



Ephraim the Syrian:

"The Scribes were silenced in envy, the Pharisees in jealousy.

Men of stone cried out and gave praise, who had a heart of stone.

They applauded in presence of the Stone, the rejected that has become the Head.

Stones were made flesh by that Stone, and obtained mouths to speak; stones cried out through that Stone."

— Hymns on the Nativity of Christ in the Flesh

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Around the Word Bible Study Trinity, 2015

Parables: "Another Vineyard Story" Matthew 21:33-44

Introduction: There is little in common between this vineyard story and the previous one (Matthew 20:1-16). Indeed, the only two commonalities are the vineyard motif and the absurdity of God's gracious activity. The previous vineyard parable was told to the disciples in the wake of confusion about who can enter the kingdom of God. Now that Jesus has made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the week of His passion, His parables take on a harsh and wrathful tone and are aimed squarely at the chief priests and Pharisees, who do not believe that He is the Son of God and thus challenge His authority and seek to kill him. Just prior to this parable is the brief but convicting parable of the two sons and just after is Jesus' quotation of Psalm 118:22. Jesus is the stone, and despite the builders' rejection He will become the cornerstone!

Opening: Psalm 118

¹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for | he is good;*
for his steadfast love endures for- | ever!

²**Let | Israel say,***
"His steadfast love endures for- | ever."

³Let the house of | Aaron say,*
"His steadfast love endures for- | ever."

⁴**Let those who fear the | LORD say,***
"His steadfast love endures for- | ever."

⁵Out of my distress I called | on the LORD;*
the LORD answered me and | set me free.

⁶**The LORD is on my side; I | will not fear.***
What can man | do to me?

⁷The LORD is on my side as my | helper;*
I shall look in triumph on those who | hate me.

⁸**It is better to take refuge | in the LORD***
than to | trust in man.

⁹It is better to take refuge | in the LORD*
than to trust in | princes.

¹⁰**All nations sur- | rounded me;*
in the name of the LORD I | cut them off!**

¹¹They surrounded me, surrounded me on | every side;*
in the name of the LORD I | cut them off!

¹²**They surrounded me like bees;
they went out like a fire a- | mong thorns;*
in the name of the LORD I | cut them off!**

¹³I was pushed hard, so that I was | falling,*
but the LORD | helped me.

¹⁴**The LORD is my strength | and my song;*
he has become my sal- | vation.**

¹⁵Glad songs of salvation
are in the tents of the | righteous;*
"The right hand of the LORD does | valiantly,

¹⁶**the right hand of the | LORD exalts,*
the right hand of the LORD does | valiantly!"**

¹⁷I shall not die, but | I shall live,*
and recount the deeds | of the LORD.

¹⁸**The LORD has disciplined me se- | verely,*
but he has not given me o- | ver to death.**

¹⁹Open to me the gates of | righteousness,*
that I may enter through them
and give thanks | to the LORD.

²⁰**This is the gate | of the LORD;*
the righteous shall enter | through it.**

²¹I thank you that you have | answered me*
and have become my sal- | vation.

²²**The stone that the builders re- | jected*
has become the | cornerstone.**

²³This is the LORD's | doing;*
it is marvelous | in our eyes.

²⁴**This is the day that the | LORD has made;*
let us rejoice and be | glad in it.**

²⁵Save us, we pray, | O LORD!*
O LORD, we pray, give | us success!

²⁶**Blessed is he who comes in the name | of the LORD!*
We bless you from the house | of the LORD.**

²⁷The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine up- | on us.*
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the | altar!

²⁸**You are my God, and I will give | thanks to you;*
you are my God; I will ex- | tol you.**

²⁹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for | he is good;*
for his steadfast love endures for- | ever!

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read Matthew 21:33-44

v. 33: "There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country."

Jesus is here summarizing, Isaiah 5:1-2. Read those verses. What do these verses (and Matt. 21:33) have in common with Genesis 1? See also Genesis 17:1-8, and recall the stories of the Exodus (Especially Exodus 12-14) and the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 2-12). How do these events reveal the grace of God in the Old Testament?

Read the rest of Isaiah 5. How does that chapter set the stage for what is to come in this parable?

What differences are there between Isaiah 5 and this parable in Matthew 21? God declares Israel as a whole guilty in Isaiah 5. Whom specifically does Jesus convict?

v. 34-36: "When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed an-

other, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them."

There was apparently but one term to the lease between the landowner and the tenant farmers: The landowner expected to receive a portion of the grape harvest. What does the behavior of the tenants toward the landowner's servants tell us about how they viewed the vineyard? To whom did they see it entitled?

Look back at Isaiah 5. How does the Lord's view of the intent of the promised land as gift/grace differ from how Israel receives and uses it? How is this echoed in Jesus' parable?

Note the progression in the treatment of the servants; beating, killing, stoning. For what kind of person was stoning generally reserved? (See Lev. 24:13–16 for one example of many.) What does stoning the servant specifically indicate about how the tenants treated him?

What does the fact that the landowner kept sending more servants to the tenants (despite their treatment of the previous servants) say about his attitude toward them, and thus about God's attitude toward His people?

v.37 "Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"

How is this verse prophetic?

Would an earthly father ever send his own son into a place where his servants have been beaten and/or killed? How does this verse speak even more about the attitude of God toward His people?

v.38–39: "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."

What absurdity is there in the attitude and intentions of the tenants toward the son? How does Jesus use this to accuse the chief priests and Pharisees? Look back at the original challenge to Jesus' authority in Matt. 21:23–27 (esp. v.26). Of what attitude toward God does Jesus accuse them in this parable and specifically in these verses (38–39)?

How does the belief by the tenants that if they kill the son they will get his inheritance correspond with the attitude of the chief priests and Pharisees? What do they stand to lose if Jesus is seen by the people as Messiah and King of Israel?

What does the abuse and killing of so many servants followed by the killing of the son do to the status of the tenants in the eyes of the landowner? How much greater is their guilt for killing the son than it was for beating and killing the servants? What will the arrest, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus—on top of their history of killing the prophets—indicate concerning the guilt of Israel in the eyes of God? (cf. Matt. 27:24–26)

Bible Study

Parables Matthew 21:33–44

How does the specific mention of the son being thrown "out of the vineyard" drive home the prophetic connection with what the chief priests and Pharisees are about to do to Jesus? (cf. Heb. 13:11–13)

Read ahead to v. 45–46. Compare the response of the Pharisees to Jesus' parable with David's response to Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–15. If David was a "man after God's own heart," what does this comparison say about how far from God Israel had fallen?



v.40–41: "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

In what way is the question asked (and answer given) prophetic concerning the future of Jerusalem? (cf. Matt. 24:1–2, 15–16)

In this parable, we know that the landowner is God, the servants are the prophets, the son is Jesus, and the tenant farmers are the chief priests and Pharisees. Who are the "other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons?" (cf. Gal. 3:7–9)

v.42–44: Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner-stone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

The parable ends abruptly with harsh judgment, and gives way to Jesus' reference to Psalm 118:22–23. The builders' rejection of the stone is a reference to Christ's passion and death. Understanding all that follows Christ's crucifixion and burial, and reading the Psalm in its entirety, how will Peter later take Jesus' reference give us a wonderful Gospel sermon? (See 1 Peter 2)

Given that the Old Testament is always best understood in light of the New Testament, how does this parable and the words of Jesus that immediately follow help us to understand more clearly passages like Isaiah 26:14–16?

Closing: My Song is Love Unknown (LSB, 430)

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