

# The Vineyard of King Jesus

Matthew 21:33-46

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## **Introduction**

You all know what it is like to have something unflattering said about you...

- It gets your defences up!
- It's hard to really look at yourself objectively.
- You want to adjust things a bit—to cast them in a better light.
  - Now I know that there are a lot of people that kind of like to wallow in self-pity about their looks or their inability to perform,
    - but I am talking about looking at what you are before a holy God.
    - The objective assessment is that you fully deserve to go to Hell forever.

It is very hard to be objective about that—

- But you need to see the truth about yourself so that you can respond to God as you should.
- The whole gospel tells you the unflattering truth that you are a sinner who can do nothing to save yourself...
  - You have to trust in Jesus Christ to restore you to God through His death and to give you new life by the working of His Spirit.
  - And then, as you go along in the Christian life,
    - you need to keep on looking at yourself objectively—that is, in the light of God's word.
    - In this way, you can continue to grow in your gratitude for salvation and you can continue to seek God's grace to bring further changes in your life.
- Objectivity is very difficult when you are the one whose corruption is being exposed!

But our Lord has a tool He often uses to help you look at yourself more objectively...

- That tool is a parable!
  - A parable is a story about somebody else, and because it is about somebody else, you can look it more objectively.
  - You can hear the story of some wretched person and you can say,
    - “That's awful, how could anyone be so cruel!”
    - “How could anyone be so foolish?”

- And then the Lord can say to you...
  - That parable is really about you!
    - He did that to David when He sent Nathan the prophet to tell David how wicked he had been to Uriah when David took away his wife and then murdered Uriah in an effort to cover it up.
    - He told David the story of a wealthy man with many sheep who seized his neighbour's only sheep that his neighbour kept as a cherished pet—like a daughter...
      - As a king who was ordinarily committed to protecting the oppressed, David was filled with disdain for the man and declared that he was worthy of death!
      - Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”
        - Immediately, David was cut to the heart and brought to repentance.
        - By means of a parable, He was able to take an objective look at the sin he had been desperately trying to cover up for months.

In the passage I read to you a minute ago from Matthew 21:33-46,

- King Jesus exposes the extreme ingratitude and unbelievable wickedness of the Jewish leaders in the parable of the vinedressers...
  - With this parable, He causes them to see how deserving of judgement they are for their treatment of Him...
    - Jesus shows the vinedressers rejecting the owner's servants who came to collect the owner's portion of fruit, and then at last killing the owners son.
  - When Jesus asks what the owner should do these wicked vinedressers, the obvious answer is given by his hearers:
    - v. 41: “He will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease his vineyard out to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”
    - There is no way to tell if it was the chief priests who rendered this verdict about the man in the story or if it was the multitude who stood by...
      - The leaders may have been averse to answer Jesus' question...
        - but whether they did or not,
        - the answer was obvious anyone who heard the story that these miserable men deserved to be miserably destroyed!
  - Jesus then makes it perfectly clear to these Jewish leaders that **they** are the wicked vinedressers.

But we must not be haughty as we read about this.

- Our Lord also has something to say to us about what we have done with His gifts.
- If we reject King Jesus, we are worthy of the same condemnation, and that condemnation will fall on us unless we repent.
- So I want you to consider this passage today as it applies to us.

**I. First, I want you to see the extreme grace of God in planting His kingdom among us.**

A. My brothers and sisters, how kind the Lord has been to plant His gospel in your reach!

1. We were idle—useless Gentiles—dead in our trespasses and sins.
  - We wondered about aimlessly in the world, trying to eek out a meaningful life for ourselves...
  - But we were as barren as an old rusty pipe!
2. But our gracious Lord came among us to plant His gospel Kingdom!
  - He promised the forgiveness our sins through faith in Jesus...
    - He promised us a fruitful life by His grace through the working of the Holy Spirit.
      - We would bring forth fruit that pleases Him, the One whose judgement is true!
      - We would become a people for His name!
        - A people full of His life, living in the beauty of His law of love...
          - worshipping our God in the beauty of holiness.
    - These are the fruits He seeks from us.
      - These are the expected fruits of the gospel!

B. And in order to make this vineyard flourish, He has richly provided for us!

1. He has planted the very best vine...
  - that is, He has brought His word of truth among us...
    - a. He gives us His law to show us what we are supposed to look like...
    - b. He gives us His promises to assure us of the forgiveness of sin and of the power of His grace to renew us in life...
    - c. And He gives us His ordinances—the word, sacraments and prayer—in which the faith that unites us to Christ is produced through the working of the Holy Spirit...
2. Furthermore, He has set a hedge around us...

- a. He has given us all sorts of protection against intruders who would come to destroy the vineyard...
  - b. He has given us sound confessions of faith to help us resist heresy...
3. He has appointed vinedressers...
- He is the one who calls ministers of the word and sacraments, and elders to rule in His church...
    - He gives them to the church to oversee His vineyard in order that it might bring forth much fruit...
    - They bring the gospel and administer the ordinances and guard the vineyard from the watchtower...
      - They are appointed to prune the vines and to chase out the intruders.
4. We need not press the details of the parable...
- But the point is that He has provided for us everything that we need for life and godliness...
    - He has gone to great expense in order that we might bear much fruit and so glorify Him!
- C. And just look at His marvellous patience!
1. In the parable, the owner sends his servants to collect his portion of the fruit...
- a. This, of course, speaks of the prophets whom He sent through the ages...
    - The kings and priests in Israel were the vinedressers—the ordinary established government...
      - and the prophets were the extra-ordinary officers that God raised up and sent to inspect His vineyard and look for the fruit He desires.
      - He especially sent them when the people and their leaders had grown cold and barren.
  - b. But again and again, these servants the prophets are rejected by the vinedressers... just like the parable!
    - 1) They come, calling for the fruit that the owner wants...
      - But instead of welcoming them, the vinedressers beat one, kill another, and stone yet another!
    - 2) This, of course, is exactly what we see in the Old Testament...
      - Stephen's question was well suited to them when he said:
        - Acts 7:52: "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?"

2. But what is so amazing here is the way the owner keeps on sending more servants.
  - a. He does not give up on these vinedressers!
    - Again and again, He sends His word to them through the prophets in order to bring forth fruit...
    - And at last He sends His only Son...
      - and that with the tender words—"They will respect my Son"
      - How could they do otherwise?
  - b. The parable becomes absurd at this point!
    - What vineyard owner would keep sending servants that are so shamefully treated and then send His own son!
    - It is ridiculous!
  - c. And that is the very point of the parable!
    - God's grace to Israel was absurd!
      - It goes beyond what anyone could ever expect!
        - How many times they deserved to be cut off!
        - His patience seems to never run out with them!
3. But my friends, don't you see this same absurd patience with us?
  - a. How long has the gospel been in our land?
    - But where is the fruit of it today?
    - More and more, God's word is rejected—
      - The ministers and elders of the church continue to go their own way...
        - They continue to pervert the law and the gospel...
  - b. Yet, He continues to raise up faithful servants to call for the fruit of the gospel!
    - He raises up reformers who call the church back to where it should be...
      - They are despised and rejected, scorned and mocked...
      - But still He sends them!
        - It is a wonder that the true gospel can be found at all in our land today!

TRANS> See here how gracious our God us!

- He provides so richly for us!
  - This is the extreme grace of God to us...
  - But now,

**II. Secondly, I want you to consider the extreme wickedness of the rulers in the church...**

A. I have already spoken about how they reject His servants whom He patiently sends...

1. This is very heinous in itself...
  - a. Especially when you consider why these prophets are coming...
    - 1) They were coming to look for fruit...
      - It wasn't taxes that would impoverish the people, but fruit that God wanted them to grow...
      - It was not destructive fruit, but fruit that would make them happy and holy...
        - Things like love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

TRANS> What kind of wickedness is it that despises the one who is doing so much to make you beautiful and holy?

- 2) Furthermore, they were coming to get what properly belongs to God...
  - He is our Creator.
    - He is the owner who has supplied all things necessary for life and godliness...
    - The prophets were only coming for what was rightly His.
- TRANS> You see something of the wretched character of the vine-dressers in their rejection of the servants who were sent...
2. But the wretched character of their sin is most despicably displayed in what they do with the son...
  - a. As He sends Him, He says, "Surely they will respect my Son..."
    - Indeed, you would think!
      - He is the heir.
      - Surely they will be afraid to abuse Him!
        - Surely they will honour Him!
        - But you know what they do!

- They kill Him!

b. And look at their reason!

- v. 38: “This is the heir, come let us kill him and seize His inheritance!”

1) Do you see what this is saying?

- They **know** that He is the heir and it is just **because** of that that they purpose to kill Him!

- They did not kill Him because they did not know who He was, but because they **did** know!

- Now this was not true of all the Jews who ordered Jesus to be crucified...

- We are told that there were some who did it ignorantly and in unbelief...

- Jesus prayed for those who, as He says, “knew not what they did” when they crucified Him...

2) But some of the vinedressers **did** know...

- They knew exactly what they were doing!

- They knew that He was the Messiah and they killed Him because of envy!

- The guardians of Israel who had been appointed by God to prepare the nation for Christ knew who He was and they killed Him **because** they knew...

- Matthew and Mark both tell us that Pilate knew they had delivered Him over, not because He had done wrong, but because of envy!

3) It is an insatiable envy that wants Christ’s inheritance for itself!

- The High priests and scribes to whom Jesus spoke wanted the people’s allegiance and hosannas for themselves!

- They did not want the glory to go to God that was due to God.

- They wanted it to go to themselves.

4) And in them, this envy was **so** strong that they were willing to murder even the Son of God in order to have it!

- They did not want to have the as an under-shepherd!

- No, they wanted it for themselves alone!

- The Son of God must step out the way because it was their inheritance, not His!

TRANS> This is a terrible thing—

- It is the sin against the Holy Spirit for which there is no forgiveness!
    - The Spirit revealed to them who Jesus was and for that very reason they murdered Him!
    - But we need to see that there is something of this sin in every one of us...
3. This Christ-envy is at the very core of human rebellion against God!
- a. Is this envy of God not the very root of the fall of mankind?
    - Did Satan not offer to Eve (and Adam with her) the place of God?
      - Did he not say, “you shall be as God, knowing good and evil”?
  - b. Rather than having God as their source of all life and blessing and wisdom,
    - he told them to find life and blessing and wisdom in themselves!
      - “Why should you bring forth fruit for God?”
      - “Let your fruit be for yourself—what right does God have to it?”
      - “Kill the son and the inheritance will be yours!”

TRANS> Such was the spirit of the High Priests and scribes in Jesus’ day!

B. But this may be applied to the ministers of our day!

1. This is the very spirit of antichrist found in church leaders today...
  - a. As Paul says in 2 Thessalonians,
    - He (the man of sin) “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”
    - He wants nothing less than the throne of heaven!
  - b. Do you not see this today in all different degrees?
    - 1) There are those ministers who do not call those under their care to Christ, but to something else...
      - a) There are those who deprecate (if not wholly reject) the satisfaction and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and put repentance or good works in their place!
        - They may say that you need Christ as an example to show you how to live,

- but they will not hold Him forth as the very source of life through His saving work on the cross...
  - It is a different Christ they preach!
- b) There are likewise those that oppose the imputation of Christ's righteousness and call their disciples to produce their own righteousness...
- They may even preach Christ as the way of forgiveness,
    - but then they tell their disciples that they must produce their own righteousness to be fully justified in God's site...
    - and must go to purgatory
- c) There are those who deny that God's efficacious grace is necessary to bring about the birth, conversion, and sanctification...
- They attribute this to the will of man!
  - They deny that we are dead in trespasses and sins, and claim that there is a spark of life in every person that can be nurtured to life.
  - They take the free offer of the gospel and pervert it into the claim that everyone has the ability within himself to come to Christ.
    - The result is a reliance on their own methodology to get sinners to repent.
- d) And there are those today who altogether deny any need of justification, claiming that Christ is not needed for such a purpose...
- They claim that God is all love and will never condemn any person...
    - In their gospel, Christ came only to tell us of this love...
    - The Nashes told me about a baptism service they went to where the minister said that baptism is not given to distinguish God's people from others, but to declare God's acceptance of all people.
- 2) Such ministers are not seeking to join men to Christ by faith in the way that God has appointed—as He is revealed in the Gospel...
- a) They may talk of Christ and use His name (just as the Chief Priests spoke much of the Messiah)
- But the last thing they want is to lead anyone to the real Christ in whom alone we have salvation.
- b) Admittedly, there are different degrees of this wickedness...

- There are some who are ignorant and follow others...
  - There are some who, like the chief priests, deliberately lead their disciples away from the true Christ.
- c) We dare not try to determine how much of this spirit a minister may have and still be in Christ...
  - There are many imperfections in every gospel minister and God will judge them all in the end...
    - But let every minister and every elder endeavour by the grace of God to be free of a Christ-envying Spirit...
    - Let them desire to bring every man to Christ and present every man in Christ—
      - not the Christ of their own making and design...
      - but the Christ of God who is revealed in the Scriptures and is the beloved of His Father in heaven.
  - As Paul said,
    - “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”
    - That is just the opposite for the Chief Priests.

TRANS> But do not suppose that this pernicious envy of Christ is only found in ministers...

- It is found in ministers because it is rooted in sinful human nature...

## 2. Be sure that Christ-envy is not found in you!

### a. Let Christ-envy not be found in the civil rulers of our land.

- The rulers of our land can cry up fairness and claim that they are just representing all the people as much as they want,
  - but in the end they will stand before God to see how well they represented Him—
    - Him who appointed them and gave them their authority!
- In as much as they do not want Christ to rule in their land and His word to be final,
  - they envy Him His proper place...
    - For the Father has given the Son authority over all the nations, declaring Him to be Lord and Christ by raising Him from the dead.

- Every knee must bow and every tongue must confess that He is Lord.
  - His claims extend to every nation.
- In as much as our rulers want to promote pluralism, or secularism according to their own desires or the desires of the people,
    - they envy Christ His proper place and seek to push him out of His inheritance and claim it for themselves...
- b. Let Christ-envy not be found in any of you heads of household.
- God has appointed you men as the head of your household...
    - But not in order that you might rule according to your own selfish desires... or even according to your own unselfish ideals!
  - You are called to sanctify your wives with the washing of the word, and to bring your children up...
    - not in your own discipline and nurture...
      - but in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
  - You are to seek, like Paul with the church, to present each one perfect in Christ Jesus...
    - God's law is to be the law of your home...
    - You are to labour to see that all in your house are reconciled to Him!
      - And when they rebel, you are to call them back to Him.
  - You are to speak of the one true God when you sit down with them, when you rise up, and when you walk along with them...
    - Your family is a little vineyard and you are to bring forth fruits for Christ, not for yourself—or not no fruit at all!
    - He has the rights to it...
      - And let me remind you that the fruit He requires is what is best for them and you—for your happiness and theirs!
      - You will only bring misery to them and to yourself if you envy Christ His vineyard!
- c. Let Christ-envy not be found in any of you as individuals.
- 1) Do not think this message has nothing to do with you if you have no one under your care...
    - It is true that ministers, whether ecclesiastical, civil, or domestic, have a greater responsibility and will be judged more strictly than others...

- It is true that the primary application of this passage is for leaders...
  - But every one of you must give an account for the vineyard of your own life...
- 2) Yes, your own life is like a little vineyard for God...
- You were created to bring forth fruit for God and for His Son...
  - As I mentioned before, in the fall Satan challenged this...
    - He said, “Why should you bring forth fruit for God?”
      - “It’s your life to do with as you please...”
      - “Bring forth fruit for yourself—don’t worry what God wants, worry about what you want!”
- 3) Is there not too much of the spirit in you my friends?
- a) I tell you, it is extreme wickedness!
- The vineyard does not belong to you, you were given it from God!
  - Will you try to kill His Son that you might have it for yourself?
    - To whatever extent you claim that your life is your own, you crucify the Lord of Glory all over again...
    - You say to Him, “You have no right to this vineyard.”
      - “You cannot tell me what to do with my body...”
      - “Much less can you tell me what to do with my mind...”
      - “This vineyard is mine!”
- b) Do you see how natural it is in this fallen world to think that way?
- Is it any wonder that Jesus says,
    - Matthew 16:24: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

TRANS> It is easy to see the wickedness of the vinedressers in the parable.

- We can see the injustice of what they did because we know that the vineyard did not rightly belong to them...
  - We can all agree that the owner has every right to...
    - “destroy those wicked men miserably and to lease His vineyard out to others who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”
  - But let this lesson reach to each one of you in as much as you would try to claim the possession of the vineyards that the Lord has entrusted to you.
    - It is the same wickedness.

- It is an envy that will not stop until it has at last crucified Christ for daring to claim what is His own!
- If you will not repent, God's judgement will fall on you...
  - That is the third thing I want you to consider from this passage...

**III. Third, consider what will become of those who claim Christ's vineyard for themselves.**

- A. First, see that they will not succeed in getting rid of Him...
1. Jesus quotes from Psalm 118 to show that this is so.
    - READ Matthew 21:42
    - a. They would set Him aside, but God would raise Him up...
    - b. Isn't that marvellous?
      - It was all according to God's plan so don't let it make you stumble when you see the very ministers of Christ rejecting Him...
  2. Many times persecutors think they have succeeded in getting rid of Christ, but He always comes back from the dead...
    - How frustrated they were when Peter and John came preaching Him...
    - The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church
  3. My friends, do not try to push Christ away, you will not succeed.
- B. Secondly, see that they themselves will lose the privilege of being vinedressors...
1. READ v. 43.
  2. This happened when the gospel was lost to them...and began to be preached among the Gentiles.
    - This is what is referred to in verse 44 as falling on the stone and being broken.
  3. It is happening to us in our land—
    - We have despised the gospel in our land, and the church is dying.
- C. Thirdly, see that God's judgement will fall on them.
1. This is the second part of verse 44...
  2. This is what happened to Israel in 70 AD.
  3. This is what is likely to happen to us if we do not repent.

## **Conclusion:**

When you hear the reproofs of God's word and see that it speaks to you... as the chief priests and scribes did,

- it will either do you much good or much harm!
- It will either stir up your envy more than ever and fill you with desire to rid your life of Christ however you can,
  - or it will bring you to a much deeper humility and repentance than you have ever known.
    - You will either respond the way the Chief Priests and scribes respond to Jesus here—wanting to kill Him if only they could get away with it...
    - or you will respond as David responded when Nathan exposed him...
      - with a broken and contrite heart.
- Indeed, after Jesus the rejected stone actually was raised up, we find both responses from the Jews under the preaching of Peter...
  - There are those at Pentecost in Acts 2:37 who were cut to the heart and repented as soon as they realised that they had crucified the Lord of glory...
  - And there were those whose hearts were stirred up with even more murderous rage in Acts 5:33 when they hear the very same message.

If you have seen yourself in this parable today, you will have to respond in one way or the other.

- Which will it be?