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March 15th: Exodus 22 & Matthew 21:23-46

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Alastair Roberts

Book of the covenant: laws concerning theft, sexual and spiritual faithfulness, and oppression. The parable of the wicked tenants.

Some passages referenced:

Exodus 34:11-16 (intertwining of sexual and spiritual faithfulness).

Isaiah 5, Psalm 80 (Israel as the vineyard); Genesis 37:18-20 (killing the son and heir); Psalm 118:22-23 (the stone that the builders rejected); Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:4-7 (use of Psalm 118:22-23 elsewhere in the New Testament); Isaiah 8:14-15 (stumbling stone); Daniel 2:44-45 (the crushing stone of the kingdom of God).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Exodus chapter 22. If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief is found breaking in and is struck, so that he dies, there shall be no blood-guilt for him.

But if the son has risen on him, there shall be blood guilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double. If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over, or lets his beast loose and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best in his own field and in his own vineyard. If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that the stacked grain or the standing grain or the field is consumed, he who started the fire shall make full restitution.

If a man gives to his neighbour money or goods to keep safe, and it is stolen from the man's house, then, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to God to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbour's property. For every breach of trust, whether it is for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a cloak, or for any kind of lost thing, of which one says, This is it, the case of both parties shall come before God.

The one whom God condemned shall pay double to his neighbour. If a man gives to his neighbour a donkey or an ox or a sheep or any beast to keep safe, and it dies or is injured or is driven away without anyone seeing it, an oath by the Lord shall be between them both to see whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbour's property. The owner shall accept the oath, and he shall not make restitution.

But if it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner. If it is torn by beasts, let him bring it as evidence. He shall not make restitution for what has been torn.

If a man borrows anything of his neighbour, and it is injured or dies, the owner not being with it, he shall make full restitution. If the owner was with it, he shall not make restitution. If it was hired, it came for its hiring fee.

If a man seduces a virgin, who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride price for her, and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride price for virgins. He shall not permit a sorceress to live.

Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death. Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord alone shall be devoted to destruction. You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows, and your children fatherless. If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

If ever you take your neighbour's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body. In what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest, and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep.

Seven days it shall be with its mother. On the eighth day you shall give it to me. You shall be consecrated to me.

Therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field. You shall throw it to the dogs. The laws of Exodus chapter 22 refract the fundamental principles of the Ten Commandments in different situations.

In chapter 21 verses 1 to 11 there are laws concerning slavery and the giving of Sabbath rest. I believe that corresponds to the first and the fourth commandments. In chapter 21 verses 12 to 36 we have laws concerning violence and the honouring of father and mother, relating to the fifth and the sixth commandments.

In verses 1 to 15 of chapter 22 we have laws concerning property and theft, the eighth commandment. In chapter 22 verses 16 to 20 we have laws concerning marriage and sexual and spiritual faithfulness, the seventh and the second commandments. In chapter 22 verses 21 to chapter 23 verse 9 we have laws concerning oppression and false witness, relating to the ninth and the third commandment.

And these are both bracketed by not oppressing the sojourner. Laws concerning Sabbath and Thanksgiving conclude this section and I believe that relates to the fourth and the tenth commandments. So all of the commandments are covered within these three chapters as different parts of miscellaneous case law are related to the core principles that we see in chapter 20.

Civil and criminal law both come under this along with laws relating to personal and familial practice. This isn't neatly divided into different jurisdictions. There are ways in which it relates to ministries that will have to be performed by various different parties.

This chapter begins with laws concerned with property. Property crimes within the Old Testament are never punished with death unlike in other ancient Near Eastern societies. The laws concerning property here are also concerned with taking responsibility for property in your possession.

There are more laws in scripture that deal with situations of theft in books such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy and Numbers. Some of the laws elsewhere allow for lesser punishment for voluntary restitution. However double restitution is the norm.

The thief loses as much as he sought to gain from his crime. So if he sought to take one item from someone he has to restore two because he loses what he sought to take from the other person. It's the principle of an eye for an eye.

However if a man steals and butchers an animal the penalty can be greater. Destroying capital in the case of an ox is a case in point. The ox is not just a form of property.

It's something that enables a man to work, to work his field, to plough his land. And so an attack upon the ox is an attack upon a man's ability to work his land. There are similar concerns in this chapter about clothing.

If a man's cloak is taken he can't sleep warm at night and so the cloak must be restored at a certain point. There are laws here concerning defence of yourself and your property in the case of a burglar. In that sort of case if the burglar's life is taken at night there is no blood guilt for doing so.

At night it's not clear what a person's motivations are. It's far harder to assess a situation. But in the daylight it's easier to get things under control.

So if the burglar's life is taken then there are serious consequences. There are laws concerning failure to look after things that might damage other people's property. A sort of pollution.

You can think of the ways in which fire can be set loose. We can think of the ways a river could be poisoned. All of these would come under this principle.

So property is not just about protecting your property. It's taking responsibility for your property and the ways it can damage other people. Elsewhere in the book of Deuteronomy property also includes your responsibility to give to other people.

Your responsibility to allow the poor to glean your land for instance. There is also law here concerning mismanagement of your own property and destruction of other people's. Failure of safekeeping.

If something is put in your charge and you lose possession of it or you damage it or something goes wrong with it you need to take responsibility in some of those cases. Whereas in others for instance if the owner was there when something went wrong with something that was put in your safekeeping by him you do not have to pay in the same way. Some of these cases have to be brought before God for adjudication.

Perhaps God here refers to the judges or perhaps it refers to the prophet. Someone who's going to declare God's judgment upon the situation and his decision in the matter. We can think maybe of Solomon and his judgment concerning two women.

Solomon didn't just reflect upon legal precedent and think about the particular laws that

might apply. He gave a wise judgment that illuminated the situation with divinely given wisdom and maybe that's the sort of thing that's being looked for in these sorts of cases. There are laws then that follow concerning marriage and sexual and spiritual faithfulness.

And here I think we've moved from the eighth commandment, the commandment concerning theft and stealing, to the second and the seventh commandments. The second commandment concerning idolatry and the seventh commandment concerning adultery. The first of the laws concerns the seducer.

The seducer has to marry the woman that he seduces although there is a veto of her father. And elsewhere in scripture we see that the woman was consulted to give her consent in these cases. But it was a situation where the father would adjudicate and act on behalf of his family representing his daughter in that particular matter.

And the seducer here has to pay a bride price and marry the woman. Now it's worth thinking about what a bride price is. We've seen elsewhere in the beginning of chapter 21 the case of someone buying a female slave who would later be married.

Now the payment in that situation is not a bride price. That's the payment for a slave or the payment for one who is a prospective wife who's bought from her father and that money is used by her father. Whereas in the case of the bride price the money was given to the father or to the brother and kept in trust presumably for the woman to be used when she needed it.

It gave her some financial security. It gave her something to fall back on if her husband proved unfaithful that she had this security given to her in that money. In the case of Leah and Rachel we see them complaining about the fact that their father had consumed the money that had been given for them.

This was their money. He was supposed to keep it in trust. He could use it and have benefit of the use of it.

But he couldn't consume it. And if he had consumed it he was treating them as if they were slaves that had been sold to Jacob rather than those who were free wives who could fall back on that money if Jacob mistreated them. There are various other such payments that we have in Scripture connected with marriage.

We can think also of the gifts that are involved in marriage that can be given to the family of the bride. Given as a sign of respect to them and a sign of the joining together of two families not just two individuals. But the requirement that the seducer had to pay this amount of money was important.

It meant that the woman was not put at a disadvantage because she had lost her virginity. If she were to marry someone else the bride price would already be paid. And

so it would give her a sense of security that someone could not just seduce a woman and get away with it and end up with her losing her honour.

Many such laws can be startling for us. They relate to a society that is very different from our own with very different values, very different practices around marriage. And there's no reason why we should re-pristiniate these.

Why we should treat these as applicable in our own society. Yet they are examples of God's good law related to specific historical and cultural situations. And we can learn lessons from them.

We should also hold some of our own prejudices up to examination. For instance as members of a more egalitarian society we might see some sexual double standard here. A way that men and women are treated very differently in relationship to marriage.

But scripture in that respect is highlighting something about reality itself. That there is an asymmetry in marriage. And marriage is in part designed to ensure not equality but fairness.

That the two parties in marriage do not take advantage of each other but are joined together in one with a common good. The commandment that follows concerns the sorceress. And I think she's in here because she represents spiritual adultery.

As a woman she represents the bride but yet has abandoned the Lord and given herself to familiar spirits. The commandment that follows this concerning bestiality is an example of a more general sin of sexual immorality or fornication being classified under the seventh commandment concerning not committing adultery. Now when we see that commandment we think it can be narrowly applied to marriage relationships.

But it stands as a heading for a great many sins of a sexual nature. Keeping the seventh commandment requires the honouring of the marriage bed. It requires opposition to a great many sexual sins and forms of fornication that push against that or undermine that.

And it's not just narrowly focused upon adultery as we would think of it. It's a lot broader than that. The next law concerns sacrificing to any god other than the Lord.

Here I think we're seeing the association between the seventh and the second commandment. There is a natural association and affinity between these two commandments. One that's especially seen in the explanation following the second commandment.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. The jealousy of God is a marital jealousy a jealousy for his bride. He

does not want his bride to abandon him for any other.

And there are further statements concerning this in Exodus chapter 34 verses 11 to 16. Towards the end of that it warns them against making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and when they who are after their gods and sacrifice their gods and you are invited you eat of his sacrifice and you take of their daughters for your sons and their daughters who are after their gods and make your sons who are after their gods. What we're seeing here is the blending together of the sins of sexual immorality and adultery and the sins of spiritual adultery and idolatry.

Those two things belong together. The next section concerns laws against oppression and this whole section is bracketed in verse 21 and in verse 9 of chapter 23 with statements first of all you shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him for you are sojourners in the land of Egypt and then you shall not oppress a sojourner for you know the heart of a sojourner for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. And so that whole section belongs together.

If we were writing the Ten Commandments we would have a commandment against the abuse of power. However the expansion of the law here makes clear that there is such a command that the command particularly of the ninth commandment relates to this abuse of power. God is concerned for the stranger and the oppressed.

Israel was once a stranger in Egypt and in the book of Genesis Hagar was a stranger in the house of Abraham and Sarai and she was oppressed there. God hears the voice of the oppressed and if they oppress people they will suffer the same judgment. They're supposed to learn from what happened in Egypt.

They're supposed to treat their slaves in a way that gives them freedom that orders slavery towards manumission and to exemplify a society that has God's own fierce hatred for oppression. The warning not to oppress the stranger and the foreigner was not without relevance to Israel's life in the wilderness. They went out of Egypt with a mixed multitude with many foreigners around them and so they were not just a group of natural born Israelites.

They were surrounded with people who were not Israelites who were going to become part of their nation over time that needed to be adopted in and they had to show respect and care and concern for them not to oppress them in the way that they themselves had been oppressed. The text then goes on to talk about the widow and the fatherless. This isn't just the orphan or the person who's been bereaved.

It's a concern in particular for people without a man to provide and protect for them and God is the heavenly father. He hears the cries of all such persons and God describes powerfully his anger at the mistreatment of the vulnerable, the helpless and the oppressed. God's attitude towards the mistreatment of the widow and the orphan is not

just expressed as some sort of principled objection.

Rather God is made furious by it and God will act for them. God also speaks to the charging of interest, the way that predatory interest can be a means of controlling others, of indebting them and we can think of the way that indebtedness would often lead to slavery. God wants to ensure that his people are not reduced to that state.

Where at all possible he wants people to give charitable loans, loans that do not make our brother's losses an occasion for our personal gains. The Christian teaching against usury that has existed for centuries but has fallen into neglect is something that really needs to be revisited. There are many things that can be learnt from it.

One of the concerns is that we do not have business dealings which are just abstracted from our concern for our neighbour's wellbeing. There is the general expectation of sharing in each other's profit or loss and not profiting at the expense of others. The laws that conclude this chapter relate to giving first fruits and firstborn to the Lord.

It's a sign of Israel's own dedication to the Lord. They are consecrated to God, they bear his name and they should not bear it in vain. They must give the first fruits of their land and they must give the firstborn of their sons.

We might see a clue to the meaning of circumcision here as the firstborn animal was staying with its mother until the seventh day and then sacrificed on the eighth. In the same way the sons of Israel had to be circumcised on the eighth day. It was a sacrifice of the sons of Israel to the Lord.

And this whole section I believe should be classed under the ninth and the third commandments together. The ninth commandment relates to not bearing false witness but not using the legal system as a tool of oppression. It's not just about lying, it's not just about bearing witness in court, it's about using the structures of justice, the structures of power as means of oppression and I think we see that even more clearly in the book of Deuteronomy.

I think it's also about bearing the name of the Lord. Israel is consecrated to the Lord, they bear his name and as a result they must give their first fruits and they must give their firstborn and they must act in a way that bears that name in a righteous manner, that does not cause God's name to be blasphemed among the nations but brings honour to him by their actions. A question to consider.

Reflect upon the connections between the various laws in these chapters and the ten commandments. Do you agree with the ordering that I have suggested? What insights occur to you when reflecting upon the associations? Matthew chapter 21 verses 23 to 46. And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching and said, By what authority are you doing these things? And

who gave you this authority? Jesus answered them, I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.

The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man? And they discussed it among themselves, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say from man, we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know. And he said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

What do you think? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And he answered, I will not. But afterward he changed his mind and went.

And he went to the other son and said the same, and he answered, I go, sir. But did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, The first.

Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him.

And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him. Hear another parable. 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.

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

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son. 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.

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. Jesus said to 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 marvellous 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. When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

The second half of Matthew chapter 21 occurs on the day after the triumphal entry, after the cursing of the fig tree. We should notice the movement back and forth between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount. Jesus here is back in the temple and being asked concerning his authority, but then he returns to the Mount of Olives later on.

And that movement to and fro between these two mountains is significant. The Mount of Olives is the site from which judgement is declared upon the Temple Mount. The movement between the two mountains then has a theological import.

Jesus has entered the city like a king and has declared judgement upon its temple, has healed within the temple, and there are people gathering around him and behind him, and he is the head of a new movement. And so the chief priests and the leaders of the people, the elders, try and trap him. They ask him concerning his authority.

If his authority is from man, it can be dismissed. If his authority is claimed to be from God, they have other grounds to move against him. And so Jesus answers their question with a question, and yet the answer to the question that Jesus asks them is the answer to the question that they have asked him.

John the Baptist was sent by God and his prophetic ministry was one through which God authorised and bore witness to his son. So Jesus traps those seeking to trap him, as he does so on several occasions, by asking a question in response to a question. And had they answered that question, they would be caught in the position of recognising John the Baptist's witness to Christ, and yet they knew that they couldn't just dismiss John the Baptist as a prophet, because the people knew that he was a prophet.

And so they're caught in a dilemma, and that dilemma is one that shows Jesus' cunning and wisdom as he deals with some of these serpents. Jesus is wiser than the serpents. Having responded in a shrewd way to their opening gambit, Jesus gives a further parable that serves to put them on the defensive.

He asks them about two brothers and the vineyard, and one of the brothers starts off being committed to go out on the vineyard and then ends up failing to do so. The other originally expresses disobedience and unwillingness and then turns out to do so. Israel may be the vineyard here, but I'd be wary of putting too much weight upon this identification at this point.

It would seem to be a fair identification to make, but I don't think it's the primary point of the parable here. The vineyard is more incidental to this parable, unlike the next. Both of the sons are disobedient in some respect.

Neither of the sons is fully obedient, but neither is fully disobedient either. Peter Lighthouse observes that this puts the chief priests and the elders in a difficult position. Either way they answer, they are caught in an unfavourable comparison.

Either they fail to exhibit remorse after rejecting the ministry of John, or they are responsible for their failure to believe John. Either way they have neither of the sons' virtues and both of their vices, whereas the tax collectors and the prostitutes have at least one of the sons' virtues. The parable of the tenants that follows is an important one to read in the light of Israel's identity as the vineyard.

Such an identification is found in the Old Testament in places like Isaiah chapter 5 and Psalm 80. In Isaiah chapter 5 we read, What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured.

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste, it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed, for righteousness, but behold an outcry. And then in Psalm 80 verses 8 following, You brought a vine out of Egypt.

You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit, the boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it? Turn again, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and sea, have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the sun whom you have made strong for yourself.

They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down. May they perish at the rebuke of your face, but let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself. Then we shall not turn back from you.

Give us life, and we will call upon your name. Isaiah's parable focused upon the failure of the vineyard to produce good fruit, but Jesus focuses upon the wickedness of those working within it. The fruit seems to be there, but the workers are rebellious, and so the master is sending his servants, the prophets, and finally his own son, and all are being rejected.

And Jesus, we should note, foretells his own death within this parable. They will see the son, and they will seek to kill the son when he is sent to them by the father. That reference to the son being seen as he arrives is one that should draw our minds back to

Genesis chapter 37.

They saw him from afar, and before he came near, they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.

Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what becomes of his dreams. The workers on the vineyard are therefore being compared to the brothers of Joseph, those who attacked the beloved son of Israel. Once again, as with the preceding parable of the two sons, Jesus presents this parable as a question, a question that the elders and the chief priests are asked to answer.

And in answering this question, they are brought to a position where they must judge themselves, and they condemn themselves in their answer. Now it's important to consider what they would have seen in this parable. They would have seen the wicked tenants as some other party, the party of the Romans, for instance.

They are oppressing the vineyard of Israel. They are the ones that are preventing God from getting its fruits. But the trap is about to be sprung.

Jesus gives a verse that interprets the parable. And this verse makes clear that the parable is about the chief priests and the scribes themselves. The verses in question come from Psalm 118 verses 22 to 23.

Now that's in the context of the oppression of the servant of the Lord. He's calling out to God for deliverance. All the nations are surrounding him.

And he calls to God for salvation. The key words are found in these verses. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing. It is marvellous in our eyes. And this verse is used on a number of occasions in the New Testament with reference to things such as the resurrection.

In Acts chapter 4 verse 11, this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. And then in 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 to 8. In Acts 4 then, the apostles are using these verses to refer to the resurrection of Christ, the vindication of the rejected stone.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, the rejected stone is the cornerstone of a new building that's being erected. It's the new temple that God is building. There is a wordplay here between son, Ben, and stone, Eben.

And the fact that the builders are associated with the religious leaders. This helps to explain that the chief priests and the elders are the ones in view. It brings the temple

themes to the forefront.

Christ is the rejected stone and becomes the cornerstone of a new temple. Christ brings this point home by a statement that alludes to Isaiah chapter 8 verses 14 to 15 and Daniel chapter 2 verses 44 to 45. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken.

And then in Daniel chapter 2 verses 44 to 45. And in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all those kingdoms and bring them to an end.

And it shall stand forever. Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, a great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain and its interpretation sure.

So Jesus is orchestrating a number of different Old Testament verses and prophetic witnesses to the kingdom and to the establishment of a new temple, to the rejection of the Messiah and to the way that the Messiah will be vindicated. And he's bringing these all together into a powerful statement that springs the trap upon the chief priests and the elders of the people. He is the rejected son.

He is the one that was put to death by the wicked vinedressers. And he is the one that will become the base of a new temple that's going to be built. He has declared judgement upon the old temple and he will be the one who is the cornerstone of the new.

The riches of the Lord's vineyard will be given to another party. They will be given to a faithful party that will bear the fruits that are supposed to be borne by it. It should be noted that this is not a claim about Israel itself being dispossessed but about the wicked tenants of the chief priests and the scribes.

Their places will be taken by the twelve who are the true tenants of the vineyard of Israel now. And this looks forward to fruit from Israel. The vineyard isn't abandoned.

It's given into different hands. A question to consider. How do the two parables that Jesus gives here reflect back upon the earlier question about authority? How do they expose the true character of the authority with which Jesus acts and challenge the authority of those who are questioning him?