

Episode #850 Matthew 21 Part 6-Parable of the Murderous Vinedressers

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. In Matthew 21:33-37, the Lord had started telling a parable of a certain rich householder who planted a vineyard and then leased it to certain vinedressers before heading into a far country. His lease stipulated that they yield to him a certain amount of the vineyard’s produce, but when he sent his servants to collect what he was due, the vinedressers mistreated, beat, and even killed some of them! So he decided to send his son and heir, thinking they would respect him.

III. The Parable of the Murderous Vinedressers. Matthew 21:33-46.

- A. Verse 38. Notice they know he is the heir, so their fault was not that they failed to recognize the son. They knew him, but they no more respected him than they had the slaves. “Come” is a beckoning word. They were urging themselves on to do this heinous deed. Their thoughts were madness. As if the lord of the vineyard would say, “Well, you killed my son, so I might as well give you his inheritance”!
- B. Verse 39. They cast the son out, just as the Lord was taken outside the city of Jerusalem. Hebrews 13:12 says He died outside the camp (of the people). Again the means of death is not stated, just that they killed him. But it does not mention stoning, so this was not a sham execution, but merely a murder. This is significant in that the Lord was not stoned, but slain by other means.
- C. Verse 40. There is no doubt but that the lord will eventually respond, in spite of his oddly slow response previously. How can he help but respond to the murder of his son? The Lord asks the religious leaders to define their own fate, for this is exactly what they were about to do to Him.
- D. Verse 41. In Greek, the words “wicked” and “miserably” are the same. He will miserably destroy those miserable men. Notice that the chief priests and Pharisees have fallen into the Lord’s trap, something He never did into theirs. They have, quite naturally, sympathized with the vineyard owner, being wealthy men themselves, and having servants. They can imagine how enraged they would be by such actions and the terrible retribution they would bring down on the head of the offending servants. Yet they do not see that they themselves are in fact the offending servants, and that God will be well justified in pouring out His wrath on them. For just a moment, they can clearly see God’s perspective. “Destroy” is *apollumi*, destroy or cause to perish. The Bible speaks of this many times, and makes it clear as the fate of the wicked.
- E. Verse 42. This is the fifth of six times He chides them with “have you never read” in Matthew. He refers to Psalm 118:22. They were conversant in the Scriptures, and so of course had read it. Yet they failed completely to apply it correctly to their own situation! The house builders were the religious leaders of Israel, supposedly building God’s “house,” the people of Israel. “Rejected” could also be disallowed, disapproved, or repudiated. We might think of this “cornerstone” as the capstone of the pyramid or the keystone of the arch. An arch must be held up by a structure of scaffolding while it is being built. Yet once the capstone is placed, all the scaffolding can be removed, for the capstone holds the whole arch in place. The cornerstone of a building was the stone from which all the other measurements of the building were made. The capstone of a pyramid was the final stone that finished off the pyramid.

The Lord is all these things in the building of God. The first of seven occurrences of “marvelous:” passing understanding, causing amazement and terror, extraordinary, striking.

- F. Verse 43. One of the rare occurrences of “the kingdom of God” in Matthew, rather than “the kingdom of the heavens.” The Lord is being very clear with these men. This does not mean that Israel lost the kingdom and it was given to someone else, like the church, which by no stretch of the imagination qualifies as a “nation.” The “kingdom of God” here means the right to rule, and this right was going to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. The “nation” is one name that could be given to a country’s government, and these religious leaders were the government. Later in Matthew 23:2, the Lord describes them as sitting in Moses’ seat. Even at this time, these people had their authority under God, but they had failed miserably in it. They will never govern in the kingdom of God. The rule will be taken from them and given to a new government of Israel. Isaiah 66:7-14. Galatians 6:16, there is an Israel of God. There is no nation or group of nations today who can say they are the seed of Abraham and the nation to whom the promises were made. There are some who can say they are Abraham’s descendants, but only if they are Christ’s are they Abraham’s seed, Galatians 3:29. Some are living in the land of Israel, but they cannot say they are the Israel to whom the promises were made. It will not be until the Lord searches for His sheep and seeks them out, Ezekiel 34:11-13, not until He brings them out from the peoples and gathers them out of the countries where they are now scattered, that He will cause this nation, the seed of Israel to whom the promises are made, to come into existence. The kingdom of God will be given to that new nation in that day. The Lord started to build that nation in the Acts period. It was founded on the apostles and prophets He called, like the twelve and Paul. See Acts 5:29-32.

IV. Conclusion: Israel was God’s vineyard, and yet it was in the hand of the rebellious and murderous religious leaders. When He looked for them to yield the vineyard to Him, they refused, mistreating or killing His servants. Now, they were even going to kill His Son! Therefore, they were about to be cast out of the vineyard, and He would put others in charge. This is important, but it does not mean God was going to reject Israel and turn to “the church.” That would be like destroying the vineyard to spite its vinedressers! The Lord, rather, was going to replace them with His chosen leaders, His disciples/apostles. We need to understand this, and reject the anti-Semitic and self-serving interpretations that have been thrust on this parable by traditional Christians down through the years. God did not reject His people according to this parable!