

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 21:28 - 21:48



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders during his last week of earthly ministry. Jesus told parables to convey the message that the people of Israel had failed to produce fruit and that the kingdom of God would be given to another nation that would bear fruit. Gregg emphasizes the importance of individuals turning to Christ in faith, as God desires justice and salvation is not limited to a select group. He encourages listeners to reflect on their own judgment and the role they play in building their faith.

### Transcript

On Tuesday of the Passion Week, the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus was locked into confrontation with the religious leaders of his time who were hostile toward him and were generally trying to find fault with him, trying to find some excuse to condemn him. They came to him, according to Matthew 21 and verses 23 through 27, with a question challenging him on his right to do the things he was doing, namely things like driving the money changers out of the temple. They said, by what authority do you do this? And he said, well, I'll tell you the answer to that question if you'll tell me whether John the Baptist was from God or from men.

They wouldn't do that because both answers, either answer, would be disadvantageous for them. If they said John was from God, Jesus would simply say, well, then why didn't you believe him? And if they said John was from man, well, they'd be stating an opinion that was probably their true opinion but that they knew would be extremely unpopular with the people who had a high degree of reverence for John as a prophet. So they came back to Jesus and said, we can't answer that.

We don't know where John's authority came from. And Jesus said, well, then I won't tell you where mine came from either. And what he's saying is, you know, you're not playing square with me.

You're not going to be honest with me. I don't have any further information for you. However, he does have some parables that he tells, and in a sense, he does give them

some important information.

There are three parables in a row here, and they're very important in terms of Jesus predicting what is going to happen to Israel and why. The first parable we encounter is, we could call it the parable of the two sons. And then there is the parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard.

And then there's a parable of the wedding feast at the beginning of chapter 22. And all of these parables that Jesus tells have something to do with the state of Israel in his day. Remember, he was only three or four.

He was about three days away from being crucified when he was in this conversation with them. The Jews were going to crucify him, and there would be consequences for them, very severe consequences. And he has some things to say about it.

But let's look at one of these parables. In Matthew 21, verse 28 through 32, Jesus said, But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go, work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not.

But afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir.

But he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to him, the first. Jesus said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But tax collectors and harlots believed him. And when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.

Now, of course, this is a follow on to what he had said to them before when he said, you know, answer me this. John's baptism, is it from men or from heaven? They wouldn't answer. He says, Well, you dirty guys, you just wouldn't believe John.

And you are like that son in the parable who said, I go, sir. When the father said, go work in my vineyard, he said, I go, I'm going. But he never went.

He never really did serve his father. Now, the tax collectors and the harlots were more like the son who, when God said, go to my vineyard, the son said, No way, I'm not going to obey you. But then they repented and did.

You see, tax collectors and harlots, people like that, were people who violated God's laws and God's commands. But when they heard John preach and many of them later, when they heard Jesus preach, repented of their evil ways and became followers of his. Now, the chief priests and the Pharisees, of course, they they didn't have any respect for

these people, these tax collectors and prostitutes who had repented and were now following Jesus.

They just they just thought of them as the scum of the earth. But Jesus was saying they actually are the ones doing the will of the father. Two sons, both of them told by their father, go work in the vineyard.

The next parable is also about a vineyard. You see, Israel is the vineyard. And to work in the vineyard would mean to to work in Israel, whatever it is that God wants done.

Now, what did God want done in Israel? God wanted Israel to produce righteousness and justice, and he wanted his people to work for that, for those ends and to be holy and to glorify him. Well, some said, OK, God will do it. Like the son who said, I go, I'm on my way, but never went.

There are some who profess to be obeying God, but they aren't. They profess to be doing the will of God. And they and they they do all kinds of religious things so that they appear to be doing the will of God.

But they really never obey him. They never really submit to him. And that was the case with the chief priests.

But there are others who very plainly don't follow God and don't pretend to. They said, no, I'm not going to go into your vineyard. And they go do their own thing.

They're not they're not faking. They're not hypocrites. They don't pretend that they're obeying.

They're not religious. They live in their sins, and yet. If they repent later on, then their latter state is better than the state of the first group.

Because it's better to be a person who was disobedient and then repented and is now obedient than to be a person who's only pretended all along to be obedient and never was. Jesus said the religious leaders of Israel were of the type that pretended to be obedient to God, but were not. And the sinners, the tax collectors and the harlots who repented when John preached.

They they were like people who had rejected the will of God, but then changed their mind and came back. And Jesus said to the Pharisees or to the chief priests, excuse me. He says, John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him.

But tax collectors and harlots did believe him. And when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him. In other words, you you saw that there were some people getting saved, but you did not follow their example.

You saw there were some people obeying God, but you didn't seek to join them or be

among them. And so Jesus gives this other parable also about a vineyard. It's in Matthew 21, 33.

Here another parable. There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

Now, when vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers that they might receive its fruit. Now, let me explain to you before I read further in the parable. In Israel in those days, there were people who were wealthy enough to own land, and there were people who weren't wealthy enough to own land.

And one of the ways that the latter group could make a living would be to lease some of the land from a landowner and farm it or plant vineyard, as in this case, and then pay rent on the property with a certain percentage of what the land produced, so that the tenants who were on the property, they would get to keep a profit from what they produced, but a portion of what was produced had to be given to the owner, the landowner, as rent on the property. And that's what we have here. A man planted a vineyard, and they leased it out to tenants.

Now, the arrangement is that every year at vintage time, they're supposed to give him a portion of the grapes or of the wine as part of the rent that they pay for his land. And so, the owner sends his servants to these vinedressers that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.

Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then, last of all, he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son. But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir.

Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? Now, let's stop there for a moment.

What is this parable portraying? Well, there can be no doubt about the identity of the vineyard. The parable begins like this. Notice here another parable.

The details of the opening of this parable are contrived to resemble a parable in the book of Isaiah. Very similar in the way it begins. In Isaiah chapter 5, it says in verse 1, Now, here's God planting his vineyard, expecting good grapes, but he got wild grapes.

In verse 7, Isaiah 5, 7 says, God was looking for justice and righteousness. That's the fruit he wanted. And he planted a vineyard, which was Israel, in order to produce it.

Now, here we have Jesus taking the same imagery. A vineyard, a hedge about it, a winepress, a tower. All the same as in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 7. However, Jesus changes

the slant a little bit.

He says, Now, the vinedressers represent the leaders of Israel at any given time. They are the ones who are supposed to be guiding the nation in such a way of righteousness and justice that God can be pleased with the fruit of that nation. However, generally speaking, the leaders of Israel tended to not be righteous men.

The kings of Israel were wicked men. The judges were corrupt. The priests and many others in authority in Israel were wicked men throughout the whole of their history.

Now, God sent his messengers to collect the fruit. These messengers were the prophets in the Old Testament. The prophets' message usually was, God desires justice, God desires mercy, God desires righteousness.

In other words, they were asking the vineyard tenants to produce the fruit. And yet the prophets were treated just like Jesus said. Some were beaten, some were killed, some were stoned.

He sent others. More prophets were sent, and they did likewise to them. Okay, so God throughout the whole Old Testament period sent his prophets to Israel to try to persuade them to produce the fruit of justice and righteousness.

Then Jesus said, Then last of all, he sent his son to them. Now, that obviously brings us up in history, past the time of the Old Testament prophets to the coming of Jesus. Now, do you notice that Jesus said, last of all? That's a very important thing.

You see, for 1,400 years, from the time of Moses to the time of Christ, God gave Israel that chance to produce the fruit. God sent prophets to encourage her to do that. Israel didn't obey, but he sent more and more and more prophets.

They beat the prophets, killed the prophets, but God still sent more prophets. But last of all, he sent his son. That last of all is very indicative because it means, just like Jesus said when he cursed the fig tree, no one will ever eat fruit from you again.

The rejection of Jesus was the last chance that Israel as a nation would ever have to be God's people as a nation. Now, that doesn't mean that Jewish people today can't be saved. Far from it.

The apostle Paul was a Jew. The disciples were Jews, and many people are saved Jews. But the thing is, Jews have to be saved today the same way as Gentiles, not by being saved as part of Israel, but by being saved by coming into Christ as individuals, turning to Christ by faith.

In the Old Testament, the whole nation of Israel was considered to be God's people, but that's not true anymore because God, last of all, sent them his son and said, certainly

they'll respect my son. And when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance for ourselves.

And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now, this is, of course, a representation of how the leaders of Israel treated Jesus, the same way their ancestors had treated the prophets. The idea here is that they saw Jesus was the heir, that is, he was the son of the owner.

They saw Jesus, the son of God, coming, pressing God's interests, pressing God's demands upon the leaders of Israel. They didn't like that. You see, if they had acknowledged Jesus, they would have had to allow him to be the king.

And what would that do to them? What would that do to their positions of authority? Certainly, they were not the kind of people he would put in power. Therefore, since they already held power, the most they could hope for was to get him out of the way so they could hold the position of power that he was coming to obtain. He was the king of kings, but they wanted to kill him so they could remain in authority.

Let's kill him. He's the heir and we'll be able to possess his inheritance. We'll be able to continue to be in his position of authority instead of him.

Well, that's how they were motivated. They didn't want to submit to Christ and give up their own positions of authority, so they killed him. Now, Jesus asked this question after he has finished this parable.

He asked this question in verse 40, Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those fine dressers? Now, he's leaving it up to his audience to decide what a just penalty would be for such wicked men as those described in this parable. And the answer they give, his audience gives his answer. He will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease his vineyard to other vine dressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.

Now, they didn't realize that he was talking about them, and therefore they were talking about them when they said that the owner of the vineyard will come and destroy those people miserably and give the vineyard to someone else. Of course, Jesus said, Well, that's right. The kingdom of God is taken from you and given to another nation that will bring forth the fruits of it.

The point here is that Jesus persuaded these people to pronounce their own judgment on themselves. He did so by telling a parable that they didn't recognize as being about themselves, and therefore they didn't have the human self-interest blinding them to an objective judgment. You see, if someone says, Well, what punishment do you think you deserve for the things you've done wrong? You're more likely than not going to justify yourself and rationalize and minimize the guilt and let yourself off pretty easy.

But if you think you're hearing a story about somebody other than yourself, you may be more objective and realize how severe the penalty is that the person in question is owed. Remember when David had committed adultery with Sheba and murdered her husband. Nathan the prophet came to him and said, There was a man who had a sheep, and it was a family pet.

A poor man. He had only one. And there was another man across the street who had a big flock.

He was rich, had all kinds of sheep. And this rich man had a guest come to his house, and he wanted to give him some lamb for dinner. So he went and he killed his neighbor's one lamb instead of killing any of his own sheep.

And David was furious and said, The man shall die. Now, Nathan had presented this as if it was an actual case of someone in the kingdom. And David, as the king, was being asked to give a judgment about it.

Now, David had been a shepherd. He had lost sleep many times trying to keep sheep from being stolen. That was a sensitive thing with him.

And when he's told a story about someone whose one only sheep was stolen from him by a man who didn't even need it because he had many, he was infuriated and said, The man shall die. And then, of course, Nathan said, You're the man. Meaning, you have done essentially what this man has done, and you have now pronounced the judgment on yourself.

And the reason for Nathan telling the story that way is because he had to get around the natural self-interest that would have probably caused David to be not quite so objective in judging his own case. If you think you're passing judgment on someone other than yourself, you're more likely to be objective. Now, that's what Jesus did here with these chief priests and Pharisees.

He told them a story about some wicked, wicked men who wrongfully killed servants and even killed the son of the owner of the vineyard. He says, Now, what should he do to those people? And they said, Oh, man, he should destroy those wicked men miserably and lease his vineyard out to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits and their seasons. Now, they were pronouncing their own judgment on their own heads, and it was right.

That's what he should do, and that's what he was going to do. He did that, by the way, in 70 A.D. God came in judgment on Israel. He took the kingdom from them.

He took their land from them. He took their privileges from them, and he gave it to someone else, the church, who will bring forth the fruits of it. Jesus said to them, Did you never read in the scriptures the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief

cornerstone? This was the Lord's doing, and this is marvelous in our eyes.

The quotation is from Psalm 118, verses 22 and 23. Interestingly enough, the same psalm, a few verses later, was quoted by the people earlier in the chapter when Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and they said, Hosanna, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. That also was a quote from Psalm 118.

And now he quotes it again, said to his opponents, Didn't you ever read this in the scriptures? The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone? Now, he's referring to this, that God is building a building. Israel is that building. And the builders are like the tenants of the vineyard, the leaders of Israel.

Supposed to be building up Israel. And God is supplying the materials. And here comes a stone that he wants them to put in the building.

This stone is Jesus. They don't want him because they have their own blueprint and he doesn't fit their blueprint. So they reject him.

And he says, You know, the scripture says the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone of a new building. And God is replacing the old building. Israel, the leaders of Israel didn't have any room for Jesus.

And therefore, God's leaving their house desolate and he's going to build a new building. He's going to build a new church, a new temple. He says in verse 43, Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

Just like they said he would take the vineyard from those wicked men after he destroys them and will give it to someone else who will render the fruits in their seasons. God said, Jesus said, That's right. Good idea.

God is going to take the kingdom from you, Israel, and give it to another nation. That's basically what happened. And he says, Whoever falls on this stone will be broken.

But on whomsoever it falls, it will grind him to powder. The reference to falling on the stone is an allusion to Isaiah chapter 8 that said that Jesus would be a stumbling stone and people would fall on him and be broken. When it talks about the stone falling on someone and grinding them to powder, it's an image from Daniel chapter 2 of the great stone that grows into a great mountain to fill the earth and grinds up all the other metals of the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw.

Daniel 2.44. Jesus is alluding to two different Old Testament passages. It says, Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking of them. But they sought to lay hands on him, but they feared the multitudes because they took him for a prophet.



Like they feared to say their true sentiments about John the Baptist, they feared to capture Jesus on this occasion. They had to find a more subtle way to do so and this they did shortly afterwards.