about his authority.

They saw this; and, having given them a "sufficient" answer, there was no need of stating anything further.

They were no match for Jesus.

They were trapped again.

They had not ever questioned the validity of John the Baptist's ministry.

John had proclaimed Jesus as Messiah (the Lamb of God).

Matthew 21:28 "But what think ye? A [certain] man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard."

"A certain man had two sons":

Under the example of these two sons, one of whom was a libertine, disobedient, and insolent, but who afterwards thought on his ways, and returned to his duty.

And the second, a hypocrite, who promised all, and did nothing.

Our Lord points out, on the one hand, the tax-gatherers and sinners of all descriptions, who, convicted by the preaching of John and that of Christ, turned away from their iniquities and embraced the Gospel.

And, on the other hand, the scribes, Pharisees, and self-righteous people, who, pretending a zeal for the law, would not receive the salvation of the Gospel.

Matthew 21:29 "He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went."

"He answered and said, I will not":

Which answer rightly expresses the language and practice of openly profane and unregenerate sinners, who will not come to Christ, that they may have life.

Nor will they serve the Lord, but are bent upon indulging their lusts.

"But afterward he repented, and went":

A change of mind was wrought in him, and this produced a change of life and behavior.

So many of the publicans and sinners repented of their sins of disobedience and rebellion against God, under the ministry of John the Baptist, Christ, and his apostles, not of themselves.

Matthew 21:30 "And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I [go], sir: and went not."

"I go, sir":

This is all respect, complaisance, and professed, obedience; but he didn't go as he promised, he did not perform.

What a multitude of such are in the world, that are professing to know God, but denying him in their works!

Alas! what will such professions avail, when God comes to take away the soul?

Matthew 21:31 "Whether of them twain did the will of [his] father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

"Whether of them twain did the will of his father?":

Jesus forced them to testify against themselves.

The point of the parable was that doing is more important than saying (7:21-27; James 1:22).

They had to acknowledge this, yet in doing so they condemned themselves.

The idea that repentant tax collectors and harlots would enter the kingdom before outwardly religious hypocrites was a recurring theme in His ministry, and this infuriated the Jewish leaders.

Matthew 21:32 "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen [it], repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

“The way of righteousness”:

I.e., the repentance and faith that results in the imputation of God’s righteousness.

“Publicans and the harlots”:

The pariahs of Jewish society, most publicly despised by the chief priests and elders, had found salvation while the self-righteous leaders had not (Romans 10:3).

Jesus here, made these hearers be their own judge.

The man in this, who had two sons, was symbolic of God.

The two sons were symbolic of the Pharisees and sinners.

These Pharisees claimed to keep the law perfectly.

They had nothing to do with the spirit, just with the letter of the law.

The others knew nothing of the law, but eventually accepted the spirit.

God called His son to work in His vineyard (church).

The first son showed the repentant heart.

This second son stood for the Pharisees with their outward form, but no performance of duty.

Jesus made them judge themselves with this parable.

Jesus said by this:

These repentant shall go to heaven, but you will not make the cut unless you, like them, repent and do the first work.

His rebuke here, was not for those who repented, but for the self-righteous who knew the law and did not repent.

John preached Christ who is the way.

Some were baptized of John, but did not walk in their salvation; but these were not even repentant to be baptized.

You could also see the Gentiles in the first son and the Jews in the second.

Gentiles-rebellious, but came to repentance.

The Jews having the law and eager to obey fell short, because of self-righteousness.

In this next parable, we will see the vineyard (church), let out to husbandmen (preachers).

Verses 33-39:

In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, the “householder” represents God the Father, and the “vineyard” is Israel, a symbol of the theocracy that was familiar to the Jewish leaders (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7).

The “husbandmen were the priests and religious leaders, and the “far country” is heaven.

The anticipated “fruit” represents spiritual evidence of true conversion, which was to be the end result of the work of the husbandmen.

The “servants” sent by the owner represent the Old Testament prophets who came to correct religious abuses in the nation and were also rejected by their contemporaries (though venerated by subsequent generations).

“Last of all” indicates that Jesus was God’s final emissary to Israel.

None has ever appeared since Him, and none ever will until the Jews recognize Christ as their final Prophet and Messiah.

The desire to kill the rightful heir of the Father had already been expressed by the Jewish leaders (John 1:47-53).

Jesus clearly foretells His coming rejection and death with the statement “they ... slew him.”

Matthew 21:33 "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:"

“A vineyard ... a winepress”:

(See Isaiah 5:2).

Jesus was clearly alluding to this Old Testament passage, which would have been familiar to the Jewish leaders.

The “vineyard” is a common symbol for the Jewish nation in Scripture.

Here the landowner, representing God, developed the vineyard with great care, then leased it to “vine-growers,” that represents the Jewish leaders.

Matthew 21:34 "And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it."

These servants that went in were the prophets.

God wanted to know what have you done with this vineyard I left in your care.

He had entrusted His law to these people (what had they produced with it?)

We might ask ourselves.

What have we produced with what God has given us? Will there be a good harvest?

These prophets, God sent, were to carry back a report to God.

Matthew 21:35 "And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another."

“Beat one ... killed another ... stoned another”:

Matthew often blends and simplifies details.

From Mark’s account, we learn that in Jesus’ telling of this story, those three different slaves came individually.

The tenants “beat” the first one, “wounded” the second, and “killed” the third (Mark 12:2-5).

This corresponds to the Jewish rulers’ treatment of many of the Old Testament prophets (1 King 22:24; 2 Chron. 24:20-21; 36:15-16; Nehemiah 9:26; Jer. 2:30).

Matthew 21:36 "Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise."

“Other servants”:

There is not a moment in which God does not shower down his gifts upon men, and require the fruit of them.

Various instruments are used to bring sinners to God.

There are prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers.

Some with his gift after this manner, and some after that.

The true disciples of Christ have been persecuted in all ages, and the greatest share of the persecution has fallen upon the ministers of his religion; for there have always been good and bad husbandmen, and the latter have persecuted the former.

Notice who was doing this to the prophets.

It was not the ordinary people, but was rather the ones unto whom God had let out His vineyard (church), to.

We know these self-righteous people did not want to hear the messages of the true prophets.

They beat them, and accused them of not being truly sent of God.

Matthew 21:37 "But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son."

“His son”:

This person represents the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they killed (verses 38-39), and thereby incurred divine judgment (verse 41).

Of course, these people were so caught up in the law, that they could not see a loving God that was full of grace.

Here we see Jesus speaking prophetically about what they would do to Him, the son of God.

The sad thing today is that we are crucifying Jesus all over again.

Most churches today do not even recognize the Son of God.

They do not reverence Him.

They make Him just a man.

Not only do they not reverence Him as God manifest in the flesh, but are bringing the enemy's music and dance into the church.

If you will, allowing the fruit to be spoiled (compromising with the world).

Matthew 21:38 "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."

“But when the husbandmen saw the son”:

Whom many of them knew him, though some did not: some were entirely ignorant of him; some knew him, but did not confess him, yet were not injurious to him.

But others acted with spite and malice, as did these men.

They expected the Messiah about this time.

They knew, by prophecy, it could not be long before he appeared.

When they saw Jesus of Nazareth, they knew by various circumstances, by all the character of the Messiah being in him, and by his miracles, that he must be the same.

“They said among themselves”:

Privately, not openly to the people, this is the heir; as indeed he is of all things, as the Son of God, and as the mediator of the new covenant.

He is heir of all that his Father has, as he is his natural, essential, and only begotten Son.

And as mediator, he is heir of all things, natural, spiritual, and eternal, for the use and benefit of his church and people.

Who are also his portion and inheritance.

“Come let us kill him, and seize on his inheritance”:

Concluding, that could they be rid of him and their nation would be in peace, their temple would stand, and temple worship and service continue, so that they can remain in their office and authority undisturbed.

Therefore, they put him to death: the contrary of which they feared, should he be suffered to live.

Though what they feared from his life, befell them upon, and in consequence of his death, quite beyond all their counsels and expectations.

People, do you recognize the teaching that would make us Gods?

We are not God; we never will be God.

We cannot take away His position in the church.

We belong to the Son, we are not Him, and we never will be equal with Him.

He can share His inheritance with us, but it is His inheritance.

Here again, this passage has many meanings.

One of which was that these self-righteous, self-appointed authorities felt if they could do away with Jesus, they could take His place.

This was the very thing Lucifer was thrown out of heaven for.

Matthew 21:39 "And they caught him, and cast [him] out of the vineyard, and slew [him]."

“And they caught him”:

They seized and laid hold of him, in a rude and violent manner, as they had done to some of the servants before.

This regards their apprehending of Christ in the garden, by a band of soldiers and officers, sent by the chief priests and Pharisees, who with swords and staves took him, then bound him, and led him away.

“And cast him out of the vineyard”:

Which isn't to be understood that they were casting him out of the synagogue, which is never said of them.

Nor does it so much relate to the leading of him without the gates of Jerusalem, where they crucified him, though this is a sense not to be despised and rejected.

But rather, to the delivery of him to those, that were without the vineyard of the Jewish church and nation, to the Gentiles; to be mocked, scourged, and put to death by them.

“And slew him”:

For though the sentence of death was pronounced on him by Pilate, a heathen governor, and was executed by the Roman soldiers.

Yet it was through the instigation and at the pressing importunity of these husbandmen, and of the Jewish rulers; and who were afterwards frequently charged by the apostles with the murdering of him.

Verses 40-43:

Verse 40 then represents the condemning question of the judicial parable, “What will he do unto those husbandmen?”

Their reply again unwittingly condemns their own attitude of rejection toward Jesus.

The “other husbandmen” are the Gentiles (verse 43).

Jesus quotes (Psalm 118:22-23), exactly from the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, relating His present rejection to His ultimate triumph (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6-7).

Where the “stone which the builders rejected” is also quoted in relation to Christ.

The Sanhedrin represent the builders of Israel’s religion, who rejected the real cornerstone of God, Jesus, the true Cornerstone of the foundation of the church.

Matthew 21:40 "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?"

“When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh”:

In a way of providence, to call these husbandmen to an account; not only for the fruit they were to bring to him; but for their barbarity to his servants, the prophets, time after time.

And especially, for the inhuman usage and murder of his own son.

“What will he do unto those husbandmen”?:

This question is put to the chief priests, elders, and Scribes: and they themselves, who are designed hereby, are made judges in this case, just as the inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah are (in Isaiah 5:4).

Which passage of Scripture our Lord had greatly in view when he spoke this parable.

Isaiah 5:4 “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? why, when I expected that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes?”

This spoke of the Jewish church, how it rejected Jesus, and how ultimately they had killed Him on the cross.

I say again, we can see what is happening in our churches, as well.

You can hardly find Jesus in most of them today.

He has been tossed out in favor of things of the world.

You can readily see what God had already begun to do to these husbandmen.

Look all around you.

Matthew 21:41 "They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out [his] vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."

“Let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen”:

Again, the Jewish leaders pronounced their own judgment.

Their verdict against the evil vine-growers was also Christ’s judgment against them (verse 43).

The kingdom and all the spiritual advantages which had been given to Israel would now be given to “other vine-growers,” symbolizing the church (verse 43), which consists primarily of Gentiles (Romans 11:11).

They had told their own doom.

The church was taken from them and let out to others.

Jesus was making a point here that the Jews rejected Jesus, so God turned to the Gentile.

Look on down in history to our day.

God wants a church without spot or wrinkle (holy people).

God is taking His vineyard back again, and now will let it out to those who will now do the will of the landowner.

God will not allow the vineyard to be owned by others.

Matthew 21:42 "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 marvelous in our eyes?"

“The stone ... rejected”:

This is referring to His crucifixion; and the restoration of “the chief corner stone” does anticipate His resurrection.

“The head of the corner”:

To the superficial eye, this quotation from (Psalm 118:22-23), is irrelevant to the parable that precedes it.

But it is taken from a messianic psalm.

Jesus cited it to suggest that the Son who was killed and thrown out of the vineyard was also “the chief corner stone” in God’s redemptive plan.

Matthew 21:43 "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

“A nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”:

The church. Peter spoke of the church as “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9).

Verses 44-46:

The warning “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you” (verse 43) was fulfilled at Pentecost when the kingdom was mandatorily transferred to the church.

Yet, within this warning of judgment, Jesus offers mercy to these falling “on this stone,” meaning, falling upon Him in repentance and faith.

But His falling upon man in judgment will “grind him to powder”.

Matthew 21:44 “And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

“This stone”:

Christ is “a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over” to unbelievers (Isa. 8:14; 1 Peter 2:9).

And the prophet Daniel pictured Him as a great stone “cut out of the mountain without hands,” which falls on the kingdoms of the world and crushes them (Dan. 2:44-45).

Whether a ceramic vessel “falls on” a rock, or the rock “falls” on the vessel, the results will be the same.

The saying suggests that both enmity and apathy are wrong responses to Christ, and those guilty of either are in danger of judgment.

You see, the cornerstone fastens and holds securely two walls together.

I believe these two were symbolic of the Jew and the Gentile.

God is the architect.

The builder might reject this stone for the corner, but ultimately, the architect has the say and the builder has to bow to His wishes.

This symbolism of falling on the stone means-we humble ourselves before God, being brought down by the stone (Jesus Christ).

The next symbolism is saying total rejecting of this cornerstone (Jesus Christ), makes the wrath fall on you and will pulverize you.

Jesus is Judge of the world.

When His judgment falls on the unrepentant sinner, it is their total destruction.

Matthew 21:45 "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them."

"They perceived that he spake of them":

By evoking so much familiar messianic imagery (verses 42-44), Christ made His meaning inescapable to the chief priests and Pharisees.

Matthew 21:46 "But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet."

"But when they sought to lay hands on him":

Not that they attempted by any outward action to apprehend him, and carry him off, or by any immediate act of violence to take away his life; but they secretly had wished and earnestly desired to do it.

"They feared the multitude":

Which were now about Christ, lest there should be a tumult, and they should take the part of Christ against them, to which they seemed inclined; when their lives, had they attempted anything of this nature, would have been in a great deal of danger.

"Because they took him for a prophet":

By the doctrines which he taught, by the boldness and freedom of speech he used, and by the miracles he wrought.

Wherefore, though they might not all of them believe that he was the Messiah, or that prophet Moses spoke of; yet, since it was exceeding manifest, that he was a teacher sent of God.

And he was endowed with very wonderful gifts; and from whom many of them had received singular benefits, if not for their souls, yet for their bodies.

Being healed by him of their lameness, or blindness, or other diseases; therefore would not suffer him to be abused, and ill-treated by them.

So that, as Mark says, "they left him, and went their way"; to consult together what should be done, and wait for a better opportunity to seize him.

We, like these chief priests and Pharisees, must see that He speaks to us as well.

Instead of destroying Him, fall on this rock and be broken of Him so that He will not fall on us at judgment and condemn us to destruction.

Matthew Chapter 21 Continued Questions

1. What did the chief priest and Pharisees ask Jesus in the temple?
2. Who had quickly met and decided to destroy Jesus?
3. Why were they trying to get Him to say that God authorized Him?
4. What was Jesus' reply to them?
5. Whose baptism did Jesus use to make the point?
6. Why did they not discredit John?
7. Who had John said that Jesus was?
8. These two sons, in the first parable, were symbolic of whom?
9. Who was the man symbolic of?
10. Jesus said what 2 went into the kingdom before these self-righteous Jewish leaders?
11. What was the vineyard symbolic of?
12. Jesus was not rebuking the repentant, but whom?
13. Who were the husbandmen symbolic of?
14. What were these husbandmen called in other Scriptures that means the same?
15. When did he send the servants, in the parable?
16. What happened to the servants?
17. Who were the servants symbolic of?

18. Who was doing this against God?
19. Who was the last sent?
20. What did they (the husbandmen), do to Him?
21. What is sad about our churches today?
22. Why did they want to kill the Son?
23. What reminds us, in our churches, of why Lucifer was thrown out of heaven?
24. What is God doing today with the evil husbandmen?
25. Jesus is making a point that the Jew rejected whom?
26. What did Jesus call Himself pertaining to the building?
27. What does this do to two walls of a structure?
28. What were the two walls symbolic of?
29. What is the symbolism of falling on this stone?
30. What does it symbolize for the stone to fall on you?
31. What did the priests and Pharisees think about these parables?
32. Why did they not destroy Jesus then?