

Matthew 21 - The Triumphal Entry; Cleansing the Temple; The Cursed Fig Tree; Parable of the Two Sons; Parable of the Vineyard Owner

IV. Formal presentation and rejection of the King (Matt 20:29—23:39)

(2) Formal presentation of the King to Israel (21:1-22)

- (A) Triumphal entry (21:1-11)
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Matthew 21

(2) Formal presentation of the King to Israel (21:1-22)

- (A) Triumphal entry (21:1-11) (Cf. Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19)

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to **Bethphage**, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples,

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,

1 When they came near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples on ahead and

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

- Jesus and the disciples traveled 17 miles from Jericho to Bethany along the Roman Road
- "...Bethphage" - "house of figs"; just west of Bethany, on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4; Ezek 11:23; 43:1-5)

2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied *there* and a **colt** with it. Untie them and bring them to Me.

2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied *there* and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me.

2 told them, "Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them, and bring them to me.

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me.

- As Jesus approached Bethphage, He instructed two disciples to go to the village and bring an ass and a colt to Him (Mark 11:1-6)

— He was preparing to recreate the return of King David to Jerusalem in peace and humility (2 Sam 19-20) and the entrance of Solomon into Jerusalem for His enthronement (1 Kings 1:38-40)

- "...colt" - a young male donkey; Jesus rode a "colt," not on its mother, the donkey (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30)

3 And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The **Lord** needs them,' and he will send them on immediately."

3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him, 'The Lord needs them,' and that person will send them at once."

3 And if any *man* say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

- "...Lord" - *kyrios*, this is the only place in Matthew's gospel where Jesus uses the title "Lord" of Himself. Used this way, it became a title of authority. Every other reference refers to YHWH.

- The disciples went to pick them (the donkey and the colt) up, and when they were questioned, they explained that they were taking them to "the Lord" who needed them (Mark 11:5-6; Luke 19:33-34).

4 Now this took place so that what was spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

4 Now this happened to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet when he said,

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF **ZION**, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, HUMBLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A **COLT**, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY.'"

5 "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Look, your king is coming to you! He is humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt of a donkey.'"

5 Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

- Quoting Is 62:11; Zech 9:9 (the first two lines are quoted from Is 62:11, the last two from Zech 9:9)

— Matthew omitted the part of Zech 9:9 that speaks of Messiah bringing national salvation to Israel. Jesus would not do that yet due to Israel's rejection.

- "...ZION" - poetic name for Jerusalem, often used of the city under Messiah's rule during the Kingdom

- There were several times that Jesus became popular and the crowd wanted Him to be King

— Each time Jesus slips away and notes that "Mine hour has not yet come." Here Jesus actually stages the event! He does this deliberately to fulfill an OT prophecy

- "...COLT" - rulers rode donkeys in Israel during times of peace (Judges 5:10; 1 Kings 1:33). It was a sign of their humble service to the people. Warriors rode horses.

— By coming in peace, He was extending grace rather than judgment to the city.

— Jesus rode on the "colt" (a young male donkey), not on its mother (an ass or donkey) (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30)

- This event happened four days before Passover. Every able-bodied male was required by the Law to go to Jerusalem for Passover so Jerusalem at this time was a tourist center.

(This was not "Palm Sunday": the 10th of Nisan was a *Saturday*)

Is 62:11: Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your salvation is coming; Behold His reward is with Him, and His compensation before Him."

Zech 9:9: Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is righteous and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them,

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them,

6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their cloaks on them; and He sat on the cloaks.

7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.

7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put their coats on them, and he sat upon them.

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set *him* thereon.

- Riding this unbroken colt was a miracle in itself, especially when considering He was moving through an excited crowd with an unfamiliar burden on its back. Surely He could bring peace to Israel if He could calm the young colt (Is 11:1-10).

8 Most of the **crowd** spread their cloaks on the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road.

8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

8 Many people in the crowd spread their own coats on the road, while others began cutting down branches from the trees and spreading them on the road.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed *them* in the way.

- The deliberate preparation for a citywide reception contrasts with Jesus' former approach to ministry. Before, He had deliberately not drawn attention to Himself; He had formerly withdrawn from antagonistic situations, but now He organized a parade so they could not miss Him.

- "...crowd" - a large company of pilgrims in town for Passover, mainly from Galilee, acknowledged Him as King by spreading their coat on the road before Him (Cf. 2 Kings 9:13)

9 Now the crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; **Hosanna** in the highest!"

9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

9 Both the crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed him kept shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! How blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

- "...Hosanna" - this Greek transliteration of a Hebrew word "Save we pray" occurs 6x in the Gospels as the cry of the people when our Lord entered Jerusalem as the Messiah (Matt 21:9,15; Mark 11:9; John 12:13)
- Taken from Ps 118, recited at the Feast of Tabernacles in "the great Hallel" (Ps 113-118) they waved willow and palm branches with rejoicings
- The 7th or last day of the feast was called "the Great Hosanna," especially associated with consummated salvation
- The account in Luke notes that they are singing Ps 118, heralding Jesus as the *Meschiach Nagid*, the Messiah the King
- Later in the week, Jesus Himself would refer to this psalm and apply it to Himself (Ps 118:22-23; Matt 21:42)
- Then the Pharisees became upset because they felt that the crowd was blaspheming
- Did Jesus ever sit on the throne of David? No, it didn't exist then.
- He will later (Cf. 1 Kings 1:38-40): Solomon was brought to his coronation riding *David's mule*.

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"

10 When he came into Jerusalem, the whole city was trembling with excitement. The people were asking, "Who is this?"

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

- Jesus probably entered Jerusalem through the Sheep Gate on the eastern city wall, north of the temple enclosure (St. Stephen's Gate, a name given after Stephen's martyrdom, Acts 7:58)

— Worshippers brought sheep through this gate for sacrificing because it was the closest gate to the Temple. It would be fitting that the Lamb of God should also enter this gate.

11 And the crowds were saying, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

11 And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

11 The crowds kept saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, the man from Nazareth in Galilee."

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

- The people, like the disciples, did not understand Messiah's role as the Suffering Servant who would have to die. They also did not appreciate the universal scope of the Kingdom, as contrasted with its national scope.

— Jesus entrance into Jerusalem because a popular topic of conversation (Cf. Matt 2:3).

The residents wondered who He really was. Most people who knew about Jesus described Him as a "prophet from Nazareth" whose arena of ministry had been mainly in Galilee (Cf. 2:23; 16:14; 21:46). This description reflects popular disbelief that He was the Messiah.

The significance of the Triumphal Entry is the final and official presentation of Jesus to Israel as its Messiah. This is evident for several reasons:

1. The manner of Christ's actions. He deliberately makes careful preparations to fulfill every detail of Zech 9:9. He planned His movements with understanding of their significance.
2. The people recognized Jesus' presentation of Himself as such.
3. The parables Jesus gives following the event.
4. The timing...the event occurred on the very day predicted by Daniel in Dan 9:25.

Because Israel refused to accept the King when He was presented in exact fulfillment of their Scripture, their unbelief was confirmed. The reception given to the King was without genuine faith and understanding. However, it did give a brief glimpse of that which will characterize the King's reception when He appears to Israel the second time.

(B) Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17) (Cf. Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46)

Jesus performed two acts of judgment: He cleansed the Temple, and He cursed a fig tree. Both acts were contrary to His usual manner of ministry, for He did not come to earth to judge, but to save (John 3:17).

Both of these acts revealed the hypocrisy of Israel: The temple was a den of thieves, and the nation (symbolized by the fig tree) was without fruit. Inward corruption and outward fruitlessness were evidences of their hypocrisy.

12 And Jesus entered the temple *area* and drove out all those who were selling and buying on the temple *grounds*, and He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.

12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.

12 Then Jesus went into the Temple, threw out everyone who was selling and buying in the Temple, and overturned the moneychangers' tables and the chairs of those who sold doves.

12 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

- Jesus had opened His ministry with a similar act (John 2:13-25). However, on this occasion, Jesus' beef seemed to be *where* the merchants were rather than *how* they conducted their business. The Sadducean priests permitted merchants to conduct business in the Court of the Gentiles.

- Now, three years later, the temple was defiled again by the “religious business” of the leaders
- Annas, the former high priest, was the manager of this enterprise, assisted by his sons
- In order to comply with the requirements of the Temple, you had to have the Temple currency
- This created the need for moneychangers. The whole practice was corrupt and also in the wrong place.

13 And He *said to them, “It is written: ‘**MY HOUSE WILL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER**’; but you are making it a **DEN OF ROBBERS**.”

13 And He *said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you are making it a robbers’ den.”

13 He told them, “It is written, ‘My house is to be called a house of prayer,’ but you are turning it into a hideout for bandits!”

13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

- “...MY HOUSE” - He was affirming that He is God (quoted from Is 56:7)

— The entire 56th chapter of Isaiah denounces the unfaithful leaders of Israel

- “...DEN OF ROBBERS” - quoted from Jer 7:11; part of a long sermon in which Jeremiah condemned a superstitious reverence for the Temple while the people dishonored it.

— In the context of Jeremiah’s prophecy, the “thieves” were nationalist rebels

— This is also the meaning of the Greek word *lestai* (thieves), which Jesus uses here

— Rather than being a house of prayer, Israel’s leaders had turned it into a stronghold of Jewish nationalism that dishonored the Temple while they maintained a superstitious respect for it.

— Jesus “cleansing” of the Temple was a massive assault on the authority and integrity of the religious leaders.

- By coming to the Temple and purifying it, Jesus was making another messianic claim (Mal 3:1-4)

— However, the nation’s rejection of the Messiah precluded the fulfillment of the blessing following purification (Mal 3:5-6). This prophecy will find fulfillment at the Second Coming.

14 And *those who were blind and those who limped* came to Him in the temple area, and He healed them.

14 And *the blind and the lame* came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

14 Blind and lame people came to him in the Temple, and he healed them.

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

- This is the last reference to Jesus healing ministry in Matthew

- The healings likely took place in the Court of the Gentiles
- "...*those who were blind and those who limped*" - these people likely could not participate fully in worship activities at the Temple (Cf. 2 Sam 5:6-8, where David excluded the blind and lame)
- However, Jesus made it possible for them to do so by healing them. He therefore cleansed the Temple and those who came to it.
- The authorities later questioned His authority to do this cleansing (v23)

15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple *area*, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant,

15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant

15 But when the high priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he had done and the children shouting in the Temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became furious

15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,

- The response to Jesus' actions aggravated the chief priests and teachers of the Law. What Jesus was doing had messianic implications, and the people realized this.

16 and they said to Him, "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" And Jesus *said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, '**FROM THE MOUTHS OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF**'?"

16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" And Jesus *said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself'?"

16 and asked him, "Do you hear what these people are saying?" Jesus told them, "Yes! Haven't you ever read, 'From the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have created praise'?"

16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, **Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?**

- "...FROM THE MOUTHS OF INFANTS" - quoted from Ps 8:2, as a rebuke to the chief priests and teachers of the Law

— Surely these OT experts should have seen the messianic implications of what Jesus was doing, and heard the words people were using as they responded to Him (Cf. 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31)

— This Psalm describes the “praise” that people, even little children, will give to God for the conditions that will prevail during the Kingdom

- Jesus’ rebuke allowed the children to continue praise and temporarily stifled the leader’s criticism

— It also declared His deity, since He accepted praise reserved only for God. It also reinforced the truth that the humble and childlike often perceive spiritual truth more clearly than the sophisticated.

17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

17 Then he left them and went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there.

17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

- Bethany was within a Sabbath days walk from Jerusalem. Some very special times in Bethany, where Lazarus was raised.

- He likely retreated there nightly during festival season for practical reasons, along with the fact that He had good friends there (Mary, Martha, Lazarus)

The Sign of Jesus’ Rejection of Israel

This section of Matthew’s gospel presents Israel’s formal rejection of her Messiah. Jesus had made a formal presentation of Himself to the nation’s populace and leadership in the messianic capital with His triumphal entry. Jesus’ earlier rejection had taken place in rural Galilee (Matt 12). Now, Matthew recorded Israel’s response.

(C) Cursing of the fig tree (21:18-22) (Cf. Mark 11:11-14)

18 Now in the early morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry.

18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry.

18 In the morning, as Jesus was returning to the city, he became hungry.

18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

19 And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except **leaves alone**; and He *said to it, **“No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.”** And at once the fig tree withered.

19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He *said to it, **“No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.”** And at once the fig tree withered.

19 Seeing a fig tree by the roadside, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. He told it, **“May fruit never come from you again!”** And immediately the fig tree dried up.

19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, **Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.** And presently the fig tree withered away.

- "...leaves alone" - leaves only suggested that it had borne fruit, since fig trees bore fruit before the leaves came out, but this tree did not.

— Jesus took the opportunity to teach the disciples an important truth, using this tree as an object lesson. He cursed the tree to teach them a lesson, not because it failed to produce fruit.

The Fig Tree

In most varieties of fig trees in this part of the country, the figs show up before the leaves. So by the time there are leaves, there should be fruit on it. When we consider the time and place of this event, we understand it better. Jesus was near Jerusalem in the last week of His public ministry to His people. Jesus was not angry at the tree. Rather, He used this tree to teach several lessons to His disciples.

God wants to produce fruit in the lives of His people. In the Parable of the Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9), the gardener was given more time to care for the tree, but now the time was up. While we can make a personal application of this event, the main interpretation has to do with Israel (Jer 8:13; Hosea 9:10,16; Luke 13:6-9) or, specifically, Judah (Is 24; Hosea 9; Joel 1).

Just as this tree had leaves but no fruit, so Israel had a show of religion but no practical experience of faith resulting in godly living. The lesson here for the disciples is if they don't bear fruit they are in jeopardy. One cannot judge the human heart—that is God's job—however, one can inspect the fruits!

However, the scope of Jesus' condemnation of the Fig Tree should be noted. God's program for Israel is not dead (Rom 9-11). It is better to view the Fig Tree not as a symbol for the entire nation, but rather as representing the generation of Jews who rejected Him as their Messiah. God would judge them by withholding the kingdom from them.

20 Seeing *this*, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither *all* at once?"

20 Seeing *this*, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither *all* at once?"

20 When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree dry up so quickly?" they asked.

20 And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

- Mark's gospel separated the cursing of the fig tree from the disciple's discovery that it had withered, by one day (Mark 11:13,20). Matthew simply combined both events into one story, without saying anything that would render Mark's account incompatible or contradictory.

21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what *was done* to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen.

21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen.

21 Jesus answered them, "I tell all of you with certainty, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you be able to do what has been done to the fig tree, but you will also say to this mountain, 'Be removed and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen.

21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

- Jesus had used the hyperbolic figure of casting a mountain into the sea before to illustrate the power of faith (Matt 17:20)

— In the first mention of this hyperbole, Jesus point was that even a little faith can accomplish great feats. Here, His point was that His disciples should believe God rather than disbelieve Him. The disciples had been observing many doubters in those who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

— Jesus was urging them to have full confidence in Him as the Messiah, with the promise that *that* kind of faith can accomplish supernatural feats (Cf. Acts 3:6-7).

- There could perhaps be an additional, prophetic allusion to Jesus' reference to the mountain cast into the sea:

— A "mountain" is often a Biblical symbol for a government or kingdom (Ps 30:7; Is 2:2; 41:15; Jer 51:25; Dan 2:35,44; Cf. Rev 8:8; 16:20; 17:9).

— The "sea" typically symbolizes Gentile nations (Deut 33:19; Ps 72:8; 114:3,5; Is 11:11; 60:5).

— Perhaps with this illustration, Jesus was anticipating the coming of His kingdom that would destroy Gentile world dominion (Cf. Matt 6:10; Dan 2:44-45).

22 And whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive it all."

22 And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

22 You will receive whatever you ask for in prayer, if you believe."

22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

- This statement assumes what Jesus taught elsewhere about prayer: that God will grant the petitions of His people when they are in harmony with His will (Matt 6:9-13; 7:7-11; Cf. John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; 1 John 5:14-15).

— His point is that when we pray, we should believe that God can do anything we request, and that He *will* do what is consistent with His will and what He has promised to do.

(3) Questions and parables demonstrating Israel's rejection of Christ (Matt 21:23—22:46)

(A) Question regarding John's Authority (21:23-27) (Cf. Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8)

23 When He entered the temple *area*, the **chiefpriests** and the **elders** of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing **thesethings**, and **who gave You this authority?**"

23 When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"

23 Then Jesus went into the Temple. While he was teaching, the high priests and the elders of the people came to him and asked, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

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?

- "...chief priests" - high officials in the temple. At this time in Israel's history, these were appointed by Roman authorities. They constituted part of the Sanhedrin.

- "...elders" - non-priests who represented leading families in Israel; they also had representation on the Sanhedrin

- "...these things" - the cleansing of the Temple, healing the sick, teaching in the temple

- "...who gave You this authority" - the chief priests and elders were the people with authority to control what happened in the temple area. They had previously determined that the power Jesus used was given to Him by Satan.

24 But Jesus responded and said to them, "I will also ask you one question, which, if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

24 Jesus answered them, "I, too, will ask you one question. If you answer it for me, I will also tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

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.**

- This series of three parables grew out of the demand of the chief priests and elders for Jesus to explain what authority He had for cleansing the temple. By what authority? This is late in the game, they have had their chance. He will give them His answer when He is under oath at the trial.

25 **The baptism of John was from what source: from heaven or from men?"** And they *began* considering *the implications* among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?'"

25 **The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"** And they *began* reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?'"

25 **Where did John's authority to baptize come from? From heaven or from humans?"** They began discussing this among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'"

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?

- They were in a "Catch-22"—no matter how they answer, they lose

— Had the rulers answered that John's ministry was from heaven, they would have to acknowledge that Jesus received His authority from heaven, because that is what John announced.

26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet."

26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet."

26 But if we say, 'From humans,' we are afraid of the crowd, because everyone regards John as a prophet."

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

- If they answered that John's ministry was from men, they knew the people would rise up against them, because the people regarded John as a prophet from God

— With His question, Jesus pointed out that their rejection of Him grew out of an earlier rejection of John

27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, **"Neither am I telling you by what authority I do these things.**

27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, **"Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.**

27 So they told Jesus, "We don't know." He in turn told them, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

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.

- They wouldn't answer His question, so He wouldn't answer their question

— Jesus didn't answer their question because they had refused earlier revelation, thus had no right to ask for more

— They were incompetent to judge Jesus' authority because they misunderstood the OT and rejected the ministry of John

This confrontation over Jesus' authority led to Jesus teaching three parables. He often used events to introduce teaching. All three parables deal with these religious leaders, their failure to respond to God's call, and the consequences of their failure for the future of the Israelites.

(B) Parable of the two sons (21:28-32)

28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'

28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'

28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

28 But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

- "...vineyard" - Israel

29 But he replied, 'I do not want to.' Yet afterward he regretted it and went.

29 And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went.

29 His son replied, 'I don't want to,' but later he changed his mind and went.

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

30 And *the man* came to his second *son* and said the same thing; and he replied, 'I will, sir'; and yet he did not go.

30 The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go.

30 Then the father went to the other son and told him the same thing. He replied, 'I will, sir,' but he didn't go.

30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

- One says that he is not going to do it, but does; and the other says he will, but doesn't. He is talking to the Scribes and Pharisees.

- All that the Lord said, we will do (Ex 24:7 vs. Rom 2:24 vs. John 3:3,5)

31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They *said, "The first." Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.

31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They *said, "The first." Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.

31 Which of the two did the father's will?" They answered, "The first one." Jesus told them, "I tell all of you with certainty, tax collectors and prostitutes will get into God's kingdom ahead of you!

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.

- "...before you" - *proago*, instead of you

- Why tax collectors and harlots? They were considered the lowest of society at that time. Their lifestyle was rebellious, but they may repent at some point in the future.

- In contrast, the Scribes and Pharisees, whose words are supportive and yet their hearts are far from Him

- The leaders, however, could still believe in Jesus and enter the kingdom. Individual salvation was still possible even though national rejection was strong.

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing *this*, did not even have second thoughts afterward so as to believe him.

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing *this*, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

32 John came to you living a righteous life, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes did. But even when you saw that, you didn't change your minds at last and believe him."

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 parable teaches two points: First, sonship is proved by obedience. While one can obtain sonship purely by faith, the evidence for sonship is obedience. The second point is that the publicans and prostitutes, the ones the Pharisees considered to be outcasts, will enter the Kingdom while the Pharisees will not. The Pharisees are like the son who said, "I will," but never did. The publicans and prostitutes are those who said, "I won't," but, in the end, they did. So sinners will enter the Kingdom while the Pharisees will not, because sonship is proved by obedience.

(C) Parable of the tenants (21:33-46) (Cf. Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19)

33 "Listen to another parable. There was a **landowner** who **PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A FENCE AROUND IT, AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER**, and he leased it to **vine-growers** and went on a journey.

33 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.

33 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went abroad.

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:

- The OT text upon which this parable leverages is Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Is 5:1-7)
- Isaiah's parable decries the unfaithfulness of Israel with the imagery of a well-cultivated vineyard that inexplicably fails to produce good fruit

- The transformation of a fertile hill into a promising vineyard is described in six steps (Is 5:1b-2a), which resemble the six steps in v33-34 (but in a different order)

- Luke wrote that Jesus addressed this parable to the crowds in the temple courtyard (Luke 20:9). The chief priests and elders continued to listen.

- "...landowner" - God

- "...VINEYARD" - Israel (Is 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Ps 80:8-16)

- "...vine-growers" - Israel's religious leaders

- The care the householder took with his vineyard shows God's concern for Israel. He had a right to expect that it would be a fruitful vineyard and yield much fruit.

34 And when the **harvest time** approached, he sent his **slaves** to the vine-growers to receive his fruit.

34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce.

34 When harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenant farmers to collect his produce.

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.

- "...harvest time" - the time when the landowner (God) could expect to obtain some reward for His investment in Israel

- "...slaves" - the prophets, including John the Baptist

— At that time, slaves were not necessarily on a low social level; many of them held important positions in their owners' households

35 And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

35 The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.

35 But the farmers took his servants and beat one, killed another, and attacked another with stones.

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36 Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they did the same things to them.

36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.

36 Again, he sent other servants to them, a greater number than the first, but the tenant farmers treated them the same way.

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

- Israel's leaders had beaten and killed many prophets (Cf. 1 Kings 18:4,13; 22:24; 2 Chr 24:21-22; Jer 20:1-2; 26:20-23; 37:15)

37 But afterward he sent **his son** to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

37 Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'

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

- "...his son" - Jesus; Mark 12:6 notes his *beloved* son (Cf. John 1:11; 6:38; 7:28-29); "killed" (Acts 2:23)

— Sending his son was foolish considering the tenant's former behavior, however it showed the landowner's patience and his hope that the tenants would respond properly to the representative with the greatest authority.

38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let's kill him and take possession of his inheritance!'

38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.'

38 But when the tenant farmers saw his son, they told one another, 'This is the heir. Come on, let's kill him and get his inheritance!'

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.

- The point of the parable is that the Jewish leaders killed the prophets and now they would kill the Son

- Israel's leaders did not reject Jesus because it was not clear who He was, but because they refused to submit to His authority (23:37)

39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

39 They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

39 So they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

39 And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*.

- Jesus had previously announced to His disciples that the Jewish leaders would kill Him (16:21; 17:23; 20:18); now He announced this to the leaders themselves, along with the people

40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?"

40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?"

40 Now when the owner of the vineyard returns, what will he do to those farmers?"

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

41 They *said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the fruit in the *proper* seasons."

41 They *said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons."

41 They told him, "He will put those horrible men to a horrible death. Then he will lease the vineyard to other farmers who will give him his produce at harvest time."

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.

- The response may have come from the leaders, but since Jesus clearly identified the guilty in the parable, it was probably the people standing around listening

42 Jesus *said to them, **"Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'A STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"**

42 Jesus *said to them, **"Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"**

42 Jesus asked them, **"Have you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes.'?"**

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 marvellous in our eyes?**

- "...Did you never read in the Scriptures" - Jesus is stressing that the Scriptures pointed to Him (Cf. 12:3,5; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31; Mark 12:10)

- Jesus here quotes Ps 118:22-23, but He changed the figure from a vineyard to a building, and applied it to Himself

— It probably originally described David, Jesus' ancestor and type

— All of Israel's leaders, including Samuel and Saul, originally rejected David—but God chose him and made him the cornerstone of the nation

— In the same way, God chose Israel, a nation that other nations would despise. However, God would make Israel the cornerstone of the nations when He establishes the kingdom.

— Similarly, Israel's leaders rejected Jesus, but God would make Him the cornerstone of His building, the Church

43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be **taken away from you** and given to **a people** producing its fruit.

43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

43 That is why I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce fruit for it.

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.

- Replacement Theology believes this is the most explicit statement in Matthew of the view that there is to be a new people of God in place of OT Israel. They argue that the Church is a new people, distinct from both Jews and Gentiles, and replaces Israel in God's plan.

- "...taken away from you" - Jesus now gives the application: the offer of the Kingdom that was given to this generation has been withdrawn. It will be re-offered to another Jewish generation (during the Great Tribulation), *not* to the Church.
- God is taking His kingdom blessings away from first century Israel ("that generation") and is transferring those blessings to (not the Church, but) a future generation of Israel, who will accept Jesus as the Messiah (Cf. 23:37-39)
- This indicates that Israel will be "set aside" however Jesus is not disinheriting Israel of her kingdom promises given in the OT
- "...a people" - *ethnos*, a people; a poor synonym for the Church
- Jesus is not referring here to the Church...the church is NOT a nation (Rom 10:19; Deut 32:21), but rather is made up of people from all nations. So if the Church is not an *ethnos*, the kingdom cannot be taken from Israel and given to the Church.
- Israel, as an *ethnos*, had borders, a military, a capital, a system of taxation, and other characteristics that make up a nation; the Church has none of these things.
- Rather than seeing the nation here as the Church, it seems far better to conclude that this nation is a future generation of believing Jews (Cf. John 11:51; Acts 24:17; see also [Remnant of Israel](#))
- Some use 1 Peter 2:9 to support the idea that the Church is a nation. However, this argument incorrectly assumes that 1 Peter was written to the Church at large rather than to believing Jews (the Remnant) in the *Diaspora*.
- *ethnos*, nation or people, is used of national Israel elsewhere in Scripture (John 11:51; Acts 24:17)
- This verse, instead of teaching that the kingdom will be taken away from Israel as a whole and given in spiritual form to the Church, in context actually teaches that the kingdom will be taken away from 1st century Israel only, and instead given to future national believing Israel. Verse 45 confirms this.
- Such a divine pattern of working through a subsequent generation after cutting off a previous generation is in harmony with God's program for the Israelites after the Exodus generation failed to attain their inheritance (Canaan) due to unbelief (Num 13-14). Instead, God accomplishes His purposes through a subsequent generation of believing Jews as recorded in Joshua.

44 And the one who **falls on this stone** will be broken to pieces; and on whomever it falls, it will **crush him**."

44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

44 The person who falls over this stone will be broken to pieces, but it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

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

- "...falls" - depends, puts their faith in

- If someone "falls on Christ" their works righteousness will be "broken to pieces"

- All of my own devices and methods that I use, outside of Christ, to obtain the righteousness of God will fall apart (lead to nothing)

- In Rom 9:30-33 Paul describes this same idea, about how Israel did not come to Christ by faith, but rather through works of the Law

- "...this stone" - Jesus Christ

- "...crush him" - if I hold on to my works righteousness, one day the "stone" will fall on me and I will be crushed to pieces

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard **His parables**, they understood that He was speaking about **them**.

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

45 When the high priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was talking about them.

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

- "...His parables" - the Parable of the Two Sons (v28-32) and the Parable of the Vineyard Owner (v33-40)

- "...them" - specifically, first century Israel (that generation); the context of the parables Jesus gave was of that generation of first century Israel, not Israel as a whole

- This is why Jesus continually uses the phrase "this generation" when speaking about judgment on Israel...He's referring specifically to the generation in Israel that rejected Christ at His first coming

- Because of the blessings and curses clause of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut 28), Israel's rejection was about to unleash the curses on that generation who rejected Christ

46 And *although* they sought to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, since they considered Him to be a prophet.

46 When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

46 Although they wanted to arrest him, they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.

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

- The rulers feared the multitude, whose power over them was much less, over Jesus, whom they just understood to be the instrument of their final judgment