

**Judgment on Christ's Rejectors**

Scripture: Matthew 21:33-46

Code: 2354

In considering a passage that we might look to this morning for the Christmas message, I could find no better passage to deal with the theme of these days than the text of Matthew 21 where we find ourselves in our ongoing study of Matthew. As the Lord would have it, we come to chapter 21 verses 33 and following. And we find here a parable that could well be understood as a Christmas parable, for it reiterates to us the significance of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very unique and fascinating way.

In a sense, it's a sad part of Christmas that is discussed here. We think of Christmas as a happy time. We say "Merry Christmas," "Happy Holidays," we talk about jolly times, joyous times, times of food and family, fellowship and fun, times of parties, presents, all of those things that make us happy. And yet there is in Christmas a pathos, there is a profound sadness that finds clearly a focus as we think about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it isn't anything new, for the very first Christmas was a very sad time. While it is true that there was much rejoicing and there was much praising and there was much celebrating on the part of the principle people around the birth of Christ, the rest of the world was utterly indifferent, for the most part. And there were some who were filled with hate. And there was a massacre of every child, male child, under the age of two that sent the mothers of that part of the world into the horrors of mourning and weeping over the execution of their little ones.

And so Christmas really started with a certain pathos, a certain sadness and it maintains that even till today. It still goes on. We have to look at Christmas as a time both of celebration and of sorrow. And I suppose that perspective is summed up best in the gospel of John chapter 1 where John writes, "He was in the world and the world was made Him and the world knew Him not, He came unto His own and His own received Him not." I mean, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and rightly should we, for a Savior is born into the world to save us from our sins. But at the same time that we celebrate the Savior, we sorrow for those who reject Him. And so we are bound in a certain tension at this time of the year, wanting with all our hearts to celebrate the birth of Christ and yet something holds us back because we see the emptiness of a world that really doesn't know Him at all and is indifferent to the reality of who He is.

Now this sad part of Christmas comes into focus very clearly in the parable that our Lord teaches beginning in verse 33. And I want us to look at it and our Lord's explanation of it and I believe you will find it to be extremely profound.

Now keep in mind that this is the last week of our Lord's life. His time on earth is coming to an end. Friday He will die. This is Wednesday. And on this Wednesday, He's in the temple. It's morning and He's there teaching about the kingdom and preaching the gospel. The day before, He cleansed the temple. The day before that on Monday, He rode into the city to the hosannas of the multitude, many of them believe He may be the Messiah. He has come back then on Wednesday to the cleansed temple and the multitude is there again and He's teaching and they're listening.

Now the religious leaders, chief priests, scribes, elders, including the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians and all of those who were in responsibility for the religious life of the nation and the temple itself were infuriated at His teaching because He taught contrary to everything they taught, because He taught things that were internal and their religion was all external, because He unmasked their hypocrisy and their pretense. And so as He is moving freely through the temple which He Himself cleansed, teaching whatever He will teach, they are threatened by that. And in a fit of rage, they have a meeting together as to how they might stop Him from swaying the people any further. And so they confront Him. And we find in verse 23 of chapter 21 that they demand to know from Him by what authority does He do these things and where did He get that authority. "Where are Your credentials?," they say. "Where is Your authorization? Show us Your Sanhedrin ordination papers that give You the right to teach and preach in the temple, that give You the right to accept worship as the Messiah, that give you the permission to come in here and throw out all of the businesses that are operating in this place. Tell us by what authority You do these things."

They demand His credentials. They want His authorization papers. They want to see His ordination certificate. The Lord replies to them with a trilogy of parables, three of them. And for this morning, I want us to look at parable number two and it is fittingly a Christmas parable, in a sense.

Now let's look at verse 33 and let's begin by considering the illustration...the illustration. A parable is an illustration. It is a way of illustrating in very simple common terms a great spiritual truth. And so we see the illustration beginning in verse 33. And may I remind you of something as we approach this? The greatest teacher that ever walked on the face of the earth was Jesus Christ. The greatest story teller that ever told a story was Jesus Christ. And because there was so much truth in it and because He was so committed to that truth, there must have been a warmth, a depth, a profundity, a drama in His teaching that captivated His audience beyond the ability of any other story teller. And so, we can imagine that as He told this story, He had that entire audience in the palm of His hand. The vividness of it would have captivated them and we shall see that that is indeed the case as we come to the conclusion of it.

Verse 33, He says, "Here another parable..." He uses the Greek word allos for another, it means another of the same kind. He has just given them a parable about two sons and here is another parable in the same vernacular, in the same style. But more than that, the parable of the two sons was a parable about judgment and here is another parable about judgment, another one of the same kind. It is a judgment parable. For they have manifested collectively a rejection of Jesus Christ and so the parables He gives them are parables that bring upon them the judgment due to those who reject Him. They have rejected Him, so in these parables He rejects them. And they are powerful, to say the least. Let's look at the parable.

"There was a certain householder who planted a vineyard and hedged it round about and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenant farmers and went into a far country." Now it's a very simple scene, a very common scene. And that was the genius of a parable. You took something that was well known to explain something that was unknown...took something very objective, very concrete, very life oriented, very perceptible to explain something otherwise beyond the grasp of people. And so He talks about planting a vineyard. As I've said to you before, the land of Israel is literally covered with such vineyards in the time of Christ. A major mainstay of their agrarian society was the cultivation of vineyards. And this serves as a very, very good illustration for our Lord to use in spiritual areas as it did for Isaiah in chapter 5 when he used a very similar illustration to make a similar point about judgment. In fact, the parallels are intriguing enough that you should at your own discretion and on your own time compare Isaiah 5 with this parable.

Now the vineyard is a very common thing in their life and they would have understood exactly what was going on. First you have a certain householder, this is a man who owns the estate. This is the master, the owner. And he decides to take a portion of his land, perhaps a slope on a hillside which was the common place for vineyards, and he plants a vineyard. Then it tells us that he hedged it round about. Vineyards were vulnerable to wild animals, to robbers. And so in order to protect vineyards, they were always hedged about. There could be a moat around them on some occasions, water. There could be a wall built around them. But on some occasions, there was a hedge, a thorny hedge. Often even cactus was used. And to this day you can see cactus in the land of Israel to keep out the animals and the robbers.

The point being, the man took care in planting the vineyard. He took care in protecting the vineyard. Then it says he dug a winepress in it, that's the place where the grapes could be turned into juice. And if you traveled in the land of Israel today, you will see many remnants of old winepresses in archaeological digs and even in more contemporary settings. A winepress could be nothing more than a stone in the ground. The stone would be cut out as a shallow basin, very wide and shallow, filled with grapes. And then there would be a trough running to a lower basin carved in another piece of stone. And as the grapes were crushed, the juice would flow down the trough into the lower basin and be collected there from which it would be scooped and put into wineskins and pots and jars. That

was the way that they turned their grapes into grape juice and wine.

Then it tells us that the man built a tower. A tower was for three purposes, really,--security, shelter and storage. A tower would allow someone to watch and be sure no one was trying to invade. It would also be a place of shelter in the event of weather problems. And it would be a place for the storage of implements and tools and things necessary for the care of the vineyard.

Now the point of all of that is to demonstrate to you that the man took great care in doing it right. He really did a good job putting his vineyard together. He was careful to supply the security that it needed. And then it says he leased it out to tenant farmers and went into a far country...literally went abroad or went away. Now this is also common. A man may own land. He can't cultivate it on his own. And so he leases it out. He works out an arrangement, a contract with the people who are leasing it. And they are to give him a certain portion of the crop each year. The remainder of which belongs to them for their own livelihood. They could have done well with this. It was a properly prepared vineyard. It was properly protected. Their crop could have flourished, given the factors of weather and their careful cultivation work, they could have done very well. The man had gone to all the extremes necessary, leased it out to these people and went abroad, moved away.

Now this would not be an uncommon setting. The hearers of our Lord would have completely understood this. It was very common to lease land for such cultivating purposes.

Then verse 34. "And when the time of the fruit drew near." Literally the season of fruits, harvest time, the time when you calculated the product. "He sent his servants to the farmers that they might receive the fruits of it." In other words, it was time to collect his portion so he sent his servants to them to receive from them what was due to him. They may have given it to him in currency, having sold what was produced. They may have given it to him in terms of grapes or in terms of wine which could have been then transferred at the marketplace into cash. Whatever, he came to collect what was rightly his. That would also have been very common. The servants then came in his name, in his behalf to receive what was due to him.

But then an amazing series of events takes place in the parable. Verse 35, "And the farmers took his servants and beat one and killed another and stoned another." Now if you read Mark's parallel account, you'll find in Mark 12 verses 3 to 5 that he sort of singly identifies the sequence. First, one came, they beat him. Next one came, they killed him. Next one came, they stoned him. Matthew just pulls them all into one verse and says they beat one, killed another and stoned another. This is amazing. I mean, this good man who had given them this piece of land to cultivate by which they could have prospered sends his servants merely to collect what is due to him by virtue of the arrangement and the fact that it is his land and his vineyard. And they beat one, and the word there means to scourge or flay or beat raw and bloody. And then it says they killed another. And in order to sort of distinguish that from stoning which also brought death, we perhaps could say they killed

instantly or immediately. It's an aorist tense verb, it's as if they murdered that person rather rapidly, perhaps with a knife or a spear or a sword. And then they stoned another, lithobole basically means to stone to death.

So, they flagellated one of them bloody. They instantly murdered another and progressively crushed the life out of a third by dropping boulders on him. It's incredible. These tenant farmers given such privilege, given such opportunity had become independent. They had become resentful. They had become filled with hatred for the owner. They had become overly possessive. They wanted everything. They didn't want to give it to whom it was due. But the owner is so gracious. I mean, I think after I had sent the first guy, I would have taken some pretty strong action. He sent one. He sent another. He sent another. Look at verse 36, "Again, he sent other servants, more than the first group and they did the same unto them." They killed them all. No matter who he sent, same reaction.

Now, this does indicate to us something of the generous gracious merciful patience of this land owner as he continues to send these servants and they continue to kill them. Some critics have said at this point, "Well, this makes the parable a little far fetched. Nobody would keep sending servants." And the reply to that is that's correct, neither would they keep killing them, probably. This is where the parable becomes utterly uncommon. And it is in the uncommonness of such a thing, the heinousness of such a thing, the unbelievability of it, the incredulity of it that our Lord is making His point.

In other words, He is saying if you think this is amazing, then what do you think about its application? It is the extreme uncommonness of it that is the point He wishes to make. And so they have killed all the servants. And verse 37 says, "But last of all he sent unto them his son saying, They will reverence my son." That phrase "last of all," or "finally" is full of emotion, is full of sadness. Here is a grieved man and now he's only got his son left. In fact, in Mark 12:6, the parallel passage, Mark says he is his only son...his only son. He says I'll send him. No one left but him. They will reverence my son.

That verb is a very interesting verb, entrepo, it basically means "to turn oneself around, being ashamed of hurting or injuring." It's a very rich word. And he says certainly they will turn around from that behavior because of the shame of it. I mean, they won't do it surely to my son, they will stand in awe of my son. They will have respect and regard for my son surely.

But, verse 38 says, "When the farmers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him." It's amazing. Now they kill the man's son. They knew who he was. No mystery. They knew exactly who he was. They planned his murder, it was premeditated, first degree, the result of careful wicked planning with full knowledge of who he was. They premeditated his murder so they could control everything. It's unbelievable.

That's the illustration. Now you can imagine that the people are peaked in terms of interest. They know it's a parable. They know He has a spiritual point in mind. But the story itself is so captivating that even without the parabolic aspect, or without the interpretation we are captivated by the evil of these men and by the sadness of the father who has lost all his servants and his son.

And so we move from the illustration to the conclusion. And in a very traditional rabbinic way, He leads them down the path and makes them conclude the story themselves. Verse 40, "When the lord, or the householder, therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those farmers?" Now the assumption here is that he's got forces and resources that the servants didn't have and they couldn't protect themselves, he can. When he gets there, what's he going to do?

Well, the people certainly by now in their thinking would have been in a rage at the terrible wickedness and cruelty. It's pretty obvious what he would do. And those self-righteous religious leaders with a smirk of self-congratulation and a pat on their own back are ready to give their moralistic answer and parade their righteousness. And so they say, verse 41, unto him, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men and will lease his vineyard unto other farmers who shall render him the fruits in their seasons." They love to hear themselves saying such moral things. They love to feel so irate at injustice and evil. This feeds their hypocrisy. They say...I take it the "they" is the religious leaders. Luke tells us that the people gathered around, some of them cried, "God forbid, no, no, no, no."

In other words, those people when they heard "What will he do to them?" and the leaders said "Why he will miserably destroy those wicked farmers and give the vineyard to someone who will give them...give him the fruits of it," cried out "No, no, no, no," as if they were unable to imagine what he would do to them. And they transferred their sorrow for those who would be so devastatingly punished. They were so caught up in the story, perhaps, that they were just unable to imagine what he would do to such wicked people. And the sympathy of their heart cried out even in behalf of the wicked. Or it may be that some of the people began already to see the true interpretation of the parable and they sensed a spiritual reality that created great fear in their hearts. Luke doesn't tell us which, it could have been both, to be honest.

Now two things are said in verse 41 right out of the mouths of these leaders and they condemn themselves. "He will miserably destroy those wicked men," that's number one. "And will lease his vineyard unto other farmers who shall render him the fruits in their seasons." Miserably destroy the wicked men...leave his vineyard to other farmers who render him the fruits in their seasons...there are two things there. First is judgment, second is replacement, mark that. First is judgment, then replacement. So, they have said it. With their own mouths they have concluded the illustration.

Now thirdly I want you to see the explanation. And this is missed by many people, but I want you to see it. This is the explanation...so powerful because Jesus speaks explaining the parable but explaining it in a veiled way. Watch verse 42, the explanation, "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures the stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner? This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."

Now when you just heard me read that, you said to yourself, "What does that have to do with the parable? Boy, how did we get stone in here and builders? Now we're confusing our analogies, we're mixing our metaphors, what is this saying?" It doesn't seem to be much of an explanation at first, does it? And it's amazing how many commentators just sort of pass it off and say, "Well, Jesus is moving to another idea here," or "Matthew sort of dropped this deal in out of its local place where it belonged." No, it's sheer divine genius and you'll see in a moment why.

It is a quote out of Psalm 118 verse 22 and 23, the same Psalm from which the hosannas had come that had been offered to Christ two days before and even the day before by the children in the temple, the boys. Psalm 118 was familiar to them and they knew that verse that said the stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner, this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. And it is that prophecy that the Lord uses to explain the parable. He begins by saying to them, and it's very sarcastic, "Did you never read in the Scriptures? You who pride yourself on spending dawn till dusk reading the Scriptures, you who say you know the Scriptures, you who excel in the law, did you miss this one?" It's an indictment. Did you miss the one that said there was a stone rejected that became the head of the corner and that the Lord would do that and it would be marvelous when He did it? Did you miss that?

Now the heart of what Psalm 118:22 and 23 is saying is very simple, when builders want to build a building, they need a corner stone. And a corner stone is the most important stone in the building...for many reasons. It's key in the foundation. It's key, of course, in the support of the roof. But more than that, it sets the angles for the walls. It draws the lines by which the uniformity of the building maintains itself. And if the cornerstone is off, then down the way somewhere the whole building is off. And so a cornerstone was the most carefully selected of all stones that the building might be set as to its walls and its form in perfect order. And cornerstones were massive stones. In our recent trip to Israel we saw some of the cornerstones in the Herodian wall that rises to surround the temple mount in Jerusalem. There's one of those stones on the corner that's 32 feet by three feet by two feet, one stone quarried by hand. We saw another stone that's just one of the foundation stones down at the base of the Herodian wall that's 12 meters long and weighs tons. How they quarried it and how they moved it is still unknown.

But a cornerstone of a great edifice was a key stone and so in selecting one, they wanted to be sure it was perfect. And he says, "Does...the psalmist...that there was a stone that the builders rejected..." that can't do it, it's not adequate, it's not the right stone, it's not perfect, we reject it. And they threw it

away but it became later the head of the corner. Who did it? "It is the Lord's doing and it is a wonder in our eyes."

In other words, God brings back a stone that men reject and puts it in the place of the most significance.

And you say, "Well, what is the Psalm talking about? Well, what stone is this?" Follow carefully. It's Israel in the Psalm. Israel was a stone which the empire builders of the world rejected. This is the historic sense of the Psalm. The empire builders of the world ignored Israel. They saw Israel as insignificant and unimportant. And they discarded Israel. They had no place for Israel in the building of their great empires. But not so the Lord, for the stone Israel which indeed is the cornerstone of the redemptive history of the world, which the world has despised and rejected, God sets back in the place of significance in the building of His redemptive plan, doesn't He? I mean, the world may reject Israel and their place in history, but God knows they signify the key place in His redemptive plan. So God miraculously keeps picking Israel up off the discarded stone pile and sticking it back into His plan as the key cornerstone. That's historic and a very important point to note. This small nation which continues to exist is the cornerstone in the divine plan of God for redemptive history.

But there was something even more than that in that verse. Much of the Psalms give us Messianic perspectives. And in those Messianic perspectives there's a double fulfillment. And there's something in that Psalm that is intended to go far beyond the nation Israel and to talk about one who comes out of the loins of that nation Israel. Let me show you. Acts chapter 4 verse 10, Peter is preaching in the city of Jerusalem, addressing the leaders of Israel, the Sanhedrin, the same group really that Jesus is talking to in Matthew 21, "Be it known unto you all," verse 10, "and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you well," that is the lame man that was healed by the Gate Beautiful. "It was by Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead." Then verse 11, "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders which is become the head of the corner, neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Who is the stone then of Psalm 118? Who is it? Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified. The stone which the builders...what?...rejected, whom God raised from the dead is now become the head of the corner. The rejected stone is the crucified Christ, the restored cornerstone is the resurrected Christ. It couldn't be more clearly said than that. Peter reiterates the same message in his first epistle, chapter 2, "Behold, I lay in Zion," verse 6, "a chief cornerstone elect precious. He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore who believe, He is precious. Unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is become the head of the corner and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." Peter says the same thing. Christ is the cornerstone. Christ is the cornerstone.



Paul says it in Ephesians chapter 2, says we are fellow citizens, verse 19, with the saints and the household of God and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Now listen carefully and get this. The Lord is saying by quoting Psalm 118:22 and 23 the man...the men in the tenant farmer situation took the son out and they slew the son. And these leaders say, "Well, when that man comes back, he's going to miserably destroy those wicked sinners and take away the vineyard from them." And Jesus says to them, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner. Haven't you read that?" And what He is saying is this, the stone is Jesus Christ, right? We've seen that. The rejection constitutes the rejection of Israel. The restoration constitutes His resurrection and His following glory.

Now here is why that is an explanation of the parable, listen carefully. The stone is the son. The builders are the farmers. That's the parallel. As the farmers rejected the son, so the builders rejected whom? The stone. If the stone is Christ, then the builders represent Israel and its religious leaders. The parallel then between the explanation passage, prophecy from the Old Testament, and the parable is the parallel between a stone and a son, between builders and farmers. And just as the builders rejected the stone who is Christ, so the farmers rejected the Son who is Christ. The parable then is telling us that the son is whom? Christ. And so He uses the Word of God to explain the parable. And the indictment is very powerful. Once you know that the son is the stone, once you know therefore that the son is Christ, then the farmers have to be the religious leaders of Israel and all the people that followed them. And then who is the householder that sent the son? Who is it? God. And what is the vineyard? It's the sphere of God's blessing, verse 43, it's the Kingdom of God. Then who are the servants that were sent and murdered? The prophets.

What a parable and what an explanation. And He puts the explanation in a passage of Scripture which they affirm to believe...just like those farmers rejected that son and killed him, so you will reject the stone but God will raise that stone again and put it back in the corner. That's the explanation. What a profound approach. God, the householder, planted a vineyard, a place of blessing, a place of salvation, a place of promise, a place of covenant. And you got in that place of blessing and you hoarded that and you misused that and you misappropriated that and you robbed from God what was due Him and you never gave Him the glory to His name and you never demonstrated the fruit of repentance and you never showed the fruit of righteousness and you gave God nothing. And when God sent His prophets to you, one after another of those prophets you killed.

Tradition tells us and it comes from Justin Martyr's Dialogues with Tripho(?) that they took Isaiah and with a wooden saw they sawed him in half. That may be what Hebrews 11:37 is referring to when it talks about the men of faith being sawn asunder. They took Jeremiah and threw him into a pit and tradition says ultimately he was stoned. They rejected Ezekiel. Amos had to run for his life. Zechariah was rejected and stoned. Micah was smashed in the face, 1 Kings 22:24 says, by the people who would not hear the message that he gave. And this is the norm, this is how they treated

the prophets, the kings and the high priests and the leaders of the people, the religious people. This is how they treated God's prophets.

Turn a couple of pages further in your Bible to Matthew 23 verse 31 and Jesus in talking to the same people says, "Wherefore ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye are the sons of them that killed the prophets." That's how they're identified. They are the sons of them who killed the prophets. "Fill up then the measure of your fathers, go ahead with your murderous deed on Me," He says. Verse 34, "Wherefore, behold I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes and some of them you shall kill and crucify and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues and persecute them from city to city. What your fathers have done, you're going to keep doing." And they did. Paul the Apostle did it, didn't he? "And upon you will come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berechiah whom you slew between the temple and the altar." They killed one of the prophets right in the temple.

This is the norm. They have rejected the prophets. They rejected the son and they'll continue to reject, He says. And they did. Oh, what a remarkable thing this is.

Now let me just give you a footnote here that's amazing. I believe this is one of the most missed and yet most clear claims to deity that our Lord ever gave. He says here God sent you prophets and then God sent a son. And Mark 12:6, an only son. And so Christ distinguishes Himself as the Son of God, sent from God as different than the prophets. He's not a servant like their servants, he's a son. It is a claim to deity. And in the parable, this is the heir, to him belongs the inheritance, is the implication. This is the son. It is a remarkable claim by Jesus to be the Son of God, a claim for which they wanted Him dead. There's no way around it. He claimed to be the only Son of God, not a prophet like other prophets, not even the best of the prophets. Nothing less will do than that He is the incarnate Son of God. He is either that or He is a false prophet and a liar.

And they knew who He was. They say in verse 38 among themselves, "This is the heir." They knew who He was. They saw His miracles. They heard His words. They knew who He was but they wanted Him dead because they wanted to possess the Kingdom on their own terms. Oh, what blindness, what horrible blindness. What evil. They knew who He was. In fact, when He rose from the dead, do you remember that they bribed the soldiers to lie about His resurrection? That's right. They knew the truth. They were unwilling to accept it like people today. There's no lack of evidence. There's no lack of credibility regarding Christ. They wanted Him dead because they were afraid to lose their position and their power, their control.

Do you realize that Jesus is here telling them to their face that He knows they'll kill Him? That's right. There's no surprise to Him. He's not a victim. He said, "I am not having My life taken from Me," in John's gospel, "I lay it down of Myself."

Would you notice verse 39 that in the parable they took the son out of the vineyard. And that's consistent too because Christ was crucified it says in Hebrews 13:12 and 13, outside the gate, right? Outside the gate. The parable is so clear. Israel, the place of blessing, Israel the place of salvation, Israel the place where God poured out the goodness of His mercy and grace, and when they drifted into sin and selfishness, God sent His prophets whom they hated, despised and murdered. Finally, God sent His Son, they took Him outside, killed Him. It hasn't happened. Jesus says it's what you're going to do. It's what you're going to do.

So, the illustration, the conclusion, and the explanation. And that explanation is keyed by an understanding of the text of verse 42 from Psalm 118. Now the application. Very simple...the application. Whatever veil may have remained over their dark minds is going to get taken off now. Verse 43, "Therefore...now I'm going to apply it...say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you." You said it in verse 41, he will lease his vineyard unto other farmers. And you said it right. The Kingdom of God is going to be taken from you and given to a nation that brings forth the fruits of it. And what are those fruits? What John talked about in Matthew 3:7, the fruits of repentance, the demonstration of righteousness that comes out of a life that is turned from sin. Oh what an important verse. Jesus says to the leaders of Israel, "You have lost the right to be in the place of blessing." God turned from Israel.

That was the end of a great day. Oh my, that was the end of a great era. God turned away from Israel as the people of blessing and says, "I will give it to a nation." What nation? Well, the word means "people." What people? Well, the same nation of which Peter speaks in 1 Peter 2, "An holy nation." I believe it's the church, the redeemed of this age.

So, those two results, a Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, given to someone else--that's the first one--, taken away. That's sad. That's replacement that we talked about earlier. You forfeited it. And Israel today is unblessed. We've been learning about that in Romans 9:10 and 11 and I'm not going to go into developing it all, but Israel has been removed for the time being from the place of blessing. You say, "Will they ever come back?" Yes they will...yes they will. God will graph them in, it says in Romans, all Israel will be saved. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The day will come, says Zechariah, when they'll look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son. Salvation will come to Israel. Some from every tribe will become evangelists to proclaim the gospel around the world. Their day will come again because God has a promise He must fulfill. But for now, they are set aside and Romans 9 says a people which were not My people are now My people. I have called a no people to become My people, a non- beloved to be My beloved, Romans 9:25 and 26 says. A new people, a new nation, a holy nation, not ethnically defined, but defined by faith in Christ.

We are that nation. Bless God. We bring forth the fruit of repentance, the fruit of righteousness by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the new channel through which God can bring the gospel of salvation to a world that needs it so much.

So, verse 43 brings up the replacement idea. Then verse 44 is the application of the judgment idea. They said he'll miserably destroy those wretched sinners...those wretched wicked men. And that's exactly what the Lord says, listen: "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken...smashed to pieces, literally...but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will pulverize him...winnow him like chaff in the air, grind him into small little pieces that can blow away in the wind." Boy, what a verse.

What is it saying? "Whosoever shall fall upon" the verb has the idea of being above and falling on in a sense of seizing on. And I take it that in connection with the parable, that's what it's saying. Like they said, let's seize that son and kill him, He is saying whoever tries to seize the Lord Jesus Christ to do harm to Him shall be broken into pieces. You do that to God's Son and that's what God will do to you. He will, in the words of the Jews who responded, He will miserably destroy those wicked men who seized His Son. You fall upon the Lord Jesus Christ to do evil to Him, to do harm to Him and you'll be broken to bits. And then in the final judgment when He falls on you, you'll be crushed to powder. That's what it says. Oh my...strong words, strong words.

Paul echoes the thought, "Whosoever loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema...let him be accursed." The Greek verb "grind him to powder" couldn't be translated better than that. That's the best translation of it. It's not simply a crushing, but a scattering into nothingness. You do harm to Christ, you seize Christ and kill Him and you'll be broken. And when He comes in judgment, He will crush. A parallel is Daniel 2:34 and 35 where it shows the empires of the world in that image, you remember? And the stone cut out without hands who is Christ smashes that thing. Christ will come as a crushing stone, a judge. And He will judge in a pulverizing eternal judgment those who have rejected Him.

So, the illustration, conclusion, given out of their own mouth. Jesus gives the explanation. And taking their own words that such people ought to be judged and replaced, He says that's what you've done to Jesus Christ, you too will be judged and replaced in the sphere of blessing.

That brings me lastly to their reaction, verses 45 and 46. "And when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parable...parables, they perceived that He spoke of them." Well, they had that much sense. They got the message. How could they miss it, right?

That is a tremendously indicting statement. They knew He was talking about them. So they understood the whole thing. They understood it all. They had no question about it. They knew that they were the sons who said, "Oh yes, we'll go," and never did. They knew they were the ones who killed the prophets and tried to hoard the vineyard and would kill the son. They knew that's who they

were. They knew He spoke of them.

You say, "Did that bring a revival? Were they convicted? Did they turn their hearts toward Christ?" Verse 46, so sad, "When they sought to lay hands on Him..." What are they going to do now? They're going to seize Him anyway. They're going to seize Him to kill Him. "But they were afraid of the crowd because they regarded Him as a prophet."

Herod Antipas was afraid to take John and kill him because the people thought he was a prophet. And now they're cowards, they don't want to touch Jesus because the people think He's a prophet and they're afraid. That's the only thing that holds them back. They are so lost...so lost. The Sanhedrin wants Jesus dead but they're afraid. They've just heard the truth about themselves, they could care less. They know He's the Son of God, they don't care about that either. Oh my, what unbelievable unbelief, but it is characteristic of all unbelievers who reject against the truth. So sad.

You say, "What does this have to do with Christmas?" Everything. Verse 37 says it, last of all, "He sent unto them His Son." That's the sad part of Christmas. He sent His Son and the world is filled with people like these people who with all the information turn their back on Him and stand with those who would seize and do Him harm, rather than those who would embrace and kiss the Son.

What do we learn from this text? Can I summarize it? Listen very carefully. What do we learn about God? Listen. We learn about His grace to men, giving them privilege, blessing, giving them a hope of promise, giving them potential great reward, giving them a vineyard of blessing in which they can live and be blessed. We learn about His patience with men. How many times has God sent a messenger and another messenger and another though they are rejected and rejected and rejected. We learn about His love for men because He not only sent messengers, He sent whom? His Son. And that says how much God loves because He sent His Son to die at the hands of those men. We also learn about the judgment of God. He will come in destruction against those who destroyed Christ.

What do we learn about Christ in this story? We learn about His claim to deity. He was the Son. He is the stone. We learn about His willingness to die. He came to die. He knew what was ahead. He knew where they were taking Him. He knew they were going to murder Him. He told them to their face and never tried to avoid that. What willingness to die. We learn about His resurrection. The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner. He is restored to the place of glory and majesty and supremacy. We learn that He is the determiner of destiny because what you do with Jesus Christ determines your eternity.

What do we learn about men? We learn that men have great privilege. They have God's revelation. They have the Scripture. They have a world of providential blessing in which they live. They have the gospel. We learn about not only men's great privilege but their great responsibility. The vineyard

in a sense is ours and God has put us in a place where we can respond to Him and we can see Him and hear Him and know Him. And then we learn about our accountability, the Lord is going to send His servants to check on how we're handling the things that have been given into our care. There's an accountability there. And then we learn about men's stubborn and willful rejection of Christ. And then we learn that men will be judged for such rejection. That's the sad part of Christmas.

It need not be so. Christmas can be and should be a time of celebration and it is for those who kiss the Son, who embrace the Son in faith. I trust that's true in your life. Let's bow in prayer.

While your heads are bowed for just a closing moment, please stay where you are in an attitude of meditation for a moment. I trust that you know Christ, that you're not under some illusion about that. Or that you're not willfully rejecting Him like these, but that your heart is open to Christ, that you seek that Christmas should be all that Christmas was meant to be, that when God sends the Son, you'll not stand with the rejectors, you'll not stand with those who seized and killed the Son. You say, "I would never do that," but if you reject Jesus Christ, you stand with the rejectors as guilty as they.

On the other hand, if you'll open your heart to receive Christ, you'll enter into His glory and the stone which the builders rejected, the same becomes the head of the corner and that corner could be the corner in the eternal and everlasting glorious Kingdom of God of which you will be a part. For Peter says, "And upon that foundation stone, Christ, we are built up as living stones." You can be a part of the glory of His Kingdom, possessing the life of God that He alone can give to those in faith who come to Him. I just ask the Spirit of God to move your heart to receive Christ. Pray a simple prayer confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior who died and rose for you, giving your life to Him that He may forgive your sin and bring you peace with God.

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