

## Parables of Response and Rejection

Matthew 21:23-46

October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Big idea: The kingdom belongs to those who respond in faith and repentance to the Son of God. Judgment comes to those who reject God's appeal.

### Intro

As I think back to this series in Matthew there has been gradual change in the tone of the passages and in the tone of the messages.

The first several chapters were informational about Jesus.

As the book as moved on it has gotten progressively more confrontational, requiring the reader to respond to the person of Jesus as presented.

1. How will I respond to Jesus' ***authority*** and ***identity***? (vv. 23-27)
  - a. The central question that runs through Matthew's gospel.
    - i. Asked from the perspective of the leaders of the people.
    - ii. Jesus' response shows that he knows they are not sincere seekers but want a reason to bring their forces of opposition against Him
  - b. The scene
    - i. The temple complex, probably in one of the porticos surrounding the court of gentiles in this huge, 35 acre complex that was the temple grounds.
    - ii. The chief priests and elders were the members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council that was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, priests, and members of influential families. More of a political body than a religious body, but certainly the politics and religion overlapped. They had civil and criminal jurisdiction. They could order arrests and judge cases as long as they did not involve capital punishment.
    - iii. Jesus was teaching. Matthew doesn't tell us which day it was. Luke says it was "on one of the days while He was teaching in the temple" (20:1). Likely Tuesday or Wednesday.
  - c. Their question was understandable. By what authority are You doing this?
    - i. Romans had authority by their occupying army. It was an authority of force.
    - ii. The Pharisees had authority by religious tradition.
    - iii. The Sanhedrin had a political, social, and administrative authority affirmed by the Romans and supported by Jewish law.
    - iv. But who are you? Who are you to kick people out of the temple? Who are you to tell people what is true?
    - v. If he would have said a human authority, they would have responded that they are the human authority. If He would have said the authority comes from God, they would have accused him of blasphemy.
  - d. His answer was not simply being evasive, although it was clever in turning the trap back on them.
    - i. John's baptism was a reference to John's total ministry of baptism and repentance.

- ii. They knew the answer they wanted to give but they were afraid of the people.
  - iii. If they answered it correctly (John's authority was from God) then they would have their answer about Jesus as well because John pointed to Jesus and called Him the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
  - iv. **John 1:29-30** The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>30</sup> "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'
  - e. If they reject the truth they already have before them, Jesus doesn't have to give them more answers to their questions about Him.
  - f. He goes on to tell 3 parables of rejection to this audience of chief priests, elders, and whoever else was listening on the temple grounds. We'll look at two of them today and 1 next Sunday.
    - i. Both are pretty straightforward and easy to understand. Both help us understand salvation history. But both push us to respond as well, so we'll frame them in our outline in terms of their implications for us.
2. Parable 1: Does my response to God demonstrate true faith or empty talk? (vv. 28-32)
- a. It's a parable that parents would recognize. It's believable!
  - b. Summary: two sons, both were asked by the father to go work in the vineyard. One refused, but then regretted it and went. The other said he would (and was respectful about it calling his dad, "sir") but then did not go.
    - i. Which did the will of the father? Which obeyed?
    - ii. They answer correctly because it's obvious – it's the first one who obeyed, the second one only talked a good talk.
    - iii. Sounds familiar based on the cursing of the fig tree last week for having leaves but no fruit, an appearance of religiosity but no real spiritual life.
  - c. Two striking points:
    - i. The doors of the kingdom open wide to those who are bluntly ungodly but repent in faith but it's closed to those who play the religious game.
      - 1. Those who seem the least moral and religious are responding in faith and repentance and entering the kingdom. The religious leaders are not.
      - 2. Dan Doriani comments on this that the Bible warns of dead religion more often than it warns against lust or murder or many other sins.
      - 3. JC Ryle: "Open sin and avowed unbelief no doubt slay their thousands, but profession without practice slays its tens of thousands."
        - a. Using a play off of some Old Testament language
        - b. Certainly true of the effect of hypocrisy on children.
    - ii. We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone.
      - 1. **James 2:17-18** Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.<sup>18</sup> But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

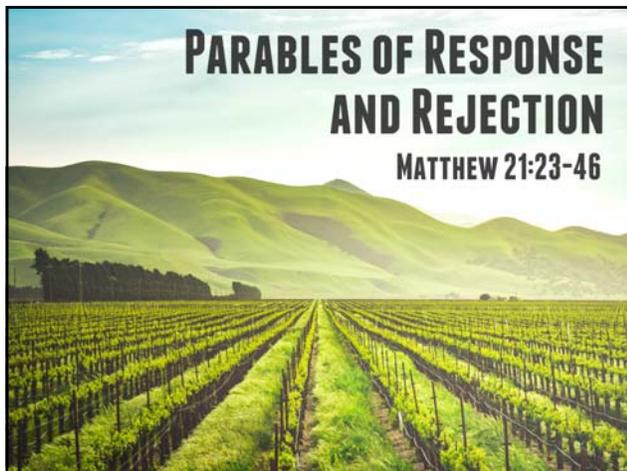
2. **Matthew 7:21** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*."
  - iii. The modern parallel is the person who has a spiritual high at a church camp or evangelistic crusade and makes a statement of commitment to God. And yet, after the emotions wear off, the life is unchanged.
  - d. He tells them "another parable" linking the two together.
3. Parable 2: Have I rejected or embraced God's ***emissary***, the ***cornerstone*** of His building? (vv. 33-46)
  - a. Vineyard was a common OT analogy used of Israel.
    - i. **Isaiah 5:1-2** Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. <sup>2</sup> He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected *it* to produce *good* grapes, But it produced *only* worthless ones.
    - ii. **Psalms 80:8-12** You removed a vine from Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it. <sup>9</sup> You cleared *the ground* before it, And it took deep root and filled the land. <sup>10</sup> The mountains were covered with its shadow, And the cedars of God with its boughs. <sup>11</sup> It was sending out its branches to the sea And its shoots to the River. <sup>12</sup> Why have You broken down its hedges, So that all who pass *that way* pick its *fruit*?
    - iii. Vineyards were common and so they were useful as teaching analogies, in the same way Americans use lots of sports analogies – we talk about someone hitting a presentation out of the park, or fumbling that conversation, or a project being a slam dunk.
  - b. It's used in a slightly different way here though.
    - i. Parable that has a brief, symbolic overview of salvation history.
  - c. Parable summary (vv. 33-41)
    - i. The scenario was fairly common – a landowner put forward the funds and efforts to establish a vineyard and then rented it out before leaving town. He would receive a portion of the fruit as payment. The renters keep the rest. By law the landowner needed to maintain contact with the renters. If tenants could show that they had undisputed possession of the land for 3 years then they could establish title to the land. So even more than just the desire to collect his rightful portion of the produce, the landowner needed to show he still had ownership of the vineyard.
    - ii. When he sent to retrieve his fruit through his servants, the servants were repeatedly abused and even killed.
    - iii. Finally he sent his son, the greatest emissary he could send. But they killed him as well.
      1. Of course there is some realism lacking. Why wouldn't he involve the authorities? Why would he risk his son?
      2. illustrates the way a compassionate and loving God acts toward sinners, not the way a businessman would act to protect his investment.
    - iv. He put the conclusion to the parable back on the listeners – what would the father do next?
      1. He will bring them to a wretched end and put other vine-growers in the vineyard.
  - d. Interpretation (vv. 42-44)
    - i. Master of the house is God, vineyard is God's people, Israel. Tenants are Israel's leaders, past and present in the text.

- ii. Servants are OT prophets.
  - 1. Beatings and stoning and killing represent their persecutions. Not all were received negatively, but many were. Jeremiah was thrown into a muddy well. John the Baptist was arrested and beheaded.
- iii. The son is of course Jesus, whom they would shortly kill.
- iv. He applied Psalm 118:22-23 to them
  - 1. Imagine stone workers searching for the right stone to complete their building. They dig and dig through the pile and pick up but reject what would have been the best stone.
  - 2. Chief cornerstone may refer to the key foundation stone or the capstone at the top of a building. Either way it's the most important and most prominent.
- v. In the same way as the vineyard would be taken from the landowners, so the kingdom would be taken from the Jewish people who were rejecting Jesus and given to a new people who produce fruit (like the son who went into the field to work not merely said he would).
- vi. The one who falls on the stone is broken in humility but the one on whom the stone falls is crushed.
  - 1. The language of the stone again points back to Psalm 118, which is a celebratory song about God's kindness.
    - a. **Psalm 118:1** Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
  - 2. Even the language of being crushed or scattered points to a prophecy by Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar.
    - a. The king had a dream about a great stone statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. A great stone struck the statue and they pulverized pieces were scattered like dust. But the stone struck them grew and filled the whole earth.
    - b. **Daniel 2:35** "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.
    - c. The parts of the statue told of five empires to come that would rule over Israel, with different levels of strength. Finally though they would be undone by a kingdom that would come and endure forever – Jesus' kingdom, the kingdom of God. (Daniel 2)
- e. The chief priests and Pharisees recognized he was talking about them (vv. 45-46)
  - i. Sometimes there is concern that a passage like this will fuel anti-Semitism.
    - 1. Just last Saturday the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia was vandalized with Nazi swastikas.

2. Does a passage like this that shows the unfolding of salvation history culminating in the rejection and death of Jesus at the hands of Jewish people provoke or stir up anti-Semitism among Christians? It shouldn't.
3. Dan Doriani speaks to this well: "It's not anti-Semitic to say that the rulers of Israel led the effort to kill Jesus. Of course Jews led the effort. Jesus was a Jew living in Israel. Both His greatest supporters and His greatest foes were Jews. The point is not "see what the Jews did." The point is "see what people do." No people, no nation would have done otherwise. Apart from God's grace, we all resent the Lord's authority and we all rebel."
4. Even people who had the most access to revelation – prophets sent over and over again – still rebelled.
5. In fact, the NT teaches that God still has a special affection and plan for Israel.
  - a. **Romans 11:1-2** say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.  
<sup>2</sup> God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.
  - b. **Romans 11:25** For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

4. How will we respond?

- a. For most here this passage ought to be a reminder of what has already been true for them.
  - i. They were at one time the son who said, "No" to the Father. Maybe it was when they were young. Maybe it's recent history.
  - ii. But God softened their hearts, brought someone along to explain the gospel, drew them to respond, and they said, "Yes" to the Father and went into the field.
- b. Others may see themselves in the second son still. They said, "yes" but have never followed through in a meaningful way in their lives. He invites them to come.



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