

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 22:1 - 22:14



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg focuses on two parables told by Jesus near the end of his life on earth, from Matthew chapter 22. The first parable compares the way Israelites viewed themselves as God's chosen people to a situation in which a man sends his son to the vineyard, and his son refuses at first but later changes his mind. The man then sends servants to the vineyard, who are abused and killed. The second parable depicts a king inviting people to a wedding feast, and when they refuse to come, the king sends servants to compel them. When they still refuse, the king becomes angry and sends his armies to destroy the offenders. Gregg explores the meaning of these parables and their relevance to Christians today.

### Transcript

Today we're turning to Matthew chapter 22 and continuing with a series of parables that Jesus told very near the end of his earthly career. In fact, it was only a couple of days before his crucifixion that this occurred. Jesus was engaged in controversy with the religious leaders of Jerusalem.

Now, Jesus, of course, was viewed as a religious leader also, and yet he was clearly not on board with the system. He was not agreeable with the Pharisees or the Sadducees or the chief priests or any of the existing leaders, and therefore, of course, they were threatened by him. Back in chapter 21, he was approached by some chief priests and elders who questioned his authority, and they basically wanted him to commit himself to saying that he was doing this by the authority of God, but he did not tell them directly because they would not be honest with him.

When he asked, well, you know, by whose authority did John the Baptist operate? They wouldn't answer, so he refused to answer them. But then he turned on them and gave three parables in a row. Each of these three parables were telling something about, of course, his opponents, the unbelieving Jewish leaders.

And one of those was the parable of the two sons, which was in chapter 21, verses 28 through 32. And in that parable, he just described a man having two different sons, and

these were prototypes or samples of two different kinds of Jewish people. All of the people of Israel were considered to be God's sons in one sense, and God was the man in the parable.

And the man says to one son, go work in my vineyard. And the son says, no, I won't go, but he later changed and did. He said to his other son, go work in my vineyard, and he said, okay, but he didn't do it.

So one of them said he wouldn't, but ended up obeying. The other said he would obey, but never did. And Jesus concluded that saying that the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of heaven before the Pharisees, because they were like the son who had initially said no to God, but then changed and came around to doing it God's way.

Whereas the Pharisees were like people who had always claimed to be obedient to God, but never really were. So that was a very searing denunciation in that parable of his critics. And then he turned to a longer parable at the end of chapter 21, which is the parable of the vineyard.

In this parable, the vineyard represents Israel, and it is God's vineyard. And he lends the vineyard out to tenants, or he leases it out to them. And it is understood that they must pay for the lease with some of the fruit each season.

So when the season came for fruit, the landlord sent his messengers to collect his rent, and they were abused. And mistreated by the tenants. So he sent more, and they abused and mistreated some of them, and even killed some.

And finally he sent his son to them, and they even killed him. Now, this of course represents the whole career of Israel as God's vineyard. God intended to get fruit from Israel, namely the fruit of justice and righteousness, according to Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 7. And yet he never got this fruit, at least not very consistently.

And so when he would send his prophets, his servants, to require Israel to produce the fruit, or to provide the fruit to God, the prophets were mistreated. So finally God sent his son, Jesus, for the same purpose. But they mistreated him and killed him too.

Now, having told that story, Jesus asked a question, and this really leads us pretty well into the next parable that we find in chapter 22. But back in chapter 21, after telling the story of these wicked tenants of the vineyard killing the son of the owner, he said, you know, when the owner of that vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers, or those tenants? And the answer they gave, not knowing they were speaking against themselves, they said to him, he will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers, who will render to him the fruits in their seasons. And Jesus affirmed that their verdict was correct.

In Matthew 21, verse 43, he said, Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be

taken from you, and given to a nation, bearing the fruits of it. In other words, the kingdom of God would be taken from Israel, and given to someone else. Now this suggests, of course, that Israel has been essentially replaced, in terms of being God's people and his kingdom, by someone else, because Jesus said the kingdom was taken from them, and given to someone else.

Now that someone else, we believe to be the church of Jesus Christ, the ones who are redeemed by his blood, and who have received Christ as their Savior and Lord, and who follow him. And the reason for doing so, is because we read in the book of Revelation, Revelation 1, and also in Revelation 5, both places speak of the redeemed community of Christians being a kingdom of priests. Which is exactly what Israel was called to be, back in Exodus chapter 19, in verses 5 and 6. So the kingdom of priests status, that once belonged to Israel, now belongs to those who are following Christ.

And it would appear, therefore, that when Jesus said, the kingdom is taken from you, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it, that nation is the church. Not an ethnic or political nation, but a spiritual nation. Even as Peter spoke of the church that way, when he says, you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

The church is a holy nation. It is not a nation in the political sense, but it is an entity that is God's people, God's community in the earth, as Israel once was, the nation of Israel once was. So Jesus told Israel, speaking prophetically, to the nation of Israel that God was taking from them the kingdom.

Now let me just address one thing before we go on to this next parable, and that is that some people have suggested that Jesus' comment, the kingdom of God will be taken from you, is not really saying that he's rejecting Israel, or that he's taking the kingdom from Israel, but only from the leaders of Israel, of that generation, the Sanhedrin and the chief priests and so forth, and that it was going to be committed to other Jews, namely the apostles, who would then head it up. Now, in other words, the kingdom of God would remain associated with Israel, but that doesn't seem agreeable with what Jesus said. Jesus said the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to another nation.

So it is taken from one nation and given to another nation. It is not simply the leaders of Israel who had shown themselves corrupt, and therefore God was going to raise up different leaders. Rather, he was taking it from one nation, the nation of Israel, and giving it to another nation, which is that holy nation of which Peter spoke, which is the chosen generation, that royal priesthood, which is the church and the body of Christ.

Now, of course, the body of Christ and the church is not entirely a different nation ethnically from Israel, because there are Jewish people in the church, and therefore we're not talking ethnically here. But we are saying this, that Israel as an ethnic nation and a political nation once was God's chosen nation, but that is not the case anymore. The kingdom of God is not associated with that national entity, or for that matter with

any other politically defined national entity, but is defined by faith in Christ and obedience to the king.

That's what the kingdom of God suggests, an obedience to the king. Now, we find, of course, in our day many more Gentiles than Jews in this entity called the church, but it is not strictly a Gentile entity. There are Jewish people in it as well.

However, Paul said that in Christ, and we could say in the true church, therefore, there is neither Jew nor Gentile. That is, being a Jew or a Gentile is not an issue to those who are in Christ. Their identity is found in something else, namely Christ himself, rather than ethnic associations.

Now, in chapter 22, we have the third parable in the series, and it is really making a very similar point, probably the same point as the previous parable, only with a different image. This time it's a parable about a wedding. Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parable, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding, and they were not willing to come.

Again he sent out other servants, saying, Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my ox and my fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready, come to the wedding. But they made light of it and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious, and he sent out his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city.

Then he said to his servants, The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together, all whom they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Now there's a sequel to this. He says, But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

Now apart from this little episode at the end, of finding the wedding guest without a wedding garment on, this parable follows almost point by point the previous parable. It is a denunciation of Israel as a nation that has historically refused God's overtures. Now the imagery is different, but the facts are the same.

You've got in the parable of the vineyard, the master sends his servants, and in that

parable the servants are coming saying the master wants fruit. In this parable, the master sends out servants also. Their message is a little different.

Their message is come to the wedding. In both cases, the servants are neglected or abused, and sometimes killed. Okay? So we have in both cases, in both parables, God, one parable he's the owner of the vineyard, the other he's a king who's making a marriage for his son, he sends his messengers, which are the prophets throughout Jewish history, throughout the Old Testament.

God sent his messengers inviting these people to come and be a part of what God was doing. And in all cases, in both parables, the servants are abused and badly treated and sometimes killed. Now in both parables also, the king gets angry and judges those people.

Of course those people are Israel, the ones who abused his servants. In the Old Testament, excuse me, in the earlier parable, let me put it that way, the parable of the vineyard, in Matthew chapter 21, it says that he will wickedly and miserably destroy those wicked men. Let me see here. Verse 41, he said to them, he will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease his vineyard to other vine dressers.

Now in the parable of the vineyard, it's just the same as the parable we just read about the wedding. He destroys those wicked people who afflicted his servants and so forth. And then he gives the invitation to another people.

In this case, however, look in verse 7, Matthew 22, 7. But when the king heard about this, he was furious and he sent out his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. Now, the meaning of this in terms of later history can hardly be mistaken because within 40 years of the time that Jesus uttered this prediction or this parable, the Roman armies came to Jerusalem, besieged it and eventually destroyed it and burned it down. And there can be, you know, very little hope of missing the point here that when he said the king sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city, these are the same murderers in the previous parable who not only killed his servants, but in the previous parable even killed his son.

And of course, in the previous parable, because they did, he took the kingdom from those wicked men after destroying them and gave it to somebody else. Well, in the parable of the wedding feast, same thing happened. He destroys those who killed his son and his servants, although in the wedding feast it doesn't mention them killing his son.

It's just a point that's not part of that story. But he destroys them and then gives the invitation to somebody else. And of course, he tells his servants to go into the highways and byways and invite as many as they could find.

This would suggest that the first people invited were those close at hand. But when

those close at hand to the king rejected the invitation and abused his servants, well, he went further out, further away from home to invite people in. This represents the Gentiles.

The Jews were the first to be invited to become part of God's kingdom and God's program. Their rejection of God's kingdom and of his prophets and of his king led to the Gentiles further away from Israel being sought, those out in the highways and byways, those that were far from God and far from Israel. As Paul put it in Ephesians chapter 2, we who were Gentiles were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.

We were without hope and without God in this world. Well, those are the people to whom the invitation is now sent. Now, both of these parables then, the parable of the vineyard and the parable of the wedding feast, have a common theme, and that is this, that Israel has failed in her responsibility to God.

In one sense, the leaders of Israel were especially under obligation to produce fruit for God, as he is the owner of Israel, and he wanted the fruit of righteousness and justice to be produced by them. Seen another way, they were neglecting a privilege, the privilege of being part of God's wedding feast, of his celebration. To be in the kingdom of God is at once an obligation and a privilege.

One of these parables brings out the obligation, one brings out the privilege. But in both cases, the Jews, who were the first to be invited or included in this, they did not respond to God properly. As keepers of the vineyard, they did not produce the fruit.

As those invited to the feast, they made light of it and did not participate. In both parables, God, represented by the owner or the king, respectively in the two parables, gets angry and judges them and then goes out to another people. Another nation is given the kingdom.

And so we see then that there is a turning point in each parable, right about the middle in the case of the second parable, and that turning point is this, that God has had enough. He has taken enough abuse from these people who kill his prophets and even who crucified his son. And therefore, he sends judgment upon them.

Now, that judgment is very clearly identified with the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 22, 7, where he says, That king heard about it, he was furious, and he sent out his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. I mean, that's so obvious that that is what happened in 70 A.D. Those who had rejected this invitation, God destroyed them and burned up their city. What's interesting about this is that the parallel place in the previous parable, parallel place in the previous parable, that's pretty good alliteration.

It says when Jesus is telling the story of the vineyard and how these people killed the

son, Jesus said to his listeners, Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? And they said, well, he'll miserably destroy those men. Now, the point here is that the judgment on these wicked people is described in the first parable as when the owner of the vineyard comes. And yet we know that in both cases, it's a description of what happened to the Jews in 70 A.D., which gives us at least one instance where clearly the destruction of Jerusalem is referred to as the coming of the vineyard's owner, the coming of the Lord.

Now, I don't believe that the second coming of Christ happened in 70 A.D., and I do know some people who think that. But I do believe we need to be aware of the many ways in which the Bible speaks of the coming of the Lord. Sometimes it does refer to the second coming in a context that speaks of the resurrection and the rapture and so forth.

It would always have to be the second coming, it seems to me. But there are times in which the coming of God or the coming of the Lord are terms that are used not with reference to what we call the second coming, but with reference to specific acts of judgment. Even though these judgments may not be supernatural in the sense of them being fire and brimstone coming out of heaven, in the case of his judgment on Jerusalem, it was through the armies of the Romans.

But notice this in Matthew 22, 7. When the king heard about it, he was furious. He sent out his armies and destroyed those people and burned their city. This refers to the Roman armies coming against Jerusalem and destroying the city of Jerusalem.

But they are called the king's armies, and the king in the parable is God. So, in a sense, even though the Romans were pagans, because they were instruments in God's hands to punish those who had brought the wrath of God upon themselves by their obstinance, yet they were God's armies, even if they were Roman armies. We have to realize that in the coming of Roman armies, that was the coming of God himself in judgment, in one sense, on Israel.

Anyone who is familiar with the Old Testament language will not be surprised by this, because very commonly in the prophets, it is often said that God has come to his people or God has come against this nation. Or a judgment on a people that takes place in history is called a visitation from God. And this is the case here.

The Lord comes, the king comes, and judges. In the case of the second parable, it is by sending his armies, which correspond in history to the armies of the Romans. And then, of course, he said in verse 8, then go to the wedding, or the wedding is ready, go out in the highways and byways and invite people to the wedding.

And it says they did so. And it says they gathered together all that they found, both good and bad. This is verse 10.

And the wedding hall was filled with guests. So the invitation goes out to the Gentiles, and there is a response. These are the people who come into the visible church.

However, there's not just good, but bad also. There's various kinds of people who have come into the visible church. And therefore, God must sort them out as well.

And we see the king coming to see the guests. He saw a man there who did not have a wedding garment on. So he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

So the king said, bind him hand and foot, take him away, cast him out into outer darkness, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. What I believe we are told here, this parable goes further than the previous parable. Both parables tell us of the rejection and the judgment on Israel.

But the first parable stops there and says, well, the kingdom is now going to be given to someone else. But this parable goes that far, and then it goes further and says, now that the kingdom is given to somebody else, the invitation is going out to all the world, to all the Gentiles, and many kinds of people, good and bad, are coming into the feast. But there must be a day of reckoning eventually where God even examines these guests.

Even those who have responded to the gospel since the judgment of Israel and since the rejection of Israel must qualify, as it were, to be there. And that qualification in this parable had to do with wearing the proper clothing. A guest who hadn't worn the proper clothing to the wedding was insulting the king.

And yet he seemed to think himself qualified to come anyway, as if he had every right to be in the king's wedding on his own terms. Unfortunately, many people respond to the gospel on their own terms also. And they come into the church and they don't really receive the terms of the gospel.

And they are there, as it were, dressed in their own garments, not those suited to a Christian. The garments represent behavior. The white linen of the church in Revelation 19 is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Our behavior is like garments. Unrighteous behavior is like filthy rags. Righteous behavior, according to Revelation 19, is white linen.

This case, a man has come, he's responded to the invitation, but his deeds show that he is not really part of the crowd. And therefore he's kicked out. And this means, of course, at the end of time, that there will be a sorting out even of those who have responded during this gospel age.

And those who are not true Christians will not be allowed to be in the kingdom of God either any more than the Israelites who rejected Christ are.



