

4. What indications does Matthew furnish in his text that show that he knew he was reorganizing the order of the two events?
5. Where had Jesus been when He saw the fig tree?
6. Where was He going?
7. At what time of day did He see the fig tree?
8. According to Matthew, where precisely was the fig located?
9. What characteristics of the tree induced Jesus to approach it?
10. In what period of the year did this event occur?
11. Tell what you know about fig trees that assists in understanding this story.
12. With what words did Jesus curse the fig tree?
13. According to Matthew, what happened when Jesus pronounced the curse upon the tree?
14. According to Mark, when did they discover the effect produced in the fig tree by Jesus' words?
15. Explain why the disciples saw the effect of the cursing only at a later time, as Mark describes it. What elements in Mark's account suggest a rapid, but gradual, process involved in the withering?
16. What was the reaction of the disciples when they saw the effect of the cursing of the fig tree? Who voiced their reaction?
17. According to Jesus, what is the lesson to be learned from this event?
18. On what mountain were Jesus and His disciples standing when He spoke of moving "this mountain"?
19. Is there any basis for the assumption of many that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is an acted parable intended by Jesus to refer to the fruitless Jewish nation soon to be destroyed for its barrenness? If so, what is that basis? If not, why not?

SECTION 57:

JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES TO HIS AUTHORITY: THREE PARABLES OF WARNING

(Parallels: Mark 11:27—12:1; Luke 20:1-8)

TEXT: 21:23-32

A. Jesus' Authority Challenged

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said,

By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?

And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven, he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him? 26 But if we shall say, From men; we fear the multitude; for all hold John as a prophet. 27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We know not.

He also said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

B. The Parable of the Two Sons

28 But what think ye? A man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in the vineyard. 29 And he answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented himself and went. 30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: but went not. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?

They say, The first.

Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye saw it, did not even repent yourselves afterward, that ye might believe him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On what quite reasonable basis could the religious authorities in Israel argue their right to challenge Jesus' authority to teach and act as He did?
- b. What is the fundamental assumption behind the religious authorities' challenge, the belief that motivates them personally to fling their challenge before Jesus?
- c. Since Jesus is challenged by the supreme religious authority in Israel, should He not respond respectfully by furnishing what they request, rather than by countering their question with another question? Is this not dodging the issue? If not, what is the real issue?

- d. How does Jesus' question about the baptism of John really deal with the main issue at stake in this situation?
- e. Do you think Jesus was concerned primarily, or, only, with the act of baptism as practiced by John, or do you think He included more of John's ministry as well? If you believe He intended more than the act of baptism, what else do you think He included? On what basis do you think this?
- f. What is the special moral rightness about Jesus' refusal to furnish credentials to these religious authorities?
- g. What is so specially sinful about the authorities' confessed indecision about John the Baptist?
- h. If men are to enter the kingdom of God on the same basis, how is it possible for some (like tax collectors and harlots) to be granted precedence over others (like chief priests and other authorities like them)?
- i. If faith must precede repentance, since one cannot change his mind about what he does not believe, how can Jesus expect the religious authorities, even after witnessing the conversion of publicans and harlots to "repent and believe (John)"? Why was this order necessary for them?
- j. What do you think would have been the reaction of common people who witnessed Jesus' treatment of the authorities? What would the people be able to see in the answer the authorities gave Jesus concerning His question about John the Baptist?
- k. What is the special value of a well-formed question in dealing with people in an antagonistic situation such as that faced by Jesus here? What may we learn from His use of questions as a method of teaching?
- l. What is the special value of a well-turned story with a decision-demanding question at the end, as illustrated in the parable of the two sons? Where else in the Scriptures do we find other highly effective stories constructed on this same pattern?
- m. How does this episode help us to understand God's basic plan of salvation?
- n. What does this text teach us about the redemption of the Jewish people: i.e. are they to be saved on a personal or on a national basis? Why do you answer as you do? Then, how does the text influence our understanding of the present place of Israel in the plan of God regarding the future.

- o. What does this section reveal about the nature of proof whereby a true prophet is to be tested and distinguished from a false one?
- p. How would you explain the religious leaders' rejection of John's ministry and message?
- q. How do you account for the religious leaders' inability to appreciate the conversion of the "sinners" in Jewish society? Should not the former have rejoiced and glorified God for this remarkable result obtained by John?
- s. In what ways is Jesus' story of the two sons here similar to His parable of the Prodigal Son and the Self-righteous Elder Brother (Luke 15:11-32)? Note that that story begins exactly as does this one: "There was a man who had TWO sons." What similarities and differences are discernible between them?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

On one of those days they arrived again in Jerusalem and He entered the temple courts. While He was walking around there, teaching the people and proclaiming God's word, the chief priests, the theologians and the councilors of the Jewish nation stepped up to Him as He was busy teaching, and demanded, "What right do you have to do what you do? Who authorized you to act this way?"

"And I too have a question for you, just one," replied Jesus. "If you tell me the answer, then I will also inform you as to what sort of authority I have for what I do. Tell me about John the Baptist: who sent him to immerse people—God or men? Answer me that!"

They began discussing it among themselves, arguing, "If we answer, 'God sent him,' He can retort, 'Then why did you reject his message?' On the other hand, if we say, 'He was acting on human motives,' we have the people to fear. Everyone will stone us to death, since they are convinced that John was really a prophet of God." So their answer to Jesus was: "We do not know who sent him."

"In that case," replied Jesus, "neither am I going to tell you by what sort of authority I do what I have done." He then began to tell them a series of illustrative stories: "What is your opinion about the following story? There was a certain man who had two sons. He approached the first and said, 'My boy, go work in the vineyard today.' But the boy answered, 'I don't want to!' Afterward, however, he regretted what he had said, and went. The father also went to the second and repeated the same thing to him. This son answered, 'Yes,

sir!' but did not go. Now, which of the two actually did what their father wanted?"

The authorities answered, "The first one."

"Right," continued Jesus, "and I can tell you this: crooks and prostitutes will get into God's kingdom ahead of you! You see, John came to YOU on a mission of righteousness, but you refused to believe him. However, the crooks and harlots did. And although you saw that, you did not even afterwards feel remorse enough to believe him."

SUMMARY

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, the religious and political authorities challenged His right to act as He was. He silenced them by asking them a question He knew they could not answer without both incriminating themselves for their unbelief in the eyes of the people, and disqualifying themselves to ask for such credentials from Him. If they could not decide about John the Baptist whom all acknowledged to be a genuine prophet of God, on what ground could they be trusted to judge Jesus' credentials supporting His claim to come from God? Jesus then told the story of the two sons, one finally obedient although at first rebellious, and the other, apparently obedient, but really disobedient. These represent the Jewish hierarchy as only apparently obedient to God, while the more flagrant sinners who do what God wants are really so. Worse still, the hierarchy remained obstinately unmoved by this display of true piety. The Kingdom of God would be open to the flagrant sinners who repented, but closed to the respectable sinners whose moral condition blocked all repentance.

NOTES

I. THE AUTHORITIES ATTACK

21:23 And when he entered the temple, He had just come from Bethany (21:17, see notes). **Into the temple** means into the courts surrounding the sanctuary proper, not unlikely on the southeast side near Solomon's porch. (Cf. John 10:23ff.; Acts 3:11; 5:12.) Mark and Luke capture the setting of the hierarchy's attack which follows: He was surrounded by eager listeners to His doctrine.

The chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him. Both Mark and Luke note that "scribes" swelled the delegation. Since these three special groups may be distinguished from the whole council (Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66 as opposed to Mark 14:43, 53), it

would seem that this is a delegation and not the whole Council. However, that each major group is represented here gives added importance to the whole procedure. Even if a formal public resolution in the Sanhedrin to send an investigative committee were "entirely outside their recognized mode of procedure" (Edersheim, *Life*, 1,309), the fact that this was a privately organized, informal mission does not weaken its psychological effect. **The chief priests** were either members of the families of the high priest (cf. Acts 4:6), or priests responsible for special tasks involved in the temple worship. **The elders of the people** were laymen, representatives of the nation of Israel. The "scribes" (Luke 20:1) were influential rabbis or theologians. (Cf. Gamaliel, Acts 5:34ff.) As is clear from 21:45, this delegation is loaded with representatives from both major religious schools of thought, the Sadducees, in the person of the chief priests, and the Pharisees.

The attack came **as He was teaching**. The leaders were struggling separately to retain the prestige of their position and influence over the nation, but Jesus kept revealing and denouncing their wickedness. To break His hold on the popular mind (cf. Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47f.), they unleashed this subtle but dangerous attack while He was surrounded by adoring followers. The approach of these stately dignitaries may have been intended to communicate an impressive display of authority as they suddenly materialize (*epèstesan*, Luke 20:1) in order to achieve the maximum psychological effect of exposing this unblest provincial before the crowd as an illegitimate, self-proclaimed intruder. Since they themselves were afraid of the people (21:45f.), they probably hoped to stigmatize Him publically so as to deprive Him of His popularity and consequent protection. By this approach did they hope to stampede Him into some off-the-cuff rash admission?

By what authority are you doing these things? and who gave you this authority? This question implies three things:

1. That Jesus had in fact been doing something significant which they must formally investigate in this manner;
2. that these inquisitors themselves enjoyed the unquestionable right to demand to examine His credentials;
3. that nothing He had ever said or done indicated to them that God authenticated His mission, message or manners.

These things, although a vague charge, must include not only what they would have termed "pseudo-Messianic rabble-rousing," such as the Messianic entry into Jerusalem and His unceremonious temple-cleansing, but also the miracles He had performed in the temple.

The clear sight of the recently blind and the normal movement of those who had until but recently been crippled (Matt. 21:14f.) should answer their question for them, unless they dig up the discredited accusation of collusion with Beelzebul! (Cf. Matt. 12:22-45.) Their most recent objection to Him lay in His defending children who unquestionably attributed to Him titles of Messiahship. (See on 21:15.) Because the responsibility to judge false prophets and religious frauds was clearly theirs (*Sanhedrin* 1:5), their major complaint was His assuming the position of Teacher of the crowds without prior authorization by any of the recognized authorities in Israel. Certainly no priest, whose was the exclusive monopoly over temple affairs, had authorized the temple's cleansing. No recognized theologian had ordained Him to teach there or anywhere. Had some Roman allowed Him a puppet-governor's right to play the part of "Messianic King"? So, because Jesus was but a common Jew and no priest, they suspected He could claim neither the authority of Church or State for His presuming to assume the management of the temple and exercise royal authority.

But we must not suppose that jealousy for their position was the only motive driving these leaders to demand who He thought He was and who had authorized Him to behave so "imperiously." Most certainly involved is their concept of authority. In fact, authority to teach in Judaism was conveyed by the imposition of hands in a formal ceremony of ordination after the accurate communication of traditions. Edersheim (*Life*, II,381f.) taught that "there was no principle more firmly established by universal consent than that *authoritative* teaching required previous authorization." This lack of accreditation by the proper rabbis was precisely the point at which Jesus seemed to be most vulnerable (cf. John 7:15). Ironically, the principle of authority to which they must appeal for their own right to lead Israel eventually originated in Scripture. But the same Bible taught that a prophet must receive his authorization directly from God (Deut. 18:15-22) even without any other human recognition! (Cf. Amos 3:3-8; 7:12-15; Gal. 1:1, 12, 16f.; 2:6.)

By what authority? means "by what kind of (*pois*) authority?" The fundamental assumption behind this challenge is their absolute certainty that He did not enjoy God's authority, hence His activity must be accounted for on some other basis. (Contrast John 3:21) These learned rulers might have conceded liberty of opinion to any itinerate rabbi who wanted to express his views publicly, but not to

Jesus who subverted their system. His personal holiness and compassion (cf. Matt. 7:15-20), His incisive but notably untraditional teaching of the meaning of God's Word (cf. Matt. 7:29) and His unquestionably true miracles (cf. Deut. 18:21f.; II Cor. 12:12) and His harmony with other prophetic revelations (cf. Deut. 13:1ff.; Isa. 8:20; Jer. 26), meant completely nothing to them as credentials! (Study I Kings 22:24-28; Jer. 20:1-6; chap. 23.)

In the mind of His inquisitors, what alternatives lay open to Jesus? The audacity of His demeanor and that of His followers implied that He claimed royal Messianic authority. Now if He denied it, His followers would abandon Him for disappointing them. If He admitted it, the authorities could turn Him over to the Roman procurator for treason. Again, if He disclaimed all authority, His actions would then lack any rationale, and He would be exposed as a fool or, worse, as an imposter. If He remained mute, they could insinuate that His silence tacitly confessed the falsity of His pretenses. If He tried to claim that God had given Him this miraculous power and this authority to teach, they could twist His answer and charge Him with blasphemy (cf. John 5:17f.). Thus, their question was not primarily intended to protect the people of God against a potential imposter, but to lead Him into a fatal trap. Normally, their question would be quite understandable and entirely justifiable, because acceptance of what anyone teaches depends on the listener's evaluation of his authority to say what he does. Technically, their formal question is in order. So it is not with the formulation of their challenge that Jesus must quarrel, but with the insincerity He sees in their motivation.

II. JESUS COUNTERATTACKS

“John's authority is indicative of mine” (21:24-27).

21:24 **And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question which, if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.** With what unruffled calm and unparalleled presence of mind He reacts! Is this evidence of only supernatural insight, and not also the reflection of careful personal preparation to meet just such a demand? This question had already arisen in Jesus' ministry (John 2:18; 6:30; Matt. 12:38; 16:1). He had already furnished answers that would have satisfied the honest mind. Now He must deal with the other kind.

Although Jesus' counter-challenge takes the form of a question, He may literally have said to them, "And I will ask you for a statement." (*erotèso humàs kagò lògon héna*; cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 285 §2, article: *eperotào* and 312 §2, article *erotào*: "to ask for, request" taken together with *lògon*: "statement," *ibid.*, 478, article *lògos*, §1 *gamma*. However, Arndt-Gingrich render our text: "I will ask you a question." Lenski, *Matthew*, 828: "*Lògon héna* = 'just one matter' and no more.")

Jesus' reaction is not artful evasion, since answering one question with another was not unknown among the rabbis. Observe the wisdom of Jesus' technique evident here:

1. He who asks a question asks the favor of an answer, and so cannot refuse to concede a favor asked of him without exposing his own unfairness. Thus, the rulers who asked Jesus the courtesy of an answer, could not easily refuse Him the courtesy of an answer to just one question, especially when He clearly declared His willingness to meet their demands immediately thereafter. If they refuse to answer His, when He had asked them one, they cannot then complain of any injustice in His refusal.
2. He knew that their question presumed their right to ask for His credentials. But their presumption must not go unquestioned, and that publicly. Normally, no one would dare ask publicly recognized officials for those documents that validate their right to question all others. But, precisely because He knew that THESE men perverted righteousness by rejecting God's true messengers, He must show for all to see that these officials were totally unqualified as holy inquisitors, hence had nothing more than a pretended right to grill Him as they were. Yet, by promising them a proper answer to their question, He tacitly admitted their responsibility and consequent authority to challenge all would-be prophets and teachers, and to decide without fear or favor. While it is unquestionably true that we are not automatically obligated to answer everyone's questions merely because he asks—either because the answer is not his to know or because the question itself is wrongly framed or otherwise impossible to answer—nevertheless, Jesus was obligated to furnish prophetic credentials sooner or later.
3. His was no crude trick or evasive counterquestion, because, were they correctly to answer His question, they would have a solid basis upon which to appreciate the correct answer to their own. (See

on 21:25.) His, then, is a highly effective way of answering, since He stimulates them to answer their own question for themselves. The key to the main question often lies in the correct answer to a question that must be taken first.

4. **JESUS HAD ALREADY ANSWERED THIS QUESTION BEFORE.** How many times must a faithful witness give his testimony before his word is to be accepted as true (cf. Rev. 1:5)? Doubtlessly numerous investigating committees had poured out their reports before the Sanhedrin, quoting verbatim His replies to this same query answered on other occasions. (Cf. Matt. 12, esp. vv. 9-14, 23, 38ff.; 16:1-4; John 2:18ff.; 5:15-47; the special case of the man born blind, John 9:24-34; 10:24-39.) Jesus cannot be unaware that they are not honestly seeking information, since the chief priests and Pharisees had united the council in the determination to put Jesus to death (John 11:47-53). So, their question is anything but a legitimate, innocent, routine request of credentials.
5. There is a special, moral rightness that Jesus should refuse to furnish His credential to THESE men. To continue providing evidence of His divine authority, when adequate proof had already been given, is to place in doubt the adequacy of the foregoing proof as if it were somehow inconclusive.
6. There is real wisdom in a well-formed question when dealing with antagonistic people:
 - a. It immediately took the pressure off of Himself, since it demonstrated that He was in control of His own spirit and that He had sufficient presence of mind to meet their potentially devastating question with a reasonable reaction.
 - b. It shifted the pressure of His questioners: they became the questioned.
 - c. It immediately enlisted all interested bystanders in cooperating together to formulate the proper answer. Each one who answers the question would line up emotionally with those whose answer approximates his own. This very procedure transforms the former threat by reorganizing its components along new, potentially helpful lines.
 - d. It turns everyone's attention away from personalities immediately involved in the antagonism and toward resolving the issue. As in our case here, the question must not merely divert the attention from the one attacked, but toward the correct solution of the problem that occasioned the attack.

- e. Such a question may cause the antagonists to think, to be reasonable, to consider. Sometimes it may lead them to see the irrationality of their prejudices.
7. One decisive question leads people to take a stand. Those who face it honestly, but had simply been confused by their background, might be persuaded to understand their confusion and abandon it. Further, the authorities' confusion, exposed in this public way, would not go unnoticed by those who had followed their leadership. This, in turn, would stimulate the followers not only to repudiate their blind shepherds, but, having recognized their fallibility, examine God's Word personally.
 8. Prudence. To answer directly that He was the Messiah, God's Son, therefore qualified, would precipitate the final crisis at a time when there was yet much to be taught and done before the last hour. He refused to invite disaster by hurling Himself on the enemy's sword. As the Lamb of God in the midst of wolves, He was "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16ff.), answering with great caution (cf. Prov. 15:28).

Whereas Jesus could have worked miracles to prove His right or perhaps cite Bible prophecies to support His claims, this time He adopted neither method of proof. Instead He lay before these schemers an unexpected, but fatal, dilemma:

21:25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men? Who sent John to immerse people—God or men? **The baptism of John** is metonymy for John's total mission of which his baptism was that act whereby those who accepted his mission from God demonstrated their submission to God. The baptism in itself would have held only a ritual importance for an Israel already accustomed to various washings and proselyte baptisms. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, 745-747; I, 273f.; see also Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 200f.; also Josephus' warped view, *Ant.*, XVIII, 5, 2.) But because John had so intimately linked it with repentance toward God and personal preparation for the coming Messianic Kingdom of God, there could be no rejecting it without, at the same time, refusing the God who had sent him to call the nation to repentance.

Why bring up **the baptism of John**? Several reasons account for this:

1. John's *baptism* is either an invention of men or required by God. Jesus left His questioners no loop-hole: the question of his *baptism*

is acid-clear, (1) because no Old Testament text had predicted or ordered it, (2) because no Jewish group, especially the Essenes and the community at Qumran, practiced anything precisely identical to it, and (3) because his baptism "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) seemed to undermine the unique program for such forgiveness available through the right sacrifices by levitical priests in the temple.

Not even the Qumran community, with its multitudinous lustrations, thought of their admission of new converts to baptism in the same way John did. (Cf. John Allegrao, *The Dead Sea Scrolls—A Reappraisal*, 2nd ed. 1964, p. 121f.; Jean Danielou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity*, 1958, p. 23). Josephus (*Wars*, II,8,2-13, esp. 7) says enigmatically, "[the proselyte to Essenism] is made a partaker of the waters of purification" which may mean initiation into the group or mere access to bathing regularly in the same water in common with "the pure." But Essene baptism is more a question of daily washings than initiatory preparation to fellowship in the community. That John's baptism was unique is eloquently evidenced even by Josephus whom some believe to have been an insider to Essenism, since he too describes John as "the Baptist." (Cf. his treatment of Essenism and other sects: *Ant.* XVIII,1,3-6; *Wars* II,8,2-13; and his *Life*, 2.)

The issue is this: was John right to introduce this rite?

2. Jesus, like John, had been sent directly by God, without human authorization from Jerusalem or from anywhere else. Standing outside the institutional structures of standard Judaism, and when challenged specifically on this point, John had claimed to be commissioned directly by God (John 1:33). Since the case of John and Jesus stand on the same footing, let the delegation decide about the former and they shall have their answer about the latter.
3. As observed before (see notes on 11:7, 14f.), the proper answer to the question, "Who is Jesus of Nazareth?" can be found in the correct answer to the other, "Who is John the Baptist?" For if it be determined that the latter is "a man sent from God" (John 1:6; Luke 3:2f.), and, consequently, his message and immersion as well, then his pointing out Jesus as God's Lamb (John 1:29), the One infinitely greater than John himself (John 1:27, 30), the One who has the Spirit (John 1:32f.), the Son of God (John 1:34),

should furnish the correct estimation of that authority by which Jesus ministered.

4. **The baptism of John** was objectively a previous revelation from God. Before Jesus will furnish new revelations of His identity, He must force them to face squarely the earlier ones, since openness to grasp new truth generally depends upon one's faithfulness and fairness in handling the previous truth.
5. In the mouth of these bigoted critics, the question, *Who gave you this authority?* means "What HUMAN authority?" since they presume the answer cannot be "God." If so, Jesus' reply really answers their challenge by saying: "John is God's messenger who prepared the way for me, baptized me and pointed me out to the world." In fact, it was at *the baptism of John* that Jesus was officially anointed to be a Prophet by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:37f.) and proclaimed by the Father (John 5:32-36; 1:29-34).
6. Last, but not least, this was a question that even the simplest of the common people could AND DID answer to the satisfaction of God. (See notes on 21:31f.)

From heaven or from men? From heaven? is a respectful Hebraism meaning "From God" whose dwelling it is. (See notes on 23:22.) **From heaven or from men?** are the only alternatives (cf. Acts 5:38f.). The best, if not the only, escape from the horns of a dilemma is the formulation of a third alternative. But in this case there can be no third possibility, because, in the nature of the case, there are no other sources of prophetic inspiration. Even diabolic or drug-induced "inspiration" may be thought of as a subdivision of Jesus' expression "from men," inasmuch as these operate in deceived and deceptive men (cf. I Kings 22:22).

Although the leaders' question had been devious, because of its apparent interest in truth, Jesus' dilemma is a legitimate one that gets right at the heart of their deepest need and of that of His hearers. Because the rulers had scorned John's baptism and message, the Lord now requires that they openly confess it in the presence of the people they claimed to lead. If they declare themselves incompetent to decide John's case, they thereby disqualify themselves as judges of Jesus, but, even more critically, as master teachers of Israel. Since John had been a figure in Israel of such great religious significance, no one could ignore him without moral consequences. It was the duty of these authorities NOT to hedge or dodge the issue: John must be evaluated and that evaluation must be published.

If *they reasoned among themselves*, then how did the Evangelists learn the content of their deliberations? Probably the leaders talked in hoarse stage whispers in this on-the-spot consultation. Unless they deliberately retreated for a hasty conference, then it may not have been too difficult for by-standers to tune in on their debate.

If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him? Jesus knew that they did not believe John, but, if pushed by their answer to ask this question, He would have meant one of two things by it:

1. **Why did you not believe him** in what he said about your sins and need to repent so as to be ready for the coming Kingdom of God?
2. **Why did you not believe him** in his open and emphatic testimony to me, given before a priestly delegation from the Pharisees, that I am far greater than himself, even God's Son (John 1:19-34)?

With unerring insight born of calculating self-interest, these shrewd politicians recognized the political ramifications of their dilemma, and either way they are damned. To answer that John's message was really of divine origin but yet unbelieved by these very rulers, would instantly disqualify them as holy inquisitors in the name of God. To be exposed as crass unbelievers in a prophet of God at the very moment they are questioning Jesus' prerogatives to be just such a prophet, is to be totally disarmed for the task at which they should have been not merely legal experts but highly qualified morally. For anyone to admit that a given message or command is from God, and at the same time not to obey it, is the highest folly and deepest wickedness of which they can be accused.

21:26 But if we shall say, From men; we fear the multitude. The broken construction evident in their words is not proof of grammatical blundering on the part of the Gospel writer, but the accurate recording of the mental agitation of the holy inquisitors themselves! Here their true character is unmasked: rather than openly affirm their secret conviction that John was just another back-woods revivalist, but certainly not a prophet of God, rather than expose the decided judgment widely held by their colleagues in the Jewish Senate, they cower before public opinion. Luke (20:6) quotes them as fearing instant death by stoning at the hands of an aroused populace. *From men* had been their real choice made many months before, since they had examined John's testimony and had repudiated it (John 1:19ff.). They considered their rejection perfectly right-minded at

that time, because, in their view, John was self-sent. Now, under the psychological pressure of their own making, they hedge, because they cannot state their own true view publicly without political self-damage.

Another evaluation of their silence sees it as an unwitting admission that they recognized John as truly a God-sent prophet, for, it is argued, were they profoundly convinced they were right, there is no mob's fury they would not have braved, risking death to declare their convictions. Good evidence for this thesis are the Jews' many public demonstrations against Herodian or Roman policies, when they bared their breasts for Herod's vengeance or Roman slaughter, rather than submit meekly to compromise of conscience. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XIV,13,1,2; XV,8,1-4; XVIII,3,1; *Wars*, II,9.2-4.) This position, however, assumes these politicians would have had more conscience than they did. It also forgets their unwillingness to part with popular support which they desperately needed in their rickety power structure.

We fear the multitude. Their glaring sin was that they did not fear GOD! Who cares if God is offended or dishonored by their deliberate refusal to confess embarrassing truth? In full awareness of their options they lied because of their previous opposition to truth. For them, the main question was not truth, but personal consequences. They could not care less whether or not John were really a prophet. Their prime concern was what answer would most successfully and most immediately defuse the live bomb Jesus had just handed them. Although they claimed to have the interest of true religion at heart, these proud men are actually animated by the dictates of political survival.

The ground of their hesitation was the almost universal conviction that *John was a true prophet* (cf. Mark 11:32). Although dead at this time, John's influence over people was very much alive and even continued on into the age of the Church. (Acts 18:24ff.; 19:1ff.; Josephus' testimony: *Ant.* XVIII,5,2.) Ironically, the common people, whom the authorities despised (John 7:49), actually held truer conclusions than their leaders and expressed greater freedom and conscientiousness in expressing their true belief! Had the authorities maintained their personal integrity and obeyed God as His will was revealed by John, they too could have maintained their position as leaders and would have had no basis for their present uneasiness.

CLUMSY EVASIVENESS

The reverend doctors solemnly intoned, "The point about which you ask is not one concerning which we are able to establish a scholarly consensus," which, stripped of its pompous language, translates into **21:27 We know not**. No one in Israel, called upon to give judgment about the ministry of a so-called "prophet" has the right to opt for this no-decision choice, since God had obligated all Israel to distinguish true prophets from false ones who lead His people into apostasy. (Cf. Deut. 13:1ff.; 18:9-22.) This shameful abdication of responsibility for a final judgment about John unquestionably ignores their God-given duty to know and decide. Further, it disqualifies them from asking credentials of ANYONE, for they would be as unable to judge the latter as they claimed in John's case.

We know not is a handy reply, because they believe no one on earth can disprove it, since it concerns their hidden thoughts. But a lie it was. They simply have no scruples about lying about their secret opinions. They merely hate the shame, not the sin, of deception. But even this deception is discovered, because the Lord did not react to their verbalized answer, **We know not**, but to their inward, suppressed answer, "We are not going to tell you," by saying, "**Neither will I tell you. . . .**" By so doing, He proved once more how rightly He read their inward thoughts which they feared to reveal. Ferrar's vivid evaluation of the situation (*Life*, 515) deserves repeating:

To say "We do not know," in this instance was a thing utterly alien to their habits, disgraceful to their discernment, a death-blow to their pretensions. It was ignorance in a sphere where ignorance was for them inexcusable. They, the appointed explainers of the Law—they, the accepted teachers of the people—they, the acknowledged monopolizers of Scriptural learning and oral tradition—and yet to be compelled, against their real convictions, to say, and that before the multitude, that they *could not tell* whether a man of immense and sacred influence—a man who acknowledged the Scriptures which they explained, and carried into practice the customs which they revered—was a divinely inspired messenger or a deluding imposter! Were the lines of demarcation, then, between the inspired prophet (*nahî*) and the wicked seducer (*mesîth*) so dubious and indistinct? It was a fearful humiliation, and one which they never either forgot or forgave!

JUSTIFIABLE REFUSAL

Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. Their inability to pursue their question admits that their refusal to answer His questions cancels their own right to a reply from Him. However, although He was absolved from answering directly, as seen in what follows, He did not evade their question, because, in itself, it is a valid question worthy of a good answer. So He answered it parabolically. (See notes on 21:33—22:14, 41—46.)

I do these things echoes the wording of their question (21:23). However, He hereby also confirms that He is actually doing things that mark Him as the most significant spiritual phenomenon of the times. They could not formulate their original question: “By what right do you CLAIM to do these things?” because it was already painfully evident to them that the miracles, message and manners that characterized His ministry were incontestable facts.

Even though for the moment both Jesus and authorities are silent, their silence is for quite opposite reasons. Because of their cowardice, they CANNOT speak. Because of His justice, He WILL not speak. But the common people who witnessed the scene would have no doubt who had won. On the other hand, Plummer (*Matthew*, 294) suspects that at last in their own mind, Jesus’ enemies did actually gain headway in this round, since He did not publicly deny all claim to royal authority, in the same way He had been unwilling to hush the crowds (Luke 19:30f.) and the children (Matt. 21:15f.) who proclaimed Him their Messianic King. These refusals, when seen as tacit confessions, strengthened their case against Him both with the Romans and the Jewish Supreme Council.

III. “DECIDE ON AN OBJECTIVE CASE: TWO SONS”

(21:28-32)

A. Rank Sinners and Religious Outcasts

21:28 **But what think ye?** Although Jesus had honorably and effectively bested His challengers psychologically, He is not satisfied to let them leave without help. Before they disperse, He presses them for further, possibly life-changing, decisions. **What think ye?** is His engaging way of eliciting their opinion. He invites them to THINK about a story that apparently has nothing to do either with their frustration and dishonorable failure in the face of His dilemma or

with His consequent refusal to submit to their pretended authority. This masterful approach defuses the tension by concentrating their attention on an interesting illustration. (Cf. 17:25; 18:12; 22:42.) The well-turned story has special value especially because of its decision-demanding question at the end. The Scripture records other highly effective illustrations built on his pattern (II Sam. 12:1-13; 14:1-24; I Kings 20:35-43; cf. Matt. 21:33-45).

A man had two sons. The *man* represents God; the *two sons* stand for (1) "the sinners," and (2) the hierarchy. The exquisite grace of Jesus pictures both as sons of the same father who tries to engage each son in useful work for Him. But there are only *two sons*, not three, as if there should have been another son who could both agree with and obey the father. Jesus omitted this concept, because there was simply no one who did that (cf. Rom. 3:10-23). **Go work today in the vineyard**, is the father's invitation to each boy to show himself a true and worthy son. The worthiness is not itself based upon HOW MUCH work each would eventually do, but upon WHETHER each would take up this precious invitation. This is the positive side of our obedience to the Father's will too. When Jesus applied this parable (vv. 31, 32), He identified those who please God and enter His Kingdom by pointing to flagrant sinners who believed His messenger and acted accordingly. Thus, the order to **go to work in the vineyard** is no mere merit system whereby each can earn so much praise for so much work, but

1. the practical procedure whereby people complete what the father needs done, and
2. the practical proof that each is truly the father's child, as he claims.

21:29 And he answered and said, I will not. The glaring disobedience the pious thought typical of publicans and harlots is not understated in this son's rude refusal: "I don't want to! (*ou thélo*)." Such an outrageous reaction springs from a rebellious heart that does not respect the father or fear the consequences. Such open, daring defiance illustrates an ungodliness almost proud of its rebellion.

Although not explicitly part of Jesus' story, He implies that the father did not instantly disinherit his boy because of this rebelliousness. He graciously left the son time to reconsider, and reconsider he did! This feature is perhaps intended to suggest how really typical of our Father not to want any to perish but all to come to repentance (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Matt. 18:10-14). This grace certainly leaves

the door open to what follows (cf. Rom. 2:4). **But afterward he repented himself.** *Metameletheis* might be better rendered: "he regretted it, or felt sorry for it." In fact this is not the normal New Testament word for repentance, *metanoéo*, which involves a change of mind and consequent action. In our text, it is true, the son actually did reverse his previous position by obeying the father, and the Jewish leaders should have done the same. (Cf. 21:32, *metemelèthete*.) However, Jesus' emphasis here is more on the remorse felt about previously bad conduct. A proper sorrow over reprehensible conduct can lead to genuine change (II Cor. 7:9-11), although this does not always happen, as in the case of Judas (Matt. 27:3). *Metamélomai* expresses primarily a change in feeling, not necessarily a change in conduct. This latter is to be discovered from the later actions which are the "fruits worthy of repentance" (*karpòn àxion tês metanoias*, cf. Matt. 3:8) John was really driving for. *He went*, thus showing himself a worthy child of his father, despite the bad beginnings.

B. Religious Professionals

21:30 **And he came to the second**, to offer this son too the same gracious opportunity to show himself a true son. **And he answered and said, I go, sir:** the cultured politeness and ready acquiescence of this boy mark a stark contrast with his brother. He very respectfully called his father "sir" (*kùrie*)! The suddenness with which he responded is breath-taking and an excellent example for our response everytime God assigns us work to do. However, HIS *I go, sir*, is but the smooth lie of someone who is too cowardly to rebel against his father's authority openly. Or is it that habitual courteousness that responds well, but, unsupported by conscience, has no serious intention to carry through such glib commitments? How appropriately he symbolized the cultured theologians standing there before Jesus! **He went not.** Despite his politeness and promises, he completely ignored his commitment to the father. These very religionists did not merely promise to do God's will. They actually convinced themselves that they were doing it! In fact, they could have scraped together "scholarly" reasons why their investigation of Jesus was the will of God (cf. John 16:2). But that "they say and do not" would be one of Jesus' charges against the Pharisees later (23:3). This form of godliness of which they were inexplicably proud, proves to be the most effective tool Satan uses to resist the power of real godliness (cf. II Tim. 3:5). They

supposed that religious forms equalled the power of righteousness and could not discern that the power of righteousness EVIDENT IN THE GREAT CONVERSIONS OF FLAGRANT SINNERS is true religion at its best!

C. The Punch Line

21:31 **Which of the two did the will of his father?** Despite the bad beginnings, who, in the final analysis, actually did what their father wanted? The crucial issue is DOING the will of God, not merely talking about it. This is true religion. (See notes on 6:10; 7:21; 9:13; 12:50; 28:20; Ps. 119; 143:10; John 15:14; Acts 5:29.) God is not so much interested in who said yes or no to Him at first, but who eventually responded in real obedience!

Without being obviously capricious, the authorities had to answer according to the justice of the case, whether they sensed the implications of His story or not. So, *they say, the first*. Anyone would prefer to deal with people who are better than their word—like the first son,—than with those who break it—like the second. And God Himself vindicates the justice of this choice in just such a case (Ezek. 18:21-28).

Verily I say unto you. . . . Since His opponents had taken sides on the moral principle in the story, Jesus now demonstrates how this principle applies to their situation. But perhaps no more shocking news faced these reverend clergymen than this: **The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.** If Jesus is right, this has to be bad news for these and anyone else who suppose themselves to possess the best chance to get into God's glorious Messianic Kingdom. In fact, from their point of view, for anyone to state that men and women whom all the pious consider hopelessly wicked, irretrievably damned sinners, shall enjoy precedence to enter into that realm where only the righteous justly deserve welcome, is to subvert all sense of justice and holiness, and irresponsibly to distribute unmerited hope to the undeserving! That is, unless there is a far higher principle of justice that completely vindicates it. And while the scowling dignitaries fume and sputter, Jesus' explanation is not long in coming (v. 32). He had already intimated this principle earlier: "There will be a surprising reversal of common judgments of right and propriety." (See on 19:30; 20:16.)

The publicans and harlots serve as the basis of Jesus' contrast, because they were common examples of shameless disobedience to God in Jewish society.

1. *Publicans*, or tax-gatherers, because of the extortion, graft and greed associated with this occupation, were considered classic sinners. (See notes on 9:9.) Nevertheless, John's preaching brought men like these to repentance (Luke 3:12f.).
2. *Harlots*, or prostitutes, because of their gross sexual immorality (cf. Luke 15:30; I Cor. 6:15f.), furnished another classical example of conscienceless unfaithfulness mixed with brazen impurity (cf. Rev. 17:1f.). However, Hebrew history provided the astonishing example of a harlot saved from certain death because of her trusting the God of Israel (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25; Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25). So, women too, not just men, found the door of the Kingdom open to them—and on the same basis. (Cf. Luke 7:36-50; John 4:7ff.; 11:1ff.; 12:1ff.; Gal. 3:28.)

But these are both mentioned not only because of their gross sins, but because they are also examples of discerning people. Even these gross sinners could discern what the leadership pretended not to know: John's baptism is from God and *the publicans and the harlots* openly confessed it. They proved that it was POSSIBLE TO KNOW.

What went wrong that made "the righteous" miss the Kingdom and "the sinners" go flocking right in? The greatest stumbling-block in true religion does not lie in its symbols and dogmas, but in its intolerably austere treatment of human pride. The man of taste and culture cannot imagine himself saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling." This self-humiliating need for divine help—at least for HIM—is nonsense and highly offensive to his sense of moral accomplishment. This very aversion felt by men of taste was notably lacking in those *publicans and harlots* not so overawed by their own sense of self-importance. In fact, unsurprised that John should verbally blister them for living corrupt lives, nevertheless, they were strangely moved by his exhortations, because he convinced them that God's Kingdom was open to all who repented—even those whom others would have rejected as hopelessly beyond recall. But the self-righteous, respectable people whose very profession proclaimed their supposed readiness to serve God, failed at the one business they professed to do.

The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. A surprising turn is given to Jesus' word when *proågousin* is rendered "they are leading you," in the sense that they go before, leading the way as they precede those who follow. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 708f.; Rocci, 1556.) Whereas the hierarchy considered itself amply qualified

to lead the procession of the righteous into Messiah's Kingdom, Jesus asserts that it is "the sinful people" who would do the leading! Submission to God's rule is the key to entrance into His Kingdom, regardless of the epoch in which one surrenders throne, scepter and crown of his own life and turns all over to Jesus as Sovereign Lord. Anyone who submitted to God's will preached by John—even if these all died before Pentecost—showed the spirit of obedience God seeks. TO DO WHAT GOD DESIRES IS TO UNDERSTAND THE KINGDOM, and those who act like loyal subjects are IN THE KINGDOM. They willingly submit to whatever the King decrees, and they do it as soon as His will is made clear to them. John the Baptist has made it real for *the publicans and the harlots* like it had never been brought home to them before. However, if Jesus is referring strictly to the Church as *the Kingdom* (cf. notes on 11:11ff.), He is indicating the direction evident in the lives of John's converts and the result they would soon obtain because of their present mind-set.

THE WICKEDNESS OF UNBELIEF EXPOSED

Because this affirmation is so explosive, Jesus had better have some good reasons for it! Who could know for sure who has precedence in God's Kingdom? And who can prove on what basis he knows that much? However, for Jesus, the matter is cut and dried: 21:32 **For John came unto you in the way of righteousness.** It is because this fact is true that Jesus is able to affirm the precedence enjoyed by the "sinners" as opposed to the leaders, i.e. "they precede you into God's kingdom, a fact we know because John came to you in the way of righteousness and they believed him and you did not." Herein lies proof that John's ministry was from God: judge him by his fruits (Matt. 7:15-20). Even if you (falsely) claim not to know the source of John's inspiration, you MIGHT yet decide on the fruit of his work. While he did no miracle (John 10:41), the direction and results of his teaching coupled with his own personal example should tell you something meaningful about him:

1. **HIS CHARACTER:** John himself walked **in the way of righteousness**, a life of obedience to God's will. Can you find fault with that? The grosser sinners, usually keenest to discern pretense in the sanctimonious, detected nothing insincere about John's unvarying seriousness about righteousness. They found his piety convincing, genuine. Does not the fruit of righteousness evident in his own life give credence to his prophetic missions?

2. **HIS MINISTRY ITSELF:** Was John's doctrine of repentance and righteousness strange and new? Was it not rather that old, familiar, prophetic challenge to deeds, not words, and to real piety, not promises, characteristic of all Old Testament religion? Did he not teach you to fast, give alms and pray? (Luke 3:10-14; 11:1; Matt. 9:14f.) The high irony, then, is that when someone else came preaching the highest ideals of Jewish religion, its own leaders could not recognize it as from God, but haughtily spurned its lofty, spiritual demands (Luke 3:10-14)!
3. **HIS SUCCESS:** "The world's worst sinners," by your definition, were turning to God under his preaching! His marvelous success among the worst of people should indicate the Lord's blessing and approval of his efforts. (Cf. Paul's labors among similarly wicked Corinthians, I Cor. 6:9-11; 9:1, 2!) John brought people closer to repentance and to God than they had ever been, and yet the leadership of the nation could not discern in this any evidence of God's authorization?!

NOTE: Whereas this pragmatic test is not valid when considered alone, because temporary successes cannot guarantee final success with God, yet taken in context with the other tests mentioned, it becomes striking proof of John's validity. After all, had not the religious leaders tried without success to bring these very people to God, and had not they miserably failed? Now that it is well-known that John brought these very sinners to repentance, should not this prove SOMETHING about the validity of his approach? Still, numerical success alone is not a final test of rightness. Remember Noah! (I Peter 3:20)

John came to YOU: his mission had not excluded the Jewish rulers merely because his following came largely, if not exclusively, from the common people of the working class. **And ye believed him not.** It is significant that NOT ONE rabbi questioning Jesus raised his voice in protest. To the man they had all turned John down!

But the publicans and the harlots believed him, and although coming from a life of flagrant, open rebellion against God, moved by remorse for sin, they justified God's righteous judgment against their sins (Luke 7:29f.). They yielded to His claims on their lives, surrendered their sins, committed themselves to a life of obedience and moved right onto the way of righteousness.

And ye, when ye saw it, did not even repent yourselves afterward. What, according to Jesus, should they have discerned in John's

conversions, to be convinced to yield themselves too? If, by the hierarchy's own definitions, the publicans and harlots were the most hardened sinners and farthest from conversion to God and righteousness, and if John is actually drawing them into heart-felt repentance, surely the hand of God Himself must be upon this ministry! Out of this conclusion come some others:

1. The hierarchy should have clearly supported and encouraged the labors of the wilderness preacher.
2. Each member of the religious community should have personally and humbly submitted to his teaching.
3. And, if in the ministry of John they could thus discern God's direction and authority, they should have taken seriously what he said about Jesus as Messiah.

Ironically, they had simply written it all off as mere religious fervor and froth, suitable perhaps for the "truly sinful," but not a matter of concern for "the righteous," i.e. for themselves.

"*Afterward*, when there was ample time for serious reflection upon the amazing changes produced in the lives of formerly hardened sinners, *afterward*, in the quiet of theological reflection with abundant opportunity to re-examine the theological ramifications of John's position in the light of his results, you still did not feel sorry enough about your previous rejection to begin believing him." There was much in the leaders' life and theology that kept them from gladly joining the ranks of John's disciples:

1. Pride of position: they felt no need to regret their choice, as they were already righteous enough to enjoy the approval of God.
2. They suspected what they could not control. John had not been authorized by them, hence, however successful, they must regard him with suspicion.
3. John was stubbornly determined to help those whom the leadership despised and ignored as incorrigible and unworthy of further effort.

You did not repent so that you could believe him (*oudè metemelèthete hùsteron toû pisteúsai autô*). Note the order: repentance, or better, regret must precede faith in their case. They could not believe, because they were reluctant to regret their former choice, consequently they hardened themselves in their error. Until a radical change of sentiment occurred, until they repudiated their original blindness,

psychologically they would never bring themselves to believe John. In their state of heart, belief could never occur. Totally unlike the first son (21:29), they felt no heartache, no grief or sorrow at having disappointed their Father and God. What moral perversity it must take to mingle among the participants in the nation's greatest moral revival and remain totally unaffected by it, and worse, publicly disclaim all ability to discern its origin in God! What incontrovertible deafness not to be able to hear the familiar voice of the God of Israel in the accents of His wilderness preacher!

And yet there is no indication in Jesus' words that the gates of the Kingdom had been shut, or that these often unscrupulous religionists could not even yet reverse themselves. By not affirming, "But for you it is too late," He implies that there is yet time to repent. This same conclusion is assured by Jesus' use of the present tense: "The publicans and harlots are going ahead of you." Even if others had preceded the hierarchy, these could still follow their lead—if they really desired to do the Father's will.

Matthew Henry (V,306) is correct to see that Jesus' parable has far wider application than Jesus gave it that day, precisely because of the principles involved: "The Gentiles were *sometimes disobedient*, had been long so, children of disobedience, like the elder son (Titus 3:3f.), yet, when the gospel was preached to them, they became obedient to the faith; whereas the Jews who said, *I go, sir*, promised fair (Exod. 24:7; Josh. 24:24); yet went not. . . ." However, Jesus' illustration does not refer directly and primarily to the Jew-Gentile question, but to those two groups of Judaism, "the best" and "the worst."

This text has far-reaching ramifications for evangelism and eschatology too. How can anyone, contrary to this text, affirm that prior to the Lord's return all Israel will somehow sweep into the Kingdom of Christ by mass conversion? If, in the day of John and Jesus, Israel divided itself into two categories: believers and unbelievers, what could unite them but common trust in God's Christ without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6)? As long as modern Israel remains closed to open evangelism, what solid hope is there for their "end-times, sweeping conversion"? They must be led to repentance as anyone else who claims inability to believe.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. According to Mark, where had Jesus been with His disciples when they arrived in the temple?
2. Who were the chief priests and elders? What is the significance of their coming to ask the question posed in our text?
3. In what activity was Jesus engaged when the authorities approached Him?
4. Furnish other incidents in Scripture where similar requests for credential were made (a) of Jesus and (b) of other God-sent prophets and apostles.
5. How did Jesus respond to the hierarchy's challenge to His authority?
6. Explain the importance of Jesus' question concerning John the Baptist and the origin of his baptism. What is meant by "from heaven" and "from men"? On what basis should anyone in Israel—its leadership especially—have been able to decide that John the Baptist was a true prophet?
7. How did the authorities react to the dilemma involved in Jesus' question about John's baptism? That is, what was the gist of their deliberations?
8. What was the final answer the hierarchy gave to Jesus' dilemma? Why did they give this particular answer?
9. What was Jesus' final answer to the authorities' challenge of His authority? Why did He answer as He did?
10. What story did Jesus tell to illustrate the moral situation in Israel represented by these religious authorities as opposed to others in Israel?
11. In what way were the two sons in Jesus' story precisely alike?
12. What fundamental difference distinguished the two sons?
13. Who or what is represented by (a) the father? (b) by each boy?
14. What is the crucial question Jesus asked to underline the fundamental lesson of His story?
15. Who or what in Jewish society were the "tax collectors and the harlots"?
16. In this text what does it mean "to go into the kingdom of God"?
17. On what basis does Jesus assert that the flagrant sinners would enjoy precedence over the religious leaders?
18. What is "the way of righteousness" wherein John had come to Israel? How does Jesus' affirmation state the divine source of John's authority?

19. When did the religious leaders see the conversions of publicans and harlots, which should have convinced them to submit themselves too?
20. What evidences of Jesus' divine majesty stand out in this incident?

SECTION 57

JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES TO HIS AUTHORITY: THREE PARABLES OF WARNING

TEXT: 21:33-46

C. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

33 Hear another parable: There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country. 34 And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, to receive his fruits. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them in like manner. 37 But afterward he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. 39 And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures,
The stone which the builders rejected,
the same was made the head of the corner;
This was from the Lord,
And it is marvellous in our eyes?

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.

45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables,

they perceived that he spake of them. 46 And when they sought to lay hold on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is this story a “parable” in the modern sense of the word, or an allegory? What other “parables” of Jesus help you to decide?
- b. On the basis of what elements in Jesus’ story could the religious authorities in Israel have correctly concluded that Jesus had told this parable against them?
- c. Why did not Jesus launch His accusations directly at the authorities, instead of hiding His intentions under the form of a parable? What advantage is there in the use of a parable, as compared with an open declaration? Is this cowardice?
- d. In what way does this parable reveal the larger plan of God for the world? That is, who is the owner of the vineyard? Who or what is the vineyard? What were the owner’s preparations for the positive development of the vineyard? In what sense did the owner go away from his vineyard? Who are the tenant farmers? What is the significance of the fact that they are tenants? When is the season of the fruit of this vineyard? When, or in what way, would the wicked farmers be punished? Who are the other tenant farmers to whom this vineyard would be entrusted after the failure of the first?
- e. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Psalm to convince His listeners of the rightness of what He was saying in the parable?
- f. Why should the meek and gentle Jesus predict the horrible destructions of everyone who goes against Him? Does not this ruin His image?
- g. The religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus, but they could not capture Him, because they feared the people who considered Him a prophet. What does this say about the depth and quality of these leaders’ convictions?
- h. Notwithstanding the well-merited punishment of the wicked tenant farmers suggested in the story, what evidence is there in the story itself that testifies to the long-suffering mercy shown them by the vineyard’s owner?
- i. Can you give a plausible reason why Jesus would leave the owner’s son dead in His parable? After all, whom does that son represent?

- j. In what way does this parable furnish the answer to the leaders' original challenge to Jesus' authority? ("By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?")
- k. Jesus pictures the owner of the vineyard as one who sincerely thinks that the tenant farmers could respect his son. On the basis of what factors could he hope this much, notwithstanding the ill-treatment suffered by all his previous agents? Although this element seems to be a weak point in Jesus' story, it could be one of His most meaningful points. Can you see what Jesus was driving at?
- l. In what sense could the Kingdom be taken away from anyone to give it to others? To what phrase or expression of the Kingdom is Jesus referring here? (Hint: in what sense had the Hebrews already known "the kingdom" before the coming of Christ?)
- m. In your opinion, what is the fruit of the Kingdom of God that the Owner of the vineyard expects from its new tenant farmers? (Clue: what was it that God desired for so many centuries from the people of Israel, but so rarely received?)
- n. Do you think Jesus was moved to tell this story because of the hierarchy's belligerent behavior on this occasion alone, or does it go deeper than that, i.e. does it spring from other situations also? Why do you think so?
- o. How many messengers of God have come to you to bring word from the owner of the universe? What did you do with them? How many more must come before
 - (1) you turn over to God all the fruit of your life that He expects?
 - (2) He comes to judge you for your handling of what He has intrusted to you?
 - (3) or He takes away your administration and gives it to others who will produce what He desires?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus began conversing with the other people in His audience, by narrating this illustration: "Listen to another story. Once upon a time there was a man, head of his house, who planted a vineyard. He fenced it round with a hedge. In it he dug a pit in which to stomp grapes, and constructed a watch tower. After renting it out to tenant farmers, he took a trip into a distant country for a long time.

"When the vintage time came around, he sent some of his slaves to the sharecroppers to collect from them his share of the grape

harvest. But those farm workers attacked his men and beat up one and sent him off empty-handed. They murdered another and drove a third with stones. Nevertheless, he kept it up. In fact, he sent other slaves, more numerous than the first group, but they treated them the same way. One they beat up, wounding him on the head, grossly insulted him and ran him off without collecting. Another they wounded, then killed him and heaved his body over the wall. Although the landowner persevered in sending them many others, they abused them all in the same way.

“As a last resort the owner of the vineyard had one man left, his own dear son. So he thought, ‘What am I to do now? I will send my own son: surely they will at least respect him!’ So, last of all, he sent his beloved son to them.

“But when those tenant farmers sighted the son coming, they plotted among themselves, ‘This fellow is the future owner. Come on, let’s kill him, so that what he inherits will be ours!’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and murdered him. Now, when the vineyard’s owner comes, how do you think he will deal with those sharecroppers?”

Some of Jesus’ listeners responded, “He will come and give those wicked men a punishment their behavior deserves! Then he will lease his vineyard to other farm workers who will give him what he expects promptly—when they are supposed to!”

But other listeners, when they heard this, cried, “May that never happen!”

Nonetheless, Jesus looked them right in the face and demanded, “What does the Bible text (Psalm 118:22f.) mean when it says,

The very stone which the builders threw away
has become the keystone.

This cornerstone came from the Lord
and it is wonderful to see?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but when it falls on anyone, it will grind him to powder. This is the reason why I can tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and awarded to a people that will really produce the fruits of the kingdom.”

When the theologians, the hierarchy and the Traditionalists heard His stories, they rightly understood that He was referring to them. They kept trying to get their hands on Him right then, but they feared the crowds, because the people considered Jesus to be a prophet.

SUMMARY

Jesus' next story concerned a vineyard (= the Kingdom of God in Israel) for which its owner (= God) made every possible provision, hedge, wine press and tower. He turned it over to tenant farmers (= the Jewish leadership) to care for it and give him the returns he required (= righteousness). But at the harvest season (= the reckoning), when he sent his servants (= the prophets) to get his share, they were mistreated and murdered by the tenants (= the leadership). Last of all, the owner (= God) sent his own son (= Jesus), but he too, like the servants, was rejected and murdered, because the sharecroppers hoped thereby to guarantee his property for themselves. Jesus called for a judgment: what will this owner (= God) do to the tenants (= the Jewish leadership)? Some answered, "He'll give them the horrible death they deserve and turn the vineyard (= the Kingdom of God) over to another people (= Christians)." Others balk, "Never!" Jesus insisted that Psalm 118:22f. is going to come true: Through God's efforts the Rejected Stone will be exalted to great glory, but it will be the Stone that crushes all who attack it. The cowardly leadership recognized His meaning, but was impotent to muzzle Him, because they feared popular reprisals.

NOTES

IV. JESUS REVEALS GOD'S PROGRAM

A. Bountiful Mercy (v. 33)

21:33 **Hear another parable:** were Jesus' attackers even that moment slithering toward the exit? If so, this invitation to hear another story blocks their escape by boldly announcing that the session is not over. Luke (20:9) informs us that, while not completely ignoring the sweaty-handed authorities, Jesus turned His direct attention specifically to the people. By eliciting a clear judgment from commoners concerning the criminal conduct of the vicious sharecroppers (v. 41), He showed that ANYONE could correctly evaluate and vindicate God's justice in punishing Israel's leaders, as He eventually would. By shifting His attention to the people, Jesus is not attacking the nation as a whole rather than its rulers. Rather, He lays bare the ruler's primary guilt and responsibility, and, by reflection, that of anyone else who agreed, in thought and behavior, with the nation's leaders. Sadly, of these there were many (John 1:11). In this sense, then, the whole nation is addressed in the person of its representative leadership (Hos. 4:6-9).

Another parable means that the story of the Two Sons is clearly a parable, even if Matthew does not so label it. But it is more than just *another*, since it carries forward the germ-ideas of the foregoing story and leads directly into the third. Compare them, noting the progression and intensity of thought as Jesus proceeds:

PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS	PARABLE OF WICKED HUSBANDMEN	PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST
<p style="text-align: center;">Matt. 21:28-32 OBEDIENCE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work in the Father's Vineyard is offered to two classes of individuals. 2. Stress is laid upon the leadership's rejection of John the Baptist despite good reasons to submit to him. 3. Rejection of John the Baptist will cost rebels their entrance into God's Kingdom. 4. God's permission to enter His Kingdom is not based on men's unfulfilled pious promises, but on obedience. This threatens all Jewish complacency grounded solely on empty pietism or carnal descent from Abraham. 5. God's dealings are based on actual performance, not on empty promises. This could potentially justify Gentile participation in Kingdom. 6. God's dealings are with individuals as evidenced in different treatment accorded the two sons of the same father. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Matt. 21:33-46 RESPONSIBILITY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Care of the Owner's Vineyard is the basis of this story. 2. Stress is laid upon Jewish rejection of all of God's prophets culminating in their assassination of His Son. 3. Rejection of God's prophets and assassination of His Son will cost its perpetrators their lives and privileged position in God's Kingdom. 4. God's dealing with Israel (Matt. 21:33-41a). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (33f). b. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (35-39). 5. God's dealing with the Gentiles (21:41b-43). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Punishment of Jews (40f) b. Blessing of Gentiles (41b-43) 6. God's dealings with other peoples are always based on "producing the fruits of" the Kingdom, something of which, in the final analysis, only individuals are capable. God's dealing with individuals is especially evident in this: "Everyone who falls . . . it falls on any one." (vv. 44; Luke 20:18) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Matt. 22:1-14 PRIVILEGE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gracious opportunity to enjoy the King's bounty is the basis of this story. 2. Stress is laid upon majority Jewish rejection of all of God's invitations given through His prophets, culminating in their killing them. 3. Rejection of God's offers will cost impenitents their lives and the destruction of their city, while non-Hebrews will be admitted to the Kingdom's privileges. 4. God's dealing with Israel (Matt. 22:2-7). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (2-4) b. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (5, 6). 5. God's dealings with the Gentiles (22:8-10). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Punishment of Jews (7) b. Blessing of Gentiles (8-10) 6. God's dealings with individual Christians (22:11-14) is always based on each's doing what God expected of him, i.e. wearing the wedding garment.

Study this parable from three points of view: what it reveals about (1) God, (2) Man and (3) Jesus. This story borders on the apocalyptic in that it telescopes into one pithy illustration past, present and (then) future events in the history of the people of God, all expressed in symbols. We see their past rebelliousness and ingratitude, their (then) present unfaithfulness in refusing God's Christ and their punishment, if not also their final destruction.

There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard. This introduction was well-calculated to stir interest, because, as A.B. Bruce (*P.H.C.*, XXIII,434) recognized,

At most this parable is but an old theme worked up with new variations. Every one who heard it knew what the vineyard with its hedge, winepress and tower signified, and who the vine-dressers were, and who the servants, sent for the fruits. These phrases belonged to the established religious dialect of Israel, as much as pastor, flock, lambs of the flock, Zion, etc. do to ours, used by us all without consciousness that we are speaking in figures.

Making use of this language, then, the Lord is not so much hiding His meaning under obscure allusions, as taking an old, well-known and well-loved story and giving it new meaning. In fact, His words quite closely echo the Septuagint version of Isaiah's celebrated allegory. (Isa. 5:1-7; cf. other parallel figures: Isa. 27:1-7; Ps. 80:7-19; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:1-6; 17:1-15; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1.) Whereas the prophet's "Son of the Vineyard" emphasizes the quality of the vineyard's yield, Jesus' version gives importance to the sharecroppers' conduct. The pedagogical value of this procedure is unmistakable:

1. A well-known story with a new twist sparks the curiosity of the listener: "I have already heard a story similar to this, but where is He taking it?"
2. Further, Jesus assured Himself a sympathetic hearing, similar to that which Stephen enjoyed while he recounted significant points of Hebrew history (Acts 7).
3. While Jesus' detractors were even now accusing Him of standing outside the pale of Old Testament religion, He paints a canvas of Old Testament history showing His proper place in all that had occurred before His coming. At the same time, He left it beyond doubt that His appearance in Israel was the last, decisive act of

- God's patient graciousness and the beginning of His punitive justice.
4. By using the recognized authority of ancient Scripture against those opponents who questioned His personal authority, Jesus defended His own. That is, His story, even while not directly re-evoking Isaiah's, assumes as true the evidences of God's original creation of Israel's nation and religion. A true prophet must speak within the "prophetic context" of already well-authenticated divine revelations. (Cf. "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee" in my Vol. III, 375ff.) While Jesus does give a new twist to Isaiah's old parable, He does not contradict it. Rather, He extends it and grounds His own appearance in all that had preceded Him in the history of Jewish religion.

Jesus had already used a *householder* to represent God (20:1). There, as here, His purpose is to portray the goodness and patience of God toward self-righteous, highly privileged ingrates. Israel had forgotten that GOD OWNED THE VINEYARD. To appreciate the abundance of attentive effort God had expended upon the nation, note each specific step the vineyard's owner took to insure the success of his operation and guarantee fruit production. (Cf. Paul's list of Jewish distinctives: Rom. 3:2; 9:4f.) However, all these preparations produced the additional result of freeing the owner from blame in the event of controversy with the sharecroppers.

1. He *planted a vineyard* is tantamount to saying, "God created His people on earth, Israel." (Cf. Deut. 32:12-14; Ezek. 16:9-14; Isa. 27:2-6.)
 - a. And yet, since the *vineyard* is what is stripped from the unworthy tenants and given to others, it represents "the Kingdom of God" operative in Israel's national existence (21:43). It is that element that is common to both Jews and Christians, all that is involved in being God's private, personal, covenant people with the precious religious advantages and unique opportunities each is offered as a result of their election by God and because of His revelations to them.
 - b. Nevertheless, because the Kingdom of God must be subjectively realized in real people, if it is not to remain a purely theoretical idea on God's drawing board, Jesus is talking primarily about its historical actualization among the Jewish people. (See below on *husbandmen*.)

2. He *set a hedge around it* for its protection from being trampled or destroyed by stray animals (cf. Num. 22:24; S. of Sol. 2:15; Ps. 80:12f.; Isa. 5:5), not unlikely made of thorns (cf. Hos. 2:6) surrounding a stone wall (cf. Prov. 24:30f.). God had furnished every safeguard to assure Israel's national security. (Cf. Zech. 2:5; Isa. 4:5f.; 26:1; 60:18.) God had provided good laws, leaders and institutions to guarantee internal order and maintain Israel's separation from the paganizing influences of other nations (Num. 23:9; cf. Eph. 2:14).
3. He *dug a wine press in it*, i.e. carved out of natural rock a large vat-like hollow where fresh-picked clusters of grapes are stomped by workers. (Cf. Neh. 13:15; Isa. 16:8-10; 63:2f.; Jer. 25:30; 48:33; Lam. 1:15; Judg. 9:27.) because the winevat is the place where the true value and maturity of the vintage is expressed, allusion may be made here to God's provision to use the fruits of the nation: justice and righteousness, love, mercy and faithfulness. Not merely the altar of sacrifice in the temple is meant, but that service to God in every point in life where the strength and life-blood of God's people is poured out as an offering to Him.
4. He *built a tower*, probably a flat-topped farmhouse or farm building of any kind which could serve the double purpose of dwelling for the sharecroppers as well as a watchtower from which to guard the winery against theft or trespassing. (Cf. Job 27:18; Isa. 1:8.) Jerusalem with its temple was established in Israel as God's dwelling-place from which He could superintend and protect His vineyard. Its immediate care and control was in the hands of the priesthood and national leaders.
5. He *let it out to husbandmen*, i.e. farmers (*georgoi*), in this case "vinedressers" to cultivate and prune the grapevines, enriching the vines' production. (Cf. S. of Sol. 8:11f.; Isa. 7:23.) These were only tenant farmers, because the householder remains "owner of the vineyard" (v. 40) and merely *let it out to vinedressers* in exchange for "his part of the fruit" (v. 34; Mark 12:2; Luke 20:10) and because the sharecroppers later made their play to seize the only heir's inheritance to make it their own (v. 38). God did not leave Israel to its own devices, but established a clear chain of command for national leadership (Ezek. 34:2; Mal. 2:7). The *husbandmen* represent also the nation to the extent that it blindly followed its leaders (Jer. 5:31).

Maclaren (*P.H.C.*, XXIV, 521) preached that, although the Sanhedrin was doubtless the principle target of Jesus' story,

it merely reflected the national spirit. After all, who acquiesced to the influence of these leaders and conceded them freedom to rule? Further, if the share-croppers to be dispossessed are only the leaders of the nation, then those who replace them would naturally be only the leaders of the Christian church, a conclusion that would militate against the better view that both Jews and Gentiles, irrespective of their official ecclesiastical position, will be united in one new nation, a new Israel in the new theocracy.

6. Even the fact that he *went into another country* reveals that God intended to follow a "hands-off policy" with Israel, not constantly intervening in the everyday affairs of the nation, as if He were personally directing them (cf. Matt. 25:14f.; Luke 19:12). Rather, He chose to send prophets, agents through whom He would act. By so doing, He left Israel and its leaders relatively free to act, responding freely to His gracious love and blessing. Their choices, therefore, were their own. Historically, God had not communicated directly with Israel by speaking from heaven since the giving of the law during the birth of the nation. In fact, His establishing of the prophetic office grew out of that incident (Deut. 18:16f.).

B. Mercy's Rights (21:34)

21:34 **The season of the fruits** would occur during the fifth vintage, since Mosaic legislation (Lev. 19:23ff.) forbade its use any sooner. In Palestine the big grape harvest usually occurs in late summer or early fall, although grapes in favored localities ripen also much earlier (*I.S.B.E.*, 3086b). Reasonably, the owner did not expect fruit nor demand payment before *the season of the fruits drew near*. This season does not refer to any definite period in Jewish history, because the very nature of the *fruits* involved required that Israel always be fruitful by sincere holiness and glad obedience, loving sacrifice and righteousness. (Study Mic. 6:8; Deut. 10:12-22; Ps. 40:6-8; 50:7-23; 51:16-19; 69:30f.; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:21ff.; Hos. 4:1; 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; I Sam. 15:22f.) If Jesus intends some specific deadline, He might mean that **EACH TIME** the vintage came round, the owner of the vineyard sent servants. The repeated missions of the servants is harmonious with this theory, in which case reference is made to the numerous, special missions of the prophets, special calls to repentance, new or particular guidance for Israel's moral development.

In Isaiah's parable, the owner "looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit . . . he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (Isa. 5:2, 7). Although in both Jesus' and Isaiah's parables the owner expected the good fruit for which the vineyard had been created, the reason he is frustrated differs only superficially. In fact, if Isaiah pictures his receiving bad grapes and Jesus implies he received none at all, the cause is essentially the same: the vineyard had become what the caretakers had made it (Isa. 3:14; 1:23). But God's concept of authority delegated to men requires that all superiors be responsible for creating the conditions in which their inferiors can succeed at the God-given tasks for which they were created. At every point the leadership of Israel is pictured as *husbandmen*: they have no inherent right or title to the nation. They are simply stewards under God, just caretakers, not lords. (Study Isa. 44:28; 56:10-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 6:3; 25:34-38; Ezek. 34; Mic. 5:4f.; Nah. 3:18; Zech. 10:3; 11:3-17.) Their acting the part of absolute owners accurately measures the depth and heinousness of their rebellion against God. So, the result is the same in both parables: the owner was not adequately repaid for his investment of time, effort and expense.

He rightly expected fruit, so *he sent his servants*, the last of whom was John the Baptist demanding the fruit of repentance and righteousness (Matt. 3:1-12). The various intervals between their missions are clearly indicated by Mark and Luke. This transparent reference to the prophets has apologetic significance, as Maclaren (*P.H.C.*, XXII, 504) shows. On a purely naturalistic basis there is no explaining why a people, so uniformly hostile towards the prophets, should have had prophets in almost continuous succession in every part of their long history. Courageous spokesmen such as these could not have been produced by this people nor by their sociological habitat, as their persecution and death at the hands of these very people proved. There can be no philosophy of Hebrew religion to account for this phenomenon, except Jesus' word: *he sent his servants*.

C. Mercy Outraged (21:35)

21:35 **And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.** Perhaps they took this gentleman for just another absentee landlord too occupied with pursuits elsewhere to be seriously concerned with the affairs of the vineyard.

God too is treated with the same nonchalance, as a Supreme Being "out there somewhere," too busy with cosmic business to disturb Himself greatly about what occurs on this infinitesimal speck of dust lost in space, leaving its occupants free to act in any way their caprice suggests.

These sharecroppers were motivated to commit these bloody atrocities by the desire to keep all the vineyard's production and advantages for themselves. They apparently had no intention of ever paying the owner his part, that practical purpose for which the vineyard had originally been created and committed to their keeping. In the hands of the spiritual leaders of the nation had been placed a priceless heritage: a nation specially chosen by God and outfitted with excellent legislation, and destined to bring God praise through loving service. And yet these moral masters of Israel yielded to the upper-class temptation to consider only their private privileges and to trifle with duty. They commonly ignored the true, final purpose of Israel's high vocation and made little effort to prepare the nation to achieve it. They were habitually preoccupied with feathering their own nest, augmenting their own prestige and influence and their ability to manipulate others. No wonder the prophets, who goaded them to personal repentance and social justice, were considered trouble-makers, tolerated where possible or ruthlessly eliminated.

Although the nation reacted to God and His messengers in a manner consonant with its training by the leaders, the brutality characteristic of the treatment accorded God's prophets came from the leadership, especially from the sacerdotal aristocracy that claimed a monopoly on God's flock. (Study Matt. 5:12; Jer. 20:1f.; 26:11, 20-23; 37:15; Matt. 23:29-37 and parallels; Luke 13:33f.; I Thess. 2:15.)

Is *killed another and stoned another* a needless redundancy?

1. No, because not all stoning succeed in killing the victim. (Cf. Acts 14:19f.; II Cor. 11:25.)
2. No, by *killed* Jesus may have meant "assassinated"; by *stoned*, judicially murdered. (Cf. II Chron. 24:20f.)
3. No, by *killed* Jesus may mean "with a sword" (cf. I Kings 19:10) or some other weapon; by *stoned* He indicates the means in the verb.

Here is further explanation why the righteous suffer apparently endless torment by the wicked: it is in God's mercifully patient planning

to furnish the wicked apparently endless opportunities to repent before the final crisis.

D. Increased Guilt Vs. Incredible Patience (21:36)

21:36 **Again, he sent other servants more than the first.** (Jer. 25:4; 44:4-6; I Kings 22:24-28; II Kings 6:31; II Chron. 36:15f.; Neh. 9:26-34; Acts 7:51f.) Because each successive generation of Jewish leadership similarly outraged God's messengers, Jesus is justified in picturing the same group of sharecroppers as uniformly hostile. (See Jesus' argumentation in Matt. 23:29-32.) But a long-suffering God was patiently pleading with Israel to repent. God had no intention to indulge the nation's irresponsibility. His requirements were just, so they must meet them. Rather than close an eye to their slackness, their ignoring contracts, their claiming what belonged to Him and shedding innocent blood so as to retain their control, He constantly reminded them of a day of reckoning. They imagined they were getting away with their reprehensible behavior. But they had no sooner assassinated one of the prophets than another stood before them to warn that Israel would be answerable to the living God for it. Judgment would come: let the wicked forsake his way!

Incredibly, God sent prophet after prophet, but the wicked ran Elijah out of the country. One story has it that they sawed Isaiah in two. They dropped Jeremiah down into a muddy cistern. They murdered Zechariah in the temple near the altar. They chopped off the head of John the Baptist. Unquestionably, the patience shown by the parabolic landowner is practically unequalled in all human history. (If some of us had been God, we would have finished those wicked men the day they laid bloody hands on any one of these great and holy men!) So, in order to picture the Almighty's unbelievable long-suffering toward Israel, Jesus had to make up an incredible story to do it!

E. Mercy Resolute (21:37)

21:37 **But afterward** emphasizes the owner's last great attempt to bring the tenant farmers around to reason. This same point is vividly expressed by Luke's version: "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?' because it depicts the final decision as the well-pondered, deliberate choice of the owner. Mark brings this into relief

by noting: "He had *still* one other, a beloved son; *finally* he sent him. . . ." This all serves to underscore the finality of Jesus' revelation of the Father who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all (Heb. 1:1ff.; Rom. 8:32). *He sent unto them his son*, not merely one more in a long line of faithful servants (Heb. 3:1-6; 1:1f.).

1. The readers of this Gospel would instantly recognize in Jesus Himself the allusion intended by "the beloved son" of the vineyard's owner, as the same language is used both at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17 = Mark 1:11 = Luke 3:22) and at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:5 = Mark 9:7).
2. For those who remember Jesus' claims to unique Sonship and can see God's prophets pictured in the owner's servants, Jesus is setting Himself above all of God's greatest spokesmen. He is claiming in the name of His Father the authority and title of Owner of everything in God's Kingdom! What an answer to the clergy's opening challenge to His authority! If they could but see it, they now have their answer: He is God's Son, empowered with all the authority of the Almighty.
3. And yet what better way could God plead with Israel's administrators than by picturing Himself as this father whose loving mercy reached an unbeatable high, when he placed his own beloved son at those who had brutalized his other agents?

The son stood in the place of the father, represented his authority and rights of ownership like no lesser servant could do. It should have been unthinkable not to give him the honor due his position (John 5:23). This touching but climactic move should have brought the vineyard's administrators back to their senses.

They will reverence my son, at first glance, would appear to be a gross blunder on the part of any human owner who had already lost many good men to the malice of his sharecroppers. He seemingly foresees only these two possible reactions: either they would actually submit to the Son's authority and produce the goods, or, if not personally submitting, they might at least hesitate to abuse him as they had the previous servants. But how could anyone in his right mind expect preferential treatment from such proven criminals? Some would conclude that, because this detail seems to deny the foreknowledge of God, we must not interpret it at all, leaving it as merely part of the vivid scenery of the story, picturing what a human landowner would do. But what landowner in real life would have

shown such resolute mercy? It just may be that this fact, precisely because it is so strikingly UNLIKE "normal" human conduct, is intended to draw attention to itself. In fact, Jesus is not talking about what men normally do, but about what GOD does. Parabolically, He pictures the history of God's dealings with an ungrateful people. **They will reverence my son**, then, expresses the last, longing hope of a longsuffering God. God is not ignorant of the final results of His plan to redeem man, yet He can still sincerely hope that everyone come to repentance toward Christ who would die for everyone, whether many of them appreciate it or not (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Rom. 11:32).

F. Mercy Mistaken for Weakness (21:38)

21:38 **But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance.** Because the *heir* would be the future owner, the present owner would have no one to whom to confer the vineyard as an *inheritance*. So the husbandmen assume that to kill the heir would open the way for the owner to consider simply abandoning to them that vineyard which had caused him so much grief. Their supposition is grossly unfounded for these reasons:

1. They suppose that the owner has no one else to whom to give the inheritance, no brother, no distant, long-lost kinsman whom he should prefer over them. *This is the heir*: they are confident there is no other who could arise to vindicate the son's death or question their seizure of the inheritance. *The heir* is therefore the owner's "only begotten son." Again, Jesus' uniqueness and finality receives emphasis in His teaching.
2. They suppose the owner cannot see through their duplicity or cannot know of their treachery. If only one of his servants returned to the owner bearing news of the treatment he suffered from them, they should have had every reason to fear and none for the confident talk they show here.
3. If they supposed they could merely *take his inheritance* by force, would they not have to reckon with the owner himself? Do they presume to think that HE could ignore that final affront, however patient he had shown himself previously with regard to his servants? Would he, too, simply and meekly lie down and die without ever once acting against them? They mistake his incredible patience for ineptness and indifference.

4. They suppose that if the present owner died heirless, their remaining in possession of the vineyard would guarantee their permanent ownership. "Possession is 9/10 of the law!"
5. They not unlikely suppose that the vineyard had already been deeded to the heir long before the father's death (cf. Luke 15:12). Since the owner had not appeared in a long time, perhaps he was dead too!

Come let us kill him and take his inheritance. For citizens of western countries endowed with excellent laws, good court systems and law enforcement, that anyone should dream by such monstrous rapacity to grab this choice real estate, would appear unthinkable. But this harsh reality is the status quo for any country plagued by bad rulers, greedy judges, apathetic citizenry and ineffective law enforcement. **Come let us kill him** is the decision already taken by the Sanhedrin (John 11:47-53, 57). Even if this murderous intent had not been widely advertised, it was indisputably an "open secret." (Cf. John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 10:31-33.) His death is to be judicial murder, not the result of enflamed passions run amok. **His inheritance** is the Kingdom of God (see on "vineyard," v. 33, 43). By killing God's Son, the theologians and clergy hoped to make permanent their possession and control of God's Kingdom with its attendant privileges. Ironically, *the inheritance* already belonged to them, but by murdering God's Son, they lost it forever! They could have had a heavenly inheritance, had they but properly honored the Son (John 5:23). But the deadly influence of this earth's power, wealth and show appeared far more real and desirable. So they forfeited God's wealth by haughtily disdaining and savagely despising God's last, best offer, His Son. Whereas the Sanhedrists themselves would never have admitted Jesus were the true *heir*, hence, Son of God, because they denied His claims, they certainly plotted to silence Him, precisely because they saw Him as a prime menace to their political acquisitions (John 11:47-53).

Worse, they were so engrossed in a national religious system of externals that, when Jesus came insisting on a religion of the heart potentially open to every man willing to pay this price, they correctly understood that, if He won, they lost. Their stupidity lay in supposing that they could remain in power forever over God's people, even after the Mosaic system found its perfection and consequent end in the Messiah and His rule. Somehow, this was an option they had never considered. Sadly, they had no taste for what they could not control, nor for any system in which they commanded no special

privileges. Jesus menaced their monopoly on God. In this very parable He preached a faith for all men (v. 43) and in so doing, strips them of that national monopoly on which their religious, political and economic power was based.

One can be an enemy of God, while being in charge of the very heritage of God! (Cf. Ezek. 34:1-10; Zech. 11:3-17.) Their murderous conspiracy in the name of God (cf. John 16:1ff.) was animated, in the final analysis, by hatred for God (John 15:23). But the sin of the crucifixion began by refusal to pay God what they owed Him, it was cultivated by abusing His prophets and was matured in the murder of His Son.

Are the commentaries right in deciding that Jesus hereby implies that the rulers really knew His true nature and official dignity? Does their condemnation lie in the fact that, though they knew Him to be the Christ, they crucified Him anyway?

1. They may have only had a haunting suspicion that He merited more courteous treatment than they were giving Him, but simply would not let this doubt take root and blossom into fuller recognition of Him as God's Son. To what extent these hidden misgivings existed and persisted, creating inner self-contradictions, none but God knows.
2. But is it credible that these representatives of God CONSCIOUSLY fought against God? While resisting evidence that Jesus truly came from God, they still maintained their facade of shallow excuses they considered to be wisdom and sound policy.
3. To what extent did Nicodemus speak for himself or for his colleagues in the Sanhedrin (John 3:2, "we know")? Undoubtedly, as on every other issue, that council was divided, so a latent consciousness of Jesus' true identity as *the heir of God* may have nagged the conscience of some, but not necessarily all.

G. Mercy Rejected (21:39)

21:39 **And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him.** Commentators, noting that Mark reverses the order: "They took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard," whereas Matthew and Luke place the killing outside the vineyard, conclude that the latter two have rewritten Jesus' original version of the story (Mark's) to suit their editorial needs. Accordingly, Luke, because of his "theology of Jerusalem," and Matthew, because he

remembered where the crucifixion actually occurred, supposedly re-arranged Jesus' words. To this two answers are possible:

1. This detail has no significance beyond the general fact that the heir was murdered. Whether in or out of the vineyard is immaterial.
2. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 784, note 742) suggested a better treatment of Mark's "reversed" order, by arguing that Matthew and Luke provide the proper historical sequence, whereas the second Gospel editorializes to show the climax: "They killed him, and this in the most shameful manner, casting him out of the vineyard as an accursed one." He rightly affirms that the difference of treatment could not easily have been produced by posterior theological treatment, because each Gospel writer testifies to the Lord's crucifixion on Calvary outside the Jerusalem city wall. (Matt. 27:31ff.; = Mark 15:20ff.; = Luke 23:26ff.)

If the authorities have been following Jesus' story up to this point, applying it to Israel and its leadership, they can discern His implication that God would send His Son. They could also remember Jesus' claims to be that Son (cf. John 5:17f.; 10:22-39). In effect, Jesus' illustration serves notice to the clergy that He understands their conspiracy to eliminate Him. Even while addressing the very men whose vote in the Hebrew Senate would seal His death warrant, He strangely declines any interest in resisting them to save Himself. Rather, He presents the case before the crowds whose common sense pronounces the condemnation of the Passover plotters. No pathetic fool or hesitant martyr Jesus! He fully understood what He was getting into when He deliberately walked into the clutches of these lawyers. Better than anyone else, He sensed that there could be only one conclusion to His final showdown in the final inquisition: DEATH.

They cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed him is said to prove that *the vineyard* could not be Israel, since this would mean that Jesus was pictured as being crucified outside Israel. However, the picture is theologically correct, since, when Israel in the Old Testament was encamped together, to slay someone or something "outside the camp" was equal to slaying them "outside of Israel." This is the sense of Paul's language in Hebrews 13:12 "outside the gate" and Hebrews 13:13 "outside the camp" where the two phrases are rendered practically equivalent. If *the vineyard* stands for "the Kingdom" (v. 43), Jesus' rejection and His crucifixion as a common criminal is in line

with the clergy's authorized view of Israel and the Kingdom. So, from their point of view, He should have been excommunicated from Israel and the Kingdom.

If it be objected that the behavior affirmed of the vinedressers is highly improbable or contrary to all probability, is it any less natural or more unreasonable than the unbelief it is intended to depict?

H. Mercy Finally Ended (21:40)

21:40 **When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?** In Isaiah's parable, too, God called Israel to judge whether the vineyard owner's efforts were adequately compensated by the results obtained therefrom (Isa. 5:3f.). But Jesus' emphasis is not now on the merciful provision for the vineyard's successful production, as in Isaiah. He assumes that **ANYONE COULD KNOW** that *the lord of the vineyard* must do something about *the husbandmen*. There can be no question whether he should, because common justice would require that he act decisively in this deteriorated situation. And when this moment of truth occurs, he who comes will not be another servant, but *the lord of the vineyard*. (Cf. 20:8 where the same high title is used.) The only question for His audience is *what will he do?* Now the erudite scholars of the nation are under double pressure both from the battering of Jesus' questions and logic as well as from the common judgment of ordinary people. They had avoided Jesus' first question, claiming not to be able to return an answer (21:27). They could not continue to affirm: "We do not know."

As in 21:31, so also here is another situation where the listeners unconsciously indict themselves by giving their verdict on the conduct of a story's characters. (Cf. I Kings 20:39ff.; II Sam. 12:1ff.; Isa. 5:3.) With quiet mastery the Lord drew them into judgment and led them unwittingly to confess their guilt and state their punishment by an angry God. Man's own sense of justice amply establishes the rightness of God's procedure and sentence. It is one of the ironies of our mind that we can easily and accurately foresee the horrible end of others' maliciousness, without, at the same time, discerning the terrible punishment deserved by our own identical sins.

If the leadership followed Jesus' story closely up to this point, as it parallels Isaiah's famous song, they could begin to feel the smashing

impact of this question. However, it is also true that precise identification of every element in His illustration may have been much easier in retrospect than at the moment of His punch-line question.

I. Mercy Offered to Others (21:41)

21:41 **They say unto him:** just who answered is not clear, whether crowd or leaders. (Cf. Luke 20:9.) Mark and Luke bypass Jesus' waiting for an answer and quote these words at His own. In fact, the Lord may have solemnly repeated their words, syllable, for maximum moral and emotional impact on the leaders. Even if they foresaw His point, there was no escape, because, unless they were to be deliberately capricious and risk losing further credibility with the crowds, they must now answer according to justice in the vain hope that Jesus' application would not damage their cause further. Either way, by a brilliant story He had led them personally to declare that conclusion to which He wanted them to arrive: their own self-condemnation.

He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Conscious or not, their sentence not only damns themselves, but becomes a completely unintended, but true, prophecy of the wrath of God rained upon Jerusalem, a prediction of the beginning of Gentile Christianity and of the satisfying effectiveness of the church of Christ. For all their pretended right to rule Israel, these sham overlords stood weaponless before a justly angry God whose infinite patience had guaranteed them every fair opportunity for self-condemnation and atonement. In fact, the very multiplicity of their opportunities to know and do better rendered absolute the certainty of this death sentence they pronounce. (Cf. Luke 12:47f.) None can complain that he was not provided sufficient motive or occasion for repentance. In fact, their innate sense of justice, evident in the tone of certainty with which they pronounce judgment, compels them to confess their verdict of punishment perfectly just.

Because Jesus accepted this answer, we learn that the coming of the **Lord of the vineyard** would mean the destruction of the wicked tenants. His coming would also signal the beginning of a new lease on the vineyard by other husbandmen. This parable does not picture the end of the world, because it refers to a striking turning point in the affairs of the vineyard, hence the (then) future affairs of the Kingdom the vineyard represents. If so, then, we must search in the

history of Israel for that tragic turning point in the affairs of the Jewish people when their unique possession of the oracles of God and their unique place as the people of God came to an abrupt, horrible end. It must also be a period of history when it becomes abundantly clear that another group of people has inherited that responsibility that had belonged to the Jews, i.e. the task of representing and revealing God to the world, the responsibility of being a people for God in the world. (Cf. fuller notes on "The Coming of the Son of Man" in my Vol. II, pp. 439-441.)

He will . . . let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits. Barclay (*Matthew*, II,291) notes eloquently that

God's sternest judgment is when He takes out of our hands the task which He meant us to do. A man has sunk to his lowest level when he has become useless to God.

Gentile Christianity, however, has now become a distinct possibility, if Jesus pursues this to its logical conclusion. (See special study at the end of this volume: "The Participation of Gentiles in the Messianic Kingdom.) Even if each arrives thereat by slightly differing routes, Jesus' point is essentially the same as Isaiah's: those unique privileges enjoyed by Israel pre-eminently above all other people, God would strip from them, leaving Israel at the level of their neighbors, the Gentiles (Isa. 5:5f.).

J. Mercy's Victory (21:42)

To the shocked listeners, stunned by the inevitable but equally inconceivable conclusion (v. 41), Jesus now addresses Himself directly, looking them square in the eye (Luke 20:17). Was it a look of compassion and grief at their stupidity? Or was He searching for some evidence that they were softening? Or was He simply facing them down? Now they must have not only the inexorable logic of their own righteous sentence just pronounced by themselves, but also the Biblical justification of its rightness. *Did you never read in the Scriptures?* Jesus intends to demonstrate not only that the nation's chiefs were guilty of obstinacy toward God by turning a deaf ear to John the Baptist, but also that they were inexplicably insensitive to the very Bible of which they were the official expositors and which they claimed to protect by opposing Him.

Why, however, did Jesus quote Psalm 118:22f. as support? Any or all of the following suggestions may explain His intention. (Study how Peter made use of this same Psalm before the gathered council of Israel, Acts 4:11, and in his own writing, I Peter 2:7.)

1. He used this Psalm because it was fresh in people's mind, since the crowds had sung its "Hosannas" in His honor just two days before. (21:9 = Mark 11:9f.; Matt. 21:15.) Further, this Psalm's cryptic passage about the "Rejected Cornerstone" required an explanation that pointed out its fulfillment. In fact, the nation's leadership's proud refusal of God's Anointed and the common people's praise for Him is strikingly described in five CONSECUTIVE verses (Ps. 118:22-26).
2. Jesus cited this Psalm because it emphasizes once again God's flair for utilizing despised, unimpressive instruments to produce the most marvelous results. (See notes on 21:16.) Is Jesus despicable and unimpressive in the hierarchy's judgment? And yet can anyone do the miracles He does, unless God be with Him? Is His message spectacularly unmilitaristic and unsupportive of nationalistic Zealotism? Is His love for children, social outcasts and others without prestige in the social pyramid reminiscent of God's tenderness toward them? Are there ANY Messianic prophecies that point to this kind of Christ, even if other predictions seem to justify militaristic or materialistic expectations? If so, reconsider His claims!
3. He cited this Psalm to answer whatever mental reservations anyone entertained about the unquestionable rightness of the punitive justice meted out upon the vineyard's former caretakers. His citation completely refutes the astonished "May it never happen!" of those who considered it inconceivable (Luke 20:16). The Psalm endorsed the just sentence handed down by Jesus' listeners.
4. He cited this Psalm to show that God had known all along about Messiah's rejection by Israel's rabbinate, and that human blindness and perversity could not sidetrack God's program. Rather, by citing it, Jesus furnished a basis for unshaken confidence in Him even at the critical hours of His passion, since God's Word had foretold it and Jesus proved He personally foresaw and approved it. His suffering would be no accidental martyrdom, but a deliberate act carefully orchestrated by God.
5. He cited this Psalm, because, if the situation was as He described it, they had no suitable alternative interpretation of its words

(Luke 20:17). "What then is this that is written?" He could and must say.

6. He cited this Psalm in order to change the figure of the vineyard and the murdered son of the owner, because this figure does not tell the whole story. Admittedly, He might have narrated the son's resurrection, but it would have perhaps seemed to do violence to the story. However, a "Rejected Cornerstone" can be exalted to a glorious position. So, in essence, Jesus desired to imply the permanent victory of the slain son. In fact, how could *the stone which the builders rejected* (the slain son) *be made head of the corner*, if its function in the divine plan could somehow be thwarted by the permanent defeat of death? So, resurrection is implied.

Although this Psalm changes the figure from the responsible care of a vineyard to the constructing of a building, the central thought is the same: those responsible for the leadership of Israel would reject God's Messiah. (Paul, too, used both metaphors together: I Cor. 3:9.) Further, the Psalm has the added advantage of being parabolic:

1. *The stone . . . rejected* is the suffering Servant of Jahweh, the Messiah. Even if the Psalm's early singers could not discern all this, meditation on its meaning should have caused them to reflect on their sensitivity to ANYTHING God would do that would be missed or rejected through dullness, insensitivity or neglect. They had better have unassailable reasons for refusing anything or anyone claiming to be sent by God! They might commit the unpardonable mistake of rejecting the Stone laid by the Lord! *The stone rejected* finds its parallel in the rejected Son.
2. *The builders* are Israel's leaders, responsible to build up God's true Temple, God's Kingdom. Their rejecting the cornerstone implies that they were ignoring the architect's masterplan. Otherwise, would they not have seen its proper place in the blueprint? Consequently, the Psalmist foresaw that Israel's administrators would be attempting to build God's Kingdom according to their own concepts which had no place for that one odd-shaped stone, so they rejected it. The construction crew in this second figure is as unskilled as the tenants were short-sighted and wicked in that, even though the constructors claim to know how to build, they are nonetheless unable to discern the proper place for the most important Stone in this edifice! The hierarchy's blundering theories about how God's temple and Kingdom had to be, showed no place

for God's Son! These incompetents did not recognize the very Stone essential to their construction when they were standing there looking at it! So far were they from God's plans (Matt. 15:3-9 = Mark 7:6-9, 13).

3. *The stone . . . was made the head of the corner* where two major parts of the construction came together and to which the cornerstone, or keystone, gives solidity and permanence. Thus, what had seemed an odd, badly-cut, untrued stone was discovered to be not only most properly fitted but unquestionably essential to give stability, permanence and glory to the structure, to the embarrassment of the "expert" builders who had so confidently excluded it. Its importance and place in the building was gloriously vindicated. In fact, a *cornerstone*, to be one, must possess characteristics different from those common stones used elsewhere. And should not the Messiah, the Keystone in God's edifice, be different from the run-of-the-mill, politico-military chiefs at the head of the world's typical governments (Eph. 2:19-22)? The total vindication of the Stone's importance by its elevation to a position of honor finds its parallel in the swift and complete vindication of the vineyard owner's claims by his eviction and execution of the share-croppers, and by their replacement by more trustworthy tenants. In both cases this surprising reversal brings shame to those who refused the owner's plans. Jesus' death and dismissal by the nation's governors did not get rid of Him. Ironically, it fashioned Him for the very function He was to serve in God's plan, as perfect sacrifice and self-sacrificing High Priest. (Cf. Heb. 4:14—5:10; 7:15-28; 9:11-28.)
4. *This was from the Lord* after all. Who else but the Lord God could turn human rejection into the very means to arrive at His stated goals?! The Almighty God will not be hindered by apparent defeat due to the dullness of the human instruments with which He has chosen to work. In fact, when God would later succeed in elevating the Rejected Stone to its proper place in the construction, it would prove that He was still on His throne. *This was from the Lord* God who "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9f.).
5. *And it is marvelous in our eyes*. Here is the stupendous surprise and pleasure of the godly observers who exult over the unexpected, but nevertheless magnificent, final result of the Lord's course of action and workmanship, and they glorify Him for it. To the redeemed. . .

- a. It is *marvelous* that the Father should have singled out His only Son to be crushed in the incarnation, or that He should give Him victory out of death, or that He should establish His Kingdom on this basis so as to include former pagans and Hebrews, or that He should bless us with marvelous progress throughout human society everywhere by world evangelism.
- b. It is *marvelous* that the manger-born, crucified Nazarene, whom men despised, should, in reality, turn out to be none other than the reflection of the Father's brilliance, the Owner of the worlds, the Lord of angels, Maker of men and adored by kings (cf. Isa. 52:14f.).
- c. It is *marvelous* that our Lord should choose such unlikely methods to reach His goals and that ONLY THESE achieve them! Who would have thought that, by ordinary, patient teaching of concepts foreign to people's habitual tendencies, political methods and social doctrines, He could have accomplished so much?
- d. Our marveling is no less great when, by contrast to God's glorious results, we must also marvel at human stupidity that would have so long rejected the Stone or that should continue to be so biased against its own highest good.

But the degree of marveling by the saints is the degree of shock and embarrassment these theologians must have felt when, at the final siege of Jerusalem, it became abundantly clear that God had abandoned them. It measures the depth of their ignorance of the will and ways of God and underscores their gross lack of qualification to represent Him. (Cf. Acts 13:27; I Cor. 2:6-8.)

K. The Reading of the Sentence (21:43)

21:43 **Therefore I say unto you:** Jesus hurled their own sentence back in their face with terrific force. It must be asked in what sense the Israelites possessed the Kingdom of God, and in what sense *it shall be taken away from (them) and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*

1. *The kingdom of God* is the vineyard of Jesus' story, God's provision for carrying out His will on earth through a well-defined group of people, in the first case, Israel. All His revelations and providence were calculated to prepare this people for the climax

of His great self-revelation in Christ, the King who would establish *the Kingdom of God* (cf. Col. 1:13f.). The Lord means *kingdom of God* in the sense of "the privilege to be the unique people of God on earth, acknowledging His dominion and enjoying His special revelations, protection and care." This privilege, with the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, was offered to "you and your children and to all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Later Peter documented the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction by depicting Israel's former rights and obligations as now the possession and responsibility of Christ's Church (I Peter 2:4-10, cf. Rev. 5:9, 10).

2. *The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you.* Nevertheless, Jesus does not mean that no Jew could be saved. Rather, their exclusive, national right to God's privileged blessings has ended and now they must enter into God's Kingdom just as anyone else would through trusting obedience to Christ. They never had an automatic right to permanence in God's Kingdom merely because they were born in Abraham's family (Matt. 3:8-10; cf. John 8:33, 37, 39; Rom. 2:28f.; 4:12, 16). But, because they thought otherwise, they suffer the natural result, the intellectual blindness and emotional hardness toward the Gospel, which, as a people, they continue to harbor yet today. (Cf. Rom. 11:8-10, 25; I Thess. 2:15f.) While this is a judgment against the nation as a whole, it can never be valid for single individuals who, like all the early Christians prior to Cornelius' conversion, are Hebrews who believe in God's Messiah and so are saved. (Cf. Rom. 11:1; Acts 21:20.)
3. *The kingdom of God . . . shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* Even if stated in a minor key, that Israel should lose its privileged position means that the good tidings will be addressed to everyone! (Acts 13:46; 28:28; Gal. 3:26ff.; Eph. 2:11-22).

This total destruction of the Jewish monopoly on God, at which time the period of special grace for the Hebrews as a people would come to an end, and in which a new people of God would be clearly distinguished from that nation, could be no other moment than the disastrous Jewish war which ended in the massacre of thousands of Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem and the permanent devastation of the temple, the end of the Levitical worship as formerly known. At this same time it became increasingly apparent to the world that, whereas the Church of Christ had inherited the true foundations of Old Testament religion and grown up within the national framework

of the Israelitish people, it was nevertheless a quite different spiritual force to be dealt with. But this new *nation* of which Jesus here speaks was not merely a new political entity, a new world government, similar to the Roman empire (cf. Rev. 13), but an international community, a Kingdom made up of spiritual Israel, Jewish and Gentile Christians all dedicated to the will of God and each other, producing the results God had always longed for: love for God and man, faithful obedience and sincere righteousness. (Cf. I Peter 2:9f.; contrast Exod. 19:5f.; Cf. Gal. 3:26ff.; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 3:10f.)

No darker heresy could be imagined than Jesus' shocking assertion that Israel as such could no longer be considered the sole depository of divine truth nor the prime (if not unique) object of divine attention, or that any other nation could satisfy God's requirements quite as well as that people He had always considered His private jewel. But if Jesus can deal such a deadly body-blow to Jewish provincialism, what would He say to American civil religion that claims to see in American national history the embodiment of God's unique blessing, but fails to recognize American blindness to many of God's most fundamental claims on life? Or what if the new people of God, the Church, fail to *bring forth the fruits thereof*? Is God obligated to maintain dead timber (Matt. 3:10)? Has not His procedure always been to remove an unbelieving generation and raise up a people that would obey (Exod. 32:9f., 14; Num. 20:12; 14:11-35; Rev. 2:4f.)?

L. Double Punishment Inflicted (21:44)

Although important manuscripts of Matthew do not contain this verse and even if the Apostle did not record it, still Jesus made this threat (Luke 20:18). While it appears to have been inserted by a scribe from Luke, three reasons suggest that Matthew actually could have written it, as the other manuscripts testify:

1. Two words are changed: Luke adds "Everyone" and has "that stone" instead of "this stone." Were this verse a direct transcription from Luke, these variations at least indict the scribe of carelessness. The simpler hypothesis is that Matthew himself simply recorded the words differently.
2. Had a scribe inserted it from Luke, the better place to insert it would have been immediately after verse 42, i.e. after Jesus' citation of Psalm 118:22 where the allusion to "the rejected cornerstone" would have been clearer because more direct, as Luke actually has it (Luke 20:17f.).

3. The textual tradition is significantly divided, i.e. not all the best manuscripts are against considering verse 44 as belonging to Matthew. However, the United Bible Societies' Editorial Committee enclose the verse in double square brackets to indicate their opinion that it is an accretion to the text, "yet because of the antiquity of the reading and its importance in the textual tradition, the Committee decided to retain it in the text" (*A Textual Commentary*, 58).

21:44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust. Is Jesus talking about two kinds of punishment for the wicked, i.e. remedial and final? Or is He referring to two distinct time factors, i.e. an early stumbling and a later judgment? In what sense are we to interpret what seems to be a mixed metaphor, i.e., how can a stone lying in the path of the incautious over which they stumble become something that, in turn, falls upon them?

The answer to these queries may be found, not in the attempt to decipher Jesus' metaphors, but in asking a better question: where did He get His language? In fact, both Isaiah and Daniel had used similar expressions. Did Jesus borrow from them?

JESUS (Matt. 21:44; Luke 20:18)

He that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces.

but on whomsoever it shall fall,

it will scatter him as dust.

ISAIAH 8:13-15

The Lord Almighty . . . will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.

Many of them will stumble;
they will fall and be broken
they will be snared and captured.

DANIEL 2:44, 34f.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. . . . a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

This impression is even more convincing when seen in combination with Jesus' citation of the other "Rejected Stone" passage, Psalm 118:22f. Since the Lord was already quoting Scripture, it should not be thought strange that, after casting Isaiah's Vineyard Song in a new form, He continue to weave these three great Messianic texts together into one great revelation. (Study Peter's combination of Ps. 118:22 and Isa. 8:14f. adding Isa. 28:16 in I Peter 2:4-8.) If the Lord is indeed combining these great prophecies, the final effect of the combination is breathtaking!

1. *He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces*, interpreted in the Isaianic context, means that Israel in general would break itself on the Lord Almighty. However, hope was held out for anyone who would regard Him as holy and fear Him. While the nation would break itself, He would be a sanctuary for individuals. If Isaiah's later revelation (28:15f.) bears on our understanding, we see that God placed this precious stone on man's path so he could build upon it as upon a solid foundation. Consequently, *he who falls upon this stone* has deliberately tried to ignore its presence in his path and so suffers the consequence by breaking himself upon its solid reality. But Jesus applies to Himself this Old Testament language! He does so with propriety, because He is God in the flesh. This means that, after our contact with Christ, it is quite impossible to swagger on as if His massive presence had not staggered us, or as if He were not the only basis upon which our lives must finally be grounded. Christ, in the days of His humiliation, had none of the world's usual attributes to qualify Him for prestige, position and power (Isa. 52:14; 53:2f.). Rather, He was a cause of stumbling (Matt. 11:6), a great Stone set in place to cause the fall of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). Consequently, there was nothing remedial in this punishment, since *he that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces*. Even if this fall is wholly accidental, it is nonetheless real and fatal.
2. *On whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust*. This vigorous language expresses Jesus' view of the sweeping, inexorable omnipotence of His Kingdom. If we have correctly surmised that our Lord is utilizing catch phrases from Daniel, then His words glow with new splendor. In fact, in Daniel 2:44 the great Stone that smashed four mighty ancient empires into oblivion and became itself a perpetual power on earth is the Kingdom of the Son of

Man. (Cf. Dan. 2 with Dan. 7.) Originally, Jewish readers would have assumed that Daniel's revelations described Messiah's total victory over Gentile nations only. But, as they were to learn at Jerusalem in 70 A.D., even the unbelievers in Israel were also meant. God had revealed His Son's total victory over ALL unbelieving nations (Rev. 13:7f., 12ff., 16; 19:18)! Even if *whomsoever* may well include "every tribe, people, tongue and nation, even all who dwell on the earth" that stumble over Christ, it is also intensely individual. This theme of individual responsibility will be developed further in the following parable (Matt. 22:11-14). Although God had worked with nations before, His present dealings regard individuals far more than before, even if they were never excluded from His earlier concerns. (Cf. Ezra 8:18; Jer. 31:30; Deut. 24:16.) Nothing—no nation nor individual—can stop God's Son from completing His appointed mission.

Upon reflection, then, we see that the great Stone of stumbling in Isaiah 8:14f. and the mighty Crushing Stone unhewn by human hands of Daniel 2:34f., 44 both stand behind Jesus' terminology. Further, in synopsis with Psalm 118:22f. and by His insistent repetition of the key word "Stone," the Lord shows that the Rejected Stone, the Crushing Stone and the Stumbling Stone are to be identified with God and His Kingdom. If so, then because these figures are to be thought of as literary parallels of the Rejected Son of the Vineyard Owner, He means that this Rejected Son is somehow deity and ruler of God's Kingdom!

In this way Jesus has accomplished two ends:

1. He conclusively answered the authorities' original test of His right to teach: He is Himself the Rejected Son, the Rejected Stone, the Stone of Stumbling and the Crushing Stone, i.e. the Ruler of God's Kingdom, therefore God incarnate and fully possessed of all necessary authority. But He had not answered their challenge in such a way as to furnish them merely more material to criticize. His method left them unable instantly to debate His terms. Rather, —and this explains why His connections may seem less clear to the logic of westerners less familiar with that Old Testament language in which His original audience was steeped—He gave them an answer to ponder. By using familiar Biblical language, He led these exponents of Old Testament studies to reflect on His meaning and perhaps to be induced to grasp the hope expressed in Isaiah

28:16: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."

2. His illuminating combination of Old Testament prophecies should open the eyes of all His enemies to the awful consequences of attempting to eliminate Him. God's Word, in short, had already vividly pictured their destruction. Sadly, however, history has now completely vindicated Jesus' applications of these texts, since the Jewish nation was *broken in pieces* precisely because of its lack of cohesive unity behind the Messiah of God, its misunderstanding of its own role in God's plan and its materialistic nationalism and its consequent failure to appreciate the spiritual character of the Kingdom. These led it to disaster in the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, Jesus winnowed this chaff (Matt. 3:12; see my "Coming of the Son of Man," *Matthew*, II after Matt. 10). Nevertheless, His meaning does not deadend here, since ALL His enemies must fail and all forms of opposition shall taste defeat! (I Cor. 15:24f.; Matt. 22:44 = Ps. 110:1; Luke 19:27; II Thess. 1:5-10 and the total message of Revelation.)

So, double punishment awaits those who presume to reject Jesus: they break themselves upon Him and He gives them their just deserts both now and in eternity. No empire however great can withstand the power of our Lord Jesus Christ! What a gloriously comforting word for embattled saints!

M. Jesus' Story Hit Home (21:45)

21:45 For **chief priests and Pharisees** see notes on 21:23. **When (they) heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.** It is not impossible that they had already begun to feel the impact of His stories earlier. In fact, when the justice of terrible vengeance upon the tenant farmers came to light, someone had recoiled in horror, "May it never happen!" (Luke 20:16). By this time, says Matthew, the blast waves of *his parables* had begun to hit home with terrific force, convincing them that, psychologically, at least, they had been unseated. Because particularly they had sneered at John the Baptist, by the Parable of the Two Sons they stood accused of flagrant disobedience toward God (21:28-32). Further, since they had inherited the "duly authorized" leadership of Israel, unquestionably they were

responsible for the care of God's vineyard, Israel, so they now saw themselves depicted as the murderous husbandmen of Jesus' story (21:33-41). The collective message of His illustrations, therefore, had just indicted them of stubborn, continued rebellion against God. How could they be anything but infuriated?

They perceived that he spake of them. How much of what we understand of Jesus' meaning did they grasp? Was their perception prompted by the accusations of a guilty conscience? Was it not rather born of a wily, political instinct of self-preservation? Anyone so thoroughly skewered by so clear a story alluding to the well-known history of their own people could not but get the point. But since they rejected the premises on which His argument was based, i.e. that He is God's Son and final revelation, what would His scarcely veiled warnings have meant to them? Would they have admitted to rebelling against Him whom they considered to be their own God? We too must beware lest we assume that understanding the Lord's words is equal to submission to His instruction.

N. The Clergy Fumbles Its Responsibility (21:46)

21:46 And when they sought to lay hold on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet. Despite their fury, they struggle helplessly with fear. The same indecisiveness that blocked any firm commitment regarding the ministry of John the Baptist also frustrates any determined, open action against Jesus now (cf. 14:5). Here is written their intellectual and moral damnation. In fact, if they grieved for the perversion of true religion, if they burned within for the scattering of Israel's flock, if they were angered at the deep injustice of the deception they were convinced Jesus practiced upon innocent followers, there could be no halting, no hesitation; only decisive action, regardless of immediate, personal consequences.

Ironically, they began instantly to feel the truth of His prediction! (Luke 20:18). They could not even touch Him right then without serious self-damage. Foolishly, they postponed their daylight attack in favor of a secret night arrest in the vain hope to avoid stumbling over the Stone in His story.

They took him for a prophet. (See notes on 21:11.) This, then, is the measure of the crowd's responsibility to trust Jesus totally and render Him joyful obedience and loyalty. While this is a good opinion of Christ and one that could induce them to confess His true Messiahship, and while it held His enemies at bay for awhile, thus stalling

any opposition until His purpose was served, this opinion would not lead to salvation unless Israel surrendered to Him. In fact, for far too many the phrase, *they took him for a prophet*, meant nothing more than "Jesus was a popular preacher." Once against Matthew closes a major event by underlining Jesus' prophetic office. (Cf. 13:57 notes; 21:11.)

Bested at their own game of "Hard Questions," hemmed in by their own ineptness and embarrassed by Jesus' precise scoring, they see no exit where they may gracefully bow out. Purple with rage but completely helpless, they must endure another of His fascinating, but lethal, stories.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what general context is the parable of the wicked vine-growers told? Tell the immediate background or circumstance in which Jesus told this story. Indicate:
 - a. the facts that took place just before this parable; then tell
 - b. the broad historical background which furnished Jesus material for His story.
2. According to Luke, to whom did Jesus address this parable?
3. List the five things the vineyard's owner did to assure himself that everything would go well for his vineyard. Tell why each detail was important.
4. Who in the Old Testament had already used these same symbols adapted here by Jesus? To what did the original author(s) of these symbols refer? Where may a closely similar version of this parable be found? In what respects does Jesus' version differ from it?
5. What did the owner of the vineyard do after doing everything he could for the positive development of his vineyard? How is this significant for the parable's meaning?
6. Everything in the parable leads us to believe that the owner of the vineyard expected only one thing from his vineyard. What is it?
7. When was it that the owner began to send his representatives to the vineyard? That is, in what season?
8. How many agents were sent by the owner to the vine-growers?
9. How were the owner's agents treated once they arrived at the vineyard?
10. Who was the last agent sent by the owner?

11. What was the owner's hope that caused him to send this latter agent?
12. What was the reaction of the vine-growers when they became aware of the arrival of the owner's last agent? (a) What was their reasoning? (b) What did they do?
13. With what question does Jesus terminate the parable and point to its moral?
14. What was the answer Jesus' listeners gave?
 - a. What would happen to the murderous vine-growers?
 - b. What would happen to the vineyard?
 - c. What would happen in regard to the fruit of the vineyard?
15. What Psalm is cited by Jesus in support of His position? When had this same Psalm been cited earlier in this same Last Week of Jesus?
16. What is the correct application of the Psalm quoted by Jesus?
 - a. What is "the stone rejected"?
 - b. Who are the builders who rejected it?
 - c. What does it mean to become "the head of the corner"?
 - d. What importance does this expression have: "this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?
 - e. In what way is Jesus' resurrection implied by His citing this Psalm?
17. What terrible prophecies does Jesus make at the conclusion of this parable? Have they been fulfilled yet? If so, when and where?
18. Where in the Old Testament had these prophecies already been suggested, if not stated outright?
19. Explain the remark about the great stone of stumbling and crushing.
20. How did the authorities react to Jesus' words?
21. What was the people's attitude toward Jesus? How did this attitude block the rulers?
22. Show how this parable is further amplified and explained by the parable of the slighted wedding invitation, which follows it. Show what features are common to both parables.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO OUTLINES

- Section 57. (continued) Jesus Meets Challenges of Authority
- D. The Parable of the Slighted Marriage Invitations (22:1-14)
- Section 58. Jesus Answers Captious Questions (22:15-46)
- A. The Question of Tribute to Caesar (22:15-22)
 - B. The Question of the Resurrection (22:23-33)
 - C. The Question of the Great Commandment (22:34-40)
 - D. The Question Regarding the Son of David (22:41-46)

STUDY OUTLINES

AN INVITATION TO JOY (22:1-14)

- I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (22:1-7) "To the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9)
 - A. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (22:1-4) "The goodness and long-suffering of God" (Cf. Rom. 11:22)
 - B. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (22:5, 6)
 - 1. Crass indifference (22:5)
 - 2. Outright brutality toward the king's messengers (22:6)
 - C. God's punishment of the Jews (22:7) "the well-deserved severity of the punishment"
- II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE GENTILES (22:8-10) "And also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9)
 - A. The undeserved goodness of the invitation (22:8)
 - B. God's graciousness to the Gentiles (22:9f.)
- III. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH INDIVIDUALS AT JUDGMENT (22:11-13) "To each according to his deeds"
 - A. The presumptuous gall of the hypocrite (22:11)
 - B. The gentle request for an explanation unanswered (22:12)
 - C. The ultimate damnation of hypocrites (22:13)
- IV. THE BOTTOM LINE IN GOD'S DEALINGS (22:14)

THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL QUESTION:

IS JESUS A REBEL? (22:15-22)

- I. A QUESTION TO TRAP THE TEACHER (22:15-17)
 - A. The Plot (22:15, 16a)

- B. The Flattery (22:16)
- C. The Crucial Question
- II. A COUNTER-TRAP (22:18-20)
 - A. The Trappers Unmasked (22:18)
 - B. The Counter-Trap Executed (22:19, 20)
- III. THE THEOLOGY OF DOUBLE TAXATION (22:21)
 - Jesus' Masterful Solution: Dual Citizenship
- IV. THE TRAPPERS GIVE UP (22:22)

**THE DOCTRINAL-EXEGETICAL QUESTION:
IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? (22:23-33)**

- I. THE PROBLEM: Sadducees affirm: "There is no resurrection, no life after death." (22:23-28)
 - A. The legal basis: the brother-in-law code (22:24)
 - B. The hypothetical case (22:25-27)
 - C. The resulting conundrum (22:28)
- II. THE SOLUTION: Jesus exposes the cause of these materialists' ignorance (22:29-32)
 - A. Proposition: "You are wrong because of fundamental ignorance (22:29a)
 - B. Explanation of His accusation (22:29b)
 - 1. Ignorance of Scripture that reveals life after death as true
 - 2. Ignorance of God's power to make resurrection possible
 - C. Proofs:
 - 1. Your ignorance of God's power blinds you to the possibility that the resurrection world shall be different from this one: heaven is not earth. (22:30)
 - 2. Your ignorance of God's Scripture blinds you to that text of all texts that reveals that God is still worshipped by LIVING men! (22:31f.)
- III. THE RESULT: Jesus' masterful rebuttal inspires praise. (22:33)

**THE SPECULATIVE QUESTION:
THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT (22:34-40)**

- I. SITUATION: Pharisees test Jesus' rabbinical credentials with the problem: What kind of commandment is great in the law? (22:34-36)

II. JESUS' RESPONSE: (22:37-40)

- A. First table of the Law:
 - 1. What we are to do: "Love"
 - 2. Whom we are to love: "the Lord our God"
 - 3. How we are to love Him: "wholeheartedly"
- B. Second table of the Law:
 - 1. What we are to do: "Love"
 - 2. Whom we are to love: "our neighbor"
 - 3. How we are to love him: "as ourselves."

THE QUESTION TO CONTEMPLATE:
THE MESSIAH'S TRUE NATURE (22:41-46)

- I. A COMMON CONVICTION: "Son of David" (22:41, 42)
- II. A CORRECTING QUOTATION: Psalm 110:1 (22:43-44)
- III. A CRUCIAL QUESTION: "If David's Lord, how then his Son?" (22:45)
- IV. ALL QUESTIONING CANCELLED (22:46)

SECTION 57

JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES OF AUTHORITY:
THREE PARABLES OF WARNING
D. THE PARABLE OF THE SLIGHTED
MARRIAGE INVITATIONS

TEXT: 22:1-14

22:1 And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, -and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 But the

king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment: 12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few chosen.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is this story a "parable" in the modern, accepted sense of the word or an allegory? What other parables of Jesus help you to decide this?
- b. How does this parable carry forward concepts expressed in other parables Jesus told on this occasion?
- c. How does this parable answer the original question of the authorities "By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?"
- d. How do you account for the fact that God's messengers gathered "all whom they found, both bad and good"? Is not God interested in gaining only good people?
- e. Why was the king perfectly within his rights to react with anger toward those citizens who rejected his invitation to a wedding feast?
- f. Again, how would you respond to someone who believes that the king's punishment of the man without the wedding garment was too severe in relation to his offense?
- g. When Jesus concluded the story with "Many are called, but few are chosen," do you think He meant this as a simple observation about facts in the story itself, or as a final warning, or what?
- h. In contrast to the king's apparent harshness, how is his patience and mercy everywhere evident in this story?
- i. Do you see any historical allusion(s) in this parable? If so, what are they?

- j. Identify the critical moment in the king's dealings with his subjects first invited. How is this crisis similar to that in the parable of the wicked husbandmen? How is the crisis resolved in a similar way in both cases?
- k. How does this parable reveal the overall plan of God for the government of His Kingdom?

PARAPHRASE

Jesus began again to teach them using illustrations: "The way God runs His Kingdom may be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. He sent his servants out to summon those who had been invited to the marriage feast, but they did not want to come. So he sent some more servants the second time, urging, 'Tell those who have been invited, Look here! I have prepared my dinner: my cattle and fattened livestock are butchered. Everything is ready, so come on to the wedding banquet!' The rest grabbed the king's servants, brutally mistreated them and finally assassinated them. This infuriated the king, so he dispatched his army to destroy those assassins and set their city on fire. Then he turned to his servants, 'The wedding is quite ready, but those invited did not deserve the honor. So go to the street corners and invite to the marriage feast everyone you encounter there.' So those servants went out into the streets and brought together everyone they could find, bad and good alike. Finally, the wedding hall was packed with dinner guests.

"However, when the king came in to inspect his guests at the table, he noticed a man who had not dressed himself in a wedding garment. He addressed him, 'Friend, how is it that you came in here without proper wedding attire?' But the man could say nothing. Therefore the king ordered his attendants, 'Tie up his hands and feet and throw him outside where it is dark and where people weep in hopeless regret and grit their teeth in futile anger!' You see, even though many are invited, few are selected."

SUMMARY

By means of the prophets God had invited Israel to enjoy the festal joy of the Messianic Kingdom. However, by indifference and positive hostility, the nation forfeited its privileged position. Worse, they would finally be severely punished by a patient and justly angry God.

At this juncture, God would enlarge the Kingdom's outreach, offering its privileges to all people alike. And yet, none may presume to ignore the conditions upon which their participation in His grace is permitted. Otherwise, these too will be rejected. Final selection is not based upon God's invitation alone, but upon every person's submission to the will of the King!

NOTES

I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (22:1-7)

22:1 **And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying.** Because our present chapter divisions may not represent Matthew's intended subject division at all, it is not unlikely that he intended to connect the Parable of the King's Feast with the hierarchy's malevolent intentions stated by our author in 21:45f. If so, the Lord addressed this parable to an enraged hierarchy to warn them of the destiny their malice deserved. So, Matthew's expression, *spake again*, points to a new start in Jesus' teaching, as if an interruption had stopped the flow of His instruction. This break may have been nothing more than the increasing agitation among the leaders because their attempt to arrest Him had aborted. Seeing their design entirely frustrated by Jesus' popularity, they lapse into a sullen silence, which permitted Him to *speak again in parables to them*. *In parables* does not necessarily point to more than one story forthcoming, as if we should chop the present parable in two or three parts, or accuse Matthew of inaccuracy, since he reports only one story. It just indicates the rhetorical category He chose as He began again after the interruption, i.e. "parables," not some other form of teaching. With Lenski (*Matthew*, 848) we must sense the unity of thought that flows through every part of the parable, making it one cohesive picture not to be thought of as a pasting together of several unrelated stories. This story consists of three distinct parts, but each one presents one important phase of God's dealings with the human race:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. God's dealings with Israel | Study how this parable carries |
| 2. God's period of mercy to the Gentiles | forward ideas expressed in the stories that precede it. (Notes on |
| 3. God's treatment of individuals at judgment | 21:33) |

Jesus had already used an illustration closely parallel to this story here, i.e. the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24). Details differ, but the main thrust is the same.

Although Jesus' language is decidedly parabolic, His thrust is not at all unlike the Revelation He gave in apocalyptic form to John (Rev. 1:1). In fact, Revelation uses apocalyptic imagery in almost parabolic ways to illustrate old, familiar truths, one of which is the precious joy promised to "those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9), an event sadly missed by those who in our story flouted the king's invitation.

22:2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king. (See notes on 18:23.) By comparing God's Kingdom to a certain king, the Lord drew immediate attention to God's procedures. God's government is broadly parallel to the policy followed by the king in our story.

Who made a marriage feast. In oriental practice the engagement ceremony usually occurred many months before the actual wedding. Although the couple are considered married, they do not, however, live together as husband and wife until after the rite of marriage is celebrated by bringing the bride to the groom's home. This happy occasion is celebrated by a *marriage feast* to which his friends are invited. (See notes on 1:18; cf. 25:1-10; Judg. 14:10-20; Gen. 29:22-30.)

For his son. At first glance *his son* appears to be a minor figure in Jesus' story, because he is not mentioned again. But the slighting of the feast insults and embarrasses *the son* as much as the king. But that *his son* is no mere secondary figure is understood contextually: both parables touch on people's treatment of God's Son (21:33-46; 22:1-14). In the previous story He was pictured as nothing less than the Son of the Owner of Israel (the vineyard owner's son). Here He is the Son of the King!

22:3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast. Before our story opens, the people in question have already been invited to the feast, since the perfect passive participle (*toš keklēménous*) indicates that the present announcement was to be given to those who already had a standing invitation to the feast. Two invitations were considered normal custom: the first, general call that announced the forthcoming wedding banquet, and the second, special call to attend the banquet itself. The former apparently preceded the latter by time sufficient for both host and guests to make appropriate preparations. Food must be procured and

prepared, accommodations for the banquet itself must be readied, servants must be organized for serving it. Guests must attire themselves suitably for the occasion. Perhaps gifts were purchased for the celebrations (Esth. 2:17f.). Then, when the allotted time for everyone's preparations had concluded, a second call was sounded to assemble the guests. (Cf. Esth. 6:14.) Not only was it an appropriate reminder, but it signalled the festival's proper beginning, so there would be no embarrassing badly-timed arrivals marring the expected joy.

In saying *his servants*, does Jesus mean the Old Testament prophets, as in His previous parable? (Cf. 21:34, 36.) Since this parable's main point centers around immediate entrance into the Kingdom, and not the long-range preparation for it illustrated in the previous story, it would not seem that Jesus had the ministry of the ancient prophets in view. Theirs was a ministry which would have more to do with the original announcements of the coming Kingdom in what for them would have been yet distant future. Contrarily, for John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, "the Kingdom is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:14f.; Matt. 10:7) is the ringing challenge whereby these called the nation to prepare for and participate in the Kingdom immediately to begin.

The king sent forth his servants to call, not just anyone but **them that were bidden to the marriage feast**. Evidently the king had invited only those citizens of attainment suitable to be considered worthy guests at a royal wedding. This is to be a feast offered by their king in which they, as loyal citizens, should feel highly honored to take part. This was the social event of a lifetime, the chance to attend a princely wedding feast, a time of national celebration! But more critical is the fact that this is the invitation of a KING, not merely that of a friend that can be taken less seriously. He is a host not to be snubbed.

To the Hebrews listening to Jesus this imagery spoke volumes, because Israel had a standing invitation (or "call") to participate in the great Messianic banquet of God. Instructive is the number of times (6) some form of the word "call" (*kaléo, klētoi*) appears in this episode, a fact that underlines Jesus' concept of "the calling of God" and the responsibilities attendant upon those who are "called." The entire history of Israel was the outworking of God's call of Abraham (Heb. 11:8) and the conquered national calling (*the klēsis tou theou*, Rom. 11:29). So it is not surprising that Jesus should speak to a "called people" in these terms. In any other story involving

invitations to a party “call” is but a normal word for “summoning or inviting.” But here it is a pointed reference to the previously-established spiritual relationship Israel enjoyed with God. Further, for Israel, participation at the great banquet of God would have commanded the highest claim on their time (cf. Isa. 25:6ff.). It was a feast to which they undoubtedly supposed themselves to have most right. It should have been a foregone conclusion that they should have longed to participate.

Presumably the expected guests had already committed themselves to attend the banquet. Otherwise, the king would not have wasted time on preparations for them. Now, right at banquet time *they would not come*. Literally, they willed not to come (*ouk éthelon eltheîn*)! Because they were the elite, they had been summoned, while others were not. Although they were the nobles of his realm and, of all people, should have been most ready for the feast, ironically, they are the least ready, because their will is dead—set against going!

Israel had been invited for centuries and had declared its intention to honor God’s Christ, but now that He had arrived, they deliberately and defiantly refused Him. (An old story: Rom. 10:21.) *They would not* echo the disobedience of the polite son and the willful reaction of the unruly son (*ou thélo*, 21:28-32). The unrepentant, uncomplaining spirit of the hierarchy is lurking just below the surface of this image (Matt. 23:37: *ouk ethelésate*). For Jesus, therefore, the cause of moral evil lies in the human will, in man’s lack of desire for God and goodness. (Cf. John 5:40; 7:17.)

22:4 **Again he sent forth other servants.** *Again* now means for the third time: they had already been invited, then called and now called again. Whereas a normal monarch would have boiled with indignation at this affront and unleashed his fury instantly, THIS sovereign surprises us with incredibly patient mercy. Israel had heard repeated calls from God (Rom. 10:18-21). Here again, as in the preceding parable, God’s long-suffering is depicted, especially in the many servants sent by the Owner of the vineyard (21:34-36). Numerous *other servants* would be commissioned and sent to call Israel into the Kingdom before the fatal deadline would pass. Does the Lord have in mind here the ministry of the Twelve?

There is an intense urgency in the king’s latest message: **I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed**, because meat, once dressed, begins to deteriorate without refrigeration. *My oxen and fatlings* speaks of the magnitude of his preparations for

the vast crowd anticipated. *Fatlings* are not some special kind of animal, but those animals, like sheep or goats, that have fed a special diet to be butchered for food. *All things are ready* conjures up loaded tables of food and drink just waiting for the guests' arrival. All the guests had to do was *come to the feast*. Matthew Henry (V, 312) caught the true spirit of this *marriage feast*. In effect, God was offering Israel:

All the privileges of church-membership, and all the blessings of the new covenant, pardon of sin, the favour of God, peace of conscience, the promises of the gospel, and all the riches contained in them, access to the throne of grace, the comforts of the Spirit, and a well-grounded hope of eternal life. These are the preparations for this feast, a heaven upon earth now, and a heaven in heaven shortly. God has prepared it in his counsel, in his covenant. It is a dinner. . . .

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE AND REJECTION (22:5, 6)

22:5 **But they made light of it** (*amelésantes*): literally, "they neglected it, did not care about it, did not think about it, were negligent"). Here is the peril of simple neglect and not putting first what must be supreme. (Cf. Heb. 2:3.) They simply acted as if nothing had happened, as if the highest royal invitation were not the opportunity of a lifetime to be seized instantly with pleasure and joyous excitement. **They went their ways, one to his own farm, and another to his merchandise.** There is a proper time to consider partying clearly secondary to business responsibilities. But THIS was no common party. These self-centered people put their own personal interests and concerns, their own enrichment and comfort ahead of the happiness and honor of their KING!

The trifles that keep people from properly hearing God's call are often not in themselves evil. This farmer went out to his fields, while the shop-keeper felt the pull of his store, ledgers and sales. Neither one disappeared for a lost week-end in self-indulgence or immoral affairs. Rather, each hurried off to the commendable job of diligent administration of their respective businesses. The unseen treasures of eternity have little appeal for the person who is thoroughly pre-occupied with the trifles and trinkets of time that so insistently claim his attention. Life's tragedy consists in letting the attraction of other trifling things, however good and justifiable in themselves, pull one

away from the one supreme opportunity God holds out to man. Because they openly preferred their own possessions and occupations to the King's royal hospitality, they were showing a contemptuous neglect and indifference to the King's invitation. (Cf. Luke 14:17-20.) This is why they will suffer appropriately. Even before anyone goes to the length of murdering God's messengers, the majority of God's people had already grievously offended Him by making light of His gracious invitation.

22:6 And the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully and killed them. This is not merely murder, but also high treason against their King! Because these messengers came not in their own name, but in that of their King, this cowardly violence must be considered as directed against him who sent them. (Cf. Matt. 10:40ff.; 23:34f.; Luke 10:16; John 12:48; 13:20; 15:18-21.) In the previous parable the ecclesiastical authorities in Israel were represented as bullying and brutalizing God's messengers (21:35). Perhaps here too we should see these barbarous butchers as standing for the same hostile authorities. While the farmers and tradesmen merely ignored God's men, the persecuting spirit of self-righteous religionists and those who used them for a smokescreen mercilessly slew them. Is this an impossible scene? Critics who doubt that God's representatives would ever have been so ill-treated must be led to see how common this deep-rooted tendency is. Which of God's faithful servants has NOT the human race mistreated (Acts 7:52)?

Here Jesus does not indicate His own imminent death as clearly as He did in the previous story (21:37-39). This emphasis on the fate of the latter messengers warns His followers that those who participate in giving men God's message will suffer for their faithfulness to Him. (Cf. Rev. 11:3-10; Phil. 1:27-29; II Thess. 1:5; Acts 14:22.) This prediction was amply fulfilled in the persecutions of the early Church incited by the Jews. (Cf. Acts 4:1ff.; 5:18ff., 40; 6:11ff.; 7:54ff.; 8:1-3; 12:1-4; 13:50; 14:2-5, 19; 20:19-23; 21:27ff.) Nor was this unparalleled in Jewish history. (II Chron. 30:1-11; see notes on 21:35-39.)

22:7 But the king was wroth: on the wrath of God pictured by Jesus, see Luke 14:21; 21:23; John 3:36; Matt. 18:34. This representation mirrors the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). This theme receives fuller development in the Epistles (Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 13:4f.; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Heb. 3:11; Rev. 6:16f.; 11:18, etc.) Such wrath is

perfectly just, because no one can turn down the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth with impunity!

He sent his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Some consider this phrase to be evidence that Jesus or Matthew departed from the illustration to insert a literal picture of the reality, because what monarch preoccupied with feverish wedding preparations would launch a war? But such a comment misses the grandeur of THIS king. Rather, what truly great king, even in the midst of ordering wedding preparations, organizing hundreds of servants, listing exquisite menus and redecorating banquet halls, could not merely pronounce that one royal order which would mobilize his battle-ready troops and start them instantly marching against the offenders? It is too small a view of the earthly king in Jesus' story to believe he had not already determined and prepared to deal effectively with *those murderers*. Thus, the glory, omniscience and grandeur of God radiate through this king's efficiency.

This is a clear prediction of the Roman Legions under Vespasian and Titus as God's instruments whereby those guilty of murdering God's messengers would finally be brought to justice and whereby *their city*, Jerusalem, would be *burned*, the very thing feared by Israel's government. (See notes on Matt. 24; cf. Josephus, *Wars*, V,VI; John 11:48.)

In retrospect, the historical reality alluded to here reveals the magnanimous patience of God the King! In fact, He gave these Jewish leaders 40 more years' respite after they murdered His Son and began to persecute His Church. Some priests did repent (Acts 6:7) and some Pharisees believed (Acts 15:5), but tragically few in contrast to the majority. Finally, in 70 A.D. He punished *those murderers and burned their city*.

In what sense could it be said of God that the Roman legions were *his armies*? Undoubtedly it is correct to argue that our God is the Lord of hosts, both heavenly and earthly, and that He can mobilize human troops in the field as easily as He does His heavenly angels, whether men think they are serving God by so doing or not. (Cf. Isa. 10:5-15; 13:5, 17; 44:28—45:13; esp. v. 4; Jer. 51:11, 20-24, 29.) And yet there are intriguing passages in Josephus where even Titus the Roman general is led to appreciate his instrumental role in the hand of God who punished Jerusalem for its wickedness. (*Wars*, VI, 1,5; 9,1; V, 12,4.) Josephus himself fully believed this (*Wars* VI, 2,1; VI,4,5; IV,5,3): "I cannot but think that it was because God

had doomed this city to destruction, as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire, that he cut off these its great defenders. . . .”

II. GOD’S DEALINGS WITH THE GENTILES (22:8-10)

22:8 **Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready.** God has completed all necessary preparations and furnished all necessary inducements to participate. Shall only man be unready? There could be no doubt that all were welcome to share in His bounty, **but they that were bidden were not worthy.** (Cf. Luke 14:21, 24.)

1. The people invited *were not worthy*, not because they lacked a certain rare quality, but because they haughtily disregarded their lord’s generous offers. His rule interfered with their own self-interest.
2. They are judged as they had judged (cf. 7:2). Did they consider the king’s invitation not worth their time and interest? Now their own sentence is handed down: they had proved themselves not worthy by the judgment they pronounced upon the king’s graciousness.
3. The irony of the situation is that they probably considered themselves highly worthy, so worthy, in fact, that they could arrogantly permit themselves the liberty of trifling with the invitation of him who was altogether worthy of their fellowship, praise and joyous sharing, their king. Many today cannot conceive that God can do without them and yet achieve His goals.
4. This judgment, *not worthy*, concerns highly religious people. Religious forms without a heart of love for God prove to be deadly hardening to a person’s sensitivity to God. In fact, the formalist wrongly assumes his own indispensability to God just because he performs the required ritual.
5. This judgment by the Lord of all the earth should become the working philosophy of all prophecy students. Modern Israel, i.e. the unbelieving, unrepentant nation, is too often exalted in prophecy schemes, as if she were the precious jewel of God or as if nothing had ever been revealed that would compromise her privileged position in the determinate counsel of God. But how can men continue to argue, by implication if not overtly, that “Israel is worthy” when the King gives this sentence: “They that were bidden were NOT WORTHY!”?

But if *they were not worthy*, why had the king invited them in the first place? Could he not have foreseen this refusal?

1. The king wanted to invite them irrespective of their worthiness or merit, because they were his people. In the story they proved *not worthy* later, not necessarily at the time of the invitation. In the reality, however, they never were worthy (Deut. 9:4-24).
2. The king invited them because of the worthiness of his son. It was appropriate that they honor the son even as they honored the father. Not to honor the son is to dishonor the father.
3. The king invited them because of his own worthiness shown in his love for his people prior to this moment (cf. Deut. 7:7ff.) and especially in his concern that they be permitted to share in his joy upon the marriage of his son.

Paul's explanation eloquently comments on this verse: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF ETERNAL LIFE, behold we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

22:9 **Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways**, that is, at street-corners, or where the streets cross city boundaries to go out into open country (cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 193). In walled cities these would be at the gates; in unwalled, at town boundaries where people leave for their farms or other towns. These would be the most frequented places as people go and come from a given city, hence an excellent place to seek potential guests for the feast. The generous king wisely seeks people where they are to be found.

As many as ye shall find: what the king missed in the rank and attainments of his guests, he compensated for in the quantity. Since "the people and quality" had so definitely proved themselves unworthy, they proved in effect to be inferior to all who would appreciate the high honor offered them and would seize the opportunity. Anyone who loves and respects the king is WORTHY, whatever his previous lack of qualification might be, while those who spurn and neglect their good king's bounty are UNWORTHY, whatever their previous attainments!

Bid to the marriage feast. The raging and bobtail of society, previously uninvited, now become "the called" (*kalésate eis toùs gàmous*). Here is Christ's theology of calling for the Gentiles. (Cf. I Cor. 1:26; 7:20; Eph. 1:8; 4:1, 4; Phil. 3:14; II Thess. 1:11; II Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; II Peter 1:10; Rev. 17:14.) This moment is paralleled in the

previous parable in that "the Kingdom of God will be taken away from (Israel) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (21:41, 43). The Great Commission (28:19f.) is now a foregone conclusion, because the Lord of missions has clearly foreseen the Jewish rejection and now proclaims the future world-wide invitation to the Gentiles to share in the Kingdom of God. But it would be wrong to conclude that He originally planned to save only the Jews and, perceiving their rejection barely in time He radically changed His course so as to avoid a total failure. Matthew has already intimated that God's original planning included the salvation of Gentiles and Jews on the same basis: faith in Jesus (cf. 8:10-12; 12:18-21). While our text is not the birthplace of the Great Commission, it is made of the same stuff and breathes the same spirit. *Go ye therefore* will be echoed again (28:19)!

22:10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together, all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. Why are the king's agents always termed "*servants*"? Because, however, great and influential were the prophets serving under the Old Testament era or Christian apostles and evangelists functioning under the new, they are ever *servants* of God and co-workers with each other. (See note on 18:23.) The results of the king's servants ring true to the reality represented: among all the people they found willing to come were *both bad and good*. By implication, then, Jesus' messengers will collect an appallingly mixed bag of guests for God too. Now why would the Lord say that?

1. He may have intended to deflate all purists' hope that the Messianic Kingdom on earth would be a utopian congregation of only "the pure and holy, the perfect." He clearly foresees a period prior to final judgment (v. 11) when the mixture of *both bad and good* would exist simultaneously. This harmonizes neatly with His revelation about the continued presence of evil in the world until the judgment (13:24-30, 36-43). Thus, He explodes the myth of perfection obtainable in this life by the elimination of all those who are *bad*.
2. As in His previous parable where the servants brought in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (Luke 14:21), those who needed help, so also here Jesus disarms all pride in human goodness and men's notions about what constitutes qualification for God's help. In this sense, then, *both good and bad* means those people,

who in other men's judgment are relatively decent, high-minded people (like Cornelius and other God-fearing, respectable people, Acts 10:1f., 4; 17:4) and the frankly sinful (like the publicans and prostitutes and the Corinthians, I Cor. 6:10f.; I Peter 4:3f.). *Good and bad* would perhaps also be seen from the Jewish standpoint: the *good* would be the self-righteous and orthodox; the *bad* are the Gentiles and the scum of Jewish society (cf. Acts 10:14, 28). Either way, they are all called without regard to their previous moral or religious condition or prior preparation before their call. Jesus obviously does not call the *bad* to remain what they are, but to repent.

3. Jesus' purpose may have been to push His listeners to re-evaluate their judgments about what constitutes goodness and badness. Those who are finally termed *good* are those who trust God's grace and obey Him by faith and, by *bad* He would mean those who did not, even though these too had considered themselves "church members in good standing." This definition and distinction arises out of Jesus' story itself, since those who were finally admitted to the king's feast were only those who (1) heard the gracious invitation specifically addressed to them, (2) accepted it by making the requisite preparation, the wedding garment, and (3) presented themselves at the wedding hall. The *bad* are those who resisted submission to the king's requirements by not making the expected preparation.

So, while they may have been *both bad and good* before they accepted the great invitation, they must all be uniformly garbed when admitted to the festal joy of their lord.

And the wedding was filled with guests! Despite the indifference and cruelty of those previously invited, despite the initial insuccesses of the king's servants, this great-hearted king was not thwarted in his determination to share his festal joy with anyone who would accept it. God's divine program to share indescribable eternal happiness with His people cannot be defeated either. Even if the despicable manners and savage brutality of the people previously invited pulled down destruction on their own heads, they did not succeed in undermining the plan of God (Rev. 7:9)!

III. GOD'S DEALING WITH INDIVIDUALS AT JUDGMENT (22:11-13)

22:11 **But when the king came in to behold the guests:** this is the true climax of the entire drama, because every other element prepared

for this moment and everything that comes after it results from it. The guests, even those who had been invited first, were invited to share in this moment. Jesus' illustration is not a conglomerate of two or more parables, but one plot steadily progressing toward this critical moment of truth.

It can hardly be doubted that *the king came in to behold the guests*, not with an eye to catching some of them unprepared, i.e. without the required garment, but, rather, to rejoice with those who had proved themselves his loyal subjects by accepting his royal invitation. God, too, has no taste for condemning anyone (Ezek. 18:23-32; 33:11; Lam. 3:31-33). Nevertheless, as the sequel proves beyond all doubt, although He finds condemnation distasteful, His sense of justice demands it and He does not hesitate to sentence and punish the guilty.

When the king came in to behold the guests, he gazed over a sea of happy faces around his tables. Yet in the midst of the merriment he could still discern *a man who had not on a wedding-garment*. His race, sex, social condition and bank account are completely irrelevant in the light of this serious disqualification: *no wedding-garment!* Although the question of where he should have procured this garment is left quite out of the story, the assumption is that the king's invitation had implied that all guests must respond appropriately by wearing one. In distinguishing this man from the others, it is also assumed that these guests had made this provision, thereby proving that the great-hearted king's demand was neither unknowable, unreasonable nor impossible. In what the *wedding-garment* consisted the Lord did not explain. Local custom would decide this. Certainly it was attire suitable for the occasion, as opposed to soiled, everyday work clothes. Some commentators, following Genesis 45:22; Judges 14:12, 19; II Kings 5:5, 22; 10:22; Revelation 19:8f., suggest that the king himself even furnished it for all guests alike, in which case their only responsibility was that of accepting to wear it (cf. Isa. 61:10).

The reality Jesus here visualized in the *wedding-garment* is not difficult to interpret, since His Revelation used a similar symbol (Rev. 19:7f., perhaps also v. 14). It may be simply "the righteous deeds of the saints." Such clothing is not more self-righteousness, since these robes are "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9, 13f.; cf. 3:4, 5, 18; 6:11; Heb. 9:14.) Such garments are no fabrication of this world, but the pure gift of divine grace, since even the "righteous deeds of God's people" are really the work

of God Himself graciously working in and through them (Isa. 26:12; Phil. 2:12f.). So, in the end, it is the King Himself who furnishes our wedding garments. And yet we would be without them unless we accepted them and dressed in them, making ourselves fit for His feast on His terms. (Study Heb. 12:14; Col. 3:5-17; Phil. 3:7-11; I Peter 1:22; II Peter 1:3-11.) So God's invitation is conditional.

What, then, is this "gate-crasher's" damning fault? Several factors surface:

1. If the king furnished a costly garment for each guest, not to put it on immediately to join in the spirit and add luster to the feast, would be to show contempt for the gift and despise the giver. It is clearly a self-willed rejection of the king's gracious provision.
2. He had no reverence for his king. The man's damning sin was insensitivity regarding that to which he had been invited. He showed no understanding of the honor one should show to his king or of what would be appropriate dress for participation in a royal banquet. This insensitivity is tantamount to dishonor (Mal. 1:6).
3. He did not understand his king's merciful hospitality. All guests were present, not because they wore wedding apparel, but because this open-hearted king was so intent upon sharing his happiness with them that he ordered the wedding-hall doors thrown open to everyone. The king owed them nothing. They could never have deserved his generosity. They were all present by the king's grace. This ingrate wanted to have the benefits of the feast while rewriting the conditions of participation to suit himself. To the Jew this banquet represented the highest privilege to the Kingdom of God (Luke 14:15; Matt. 8:11f.). But to take part in God's Kingdom means to be ruled by the will of God. Many want the blessings of the Kingdom without the submission this entails. But grace means that we surrender to the terms demanded by Him who extends us that grace.
4. Here is also a self-complacency that could be satisfied with its own garments. Here is the arrogant person who, while claiming to be on God's side, considers his own character good enough to save him. Can anyone be so proud of himself or his accomplishments or so disrespectful of His holiness that he will not change even for God?!
5. If the king required a garment that even the poorest guest could easily obtain for himself at a moment's notice, then this contemptible guest who profaned the wedding feast of the crown prince is lazy, unwilling to sacrifice his own convenience to please the king.

This story, therefore, is a lesson on receiving the grace of God. We do not have to prepare the feast, but we must submit to the spirit of His kind offer and be fitted for participation by His grace. We do not pretend to be worthy of the gift by our wearing the prescribed garments, but we must enter into His feast outfitted according to His expectations. This illustrates the place of commandments in grace: they are a part of the gift of grace, not a series of deeds whereby we earn our place at His table.

Wearing the required garment clearly stands for our effort to respond to the King's goodness (Rom. 8:1-17;). Many New Testaments texts speak of that in which the Christian saint is to be clothed:

1. By faith he begins by putting on Christ at baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3; I Peter 3:20, 21) and so is justified (Rom. 5:1; 8:1).
2. He matures in Christ by deliberately imitating His character (Phil. 2:5):
 - a. This involves putting off the sinful deeds (Rom. 13:12f.; Col. 3:5-9; Eph. 4:22, 25ff.)
 - b. It involves putting on Christ's character (Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:10, 12ff.; Eph. 4:23f.)
3. This all produces a righteousness, not based on personal merit, but one which comes from God and depends on faith (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

None of this is personal merit, because God mercifully revealed this way to be clothed. This kind of righteousness is God's gift to His people, because He covers them with the robe of His righteousness, taking their sins away (cf. II Cor. 5:21; I John 2:1, 2). They must accept His covering. While ALL are invited—the imperfect, the weak and sinful—nobody is admitted without change. We are not saved by the invitation only or by entering along with the masses only, but by personal preparation. We must respect the King and accept His terms without presuming to tell Him what we shall wear or what He must condone!

22:12 **And he saith unto him, Friend.** *Friend (heteïre)* is an interesting form of address meaning, "comrade, friend or associate." Its generalness says, "I do not know or call you by name," while its warmth says, "I want to treat you kindly anyway." But the generalness of the king's approach is ominous, because the king does not call the man by name, as if he did not care to recognize that most intimate, individualizing part of the man, his name (cf. 7:23; 25:12; II Tim. 2:19).

In each of the three occurrences of *hetêre* in Matthew (20:13; 22:12; 26:50) there is a reciprocal relationship assumed between the user of this word and the one so addressed. Further, in all three cases, the person thus addressed has not lived up to the commitment involved in that relationship. There is a resultant nuance not to miss: the goodness of the speaker and the guilt of the one addressed.

How camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? This question tacitly assumes that either the king furnished the festal robe to each guest or that the most destitute could have instantly obtained it for himself on slight notice. Either way, the guest's responsibility is clear: he should have had that robe on. The king may mean:

1. "How did you manage to slip in past those who should have stopped you at the door because of your obvious indifference to my regulation?" But in the reality, would Jesus refer to security slip-ups at the final Marriage Supper of the Lamb, any more than such a provident king could have forgotten security arrangements at his son's wedding feast? On the other hand, if only the king himself could recognize that wedding garment, the man may have passed muster for all others, only to be unmasked for what he really was in front of his king whose infallible eye alone could detect the difference.
2. "How could you have persuaded yourself to crowd in without the required garment? In what frame of mind did you come in here? What arguments could you have adduced so impelling as to scorn your king's expectations?" This is perhaps the better interpretation, because it stands in stark contrast to the man's reaction: *he was speechless*.
3. Some see Jesus' question as asking, "By what entrance did you come in here without the wedding garment? Certainly not by the proper door where all would be granted recognition and entrance" (cf. John 10:1, 9).

And he was speechless, not only without excuses, but without prayers. There is no confession of unworthiness, no seeking mercy, no pleas for forgiveness. He stands there brazen and insolent, made mute (Greek: "muzzled") by his own inability to answer his king according to his true inner feelings. What answer could he offer for his gross violation of his sovereign's hospitality? Like so many, he could have said:

1. "My own garments are just fine like they are! Why should I have to change them?"
2. "My other interests were more important than frantic preparations for a feast really intended for others and only lately thrown open to just anybody."
3. "Your requirement is a just expectation for everyone in general, but I'm an exception."

Had the man originally attempted to deceive the king by hoping he could get by with no festal robe as if the king would not notice? In the reality represented here, no more awful sin could be imagined than the bold attempt to outwit God. No wonder this faker deserves such severe punishment!

By adding this ending to an otherwise good, complete story (cf. Luke 14:15-24), Jesus surprisingly reversed the authorities' demand for His credentials (21:23), turning it into a heart-searching demand for THEIRS. In His story the king suddenly appeared to demand of this man his credentials, that proof by which he presumed to intrude. Jesus, then, warns His inquisitors that each one of them personally must one day face this painfully individual inquest and that each will find himself as excuseless as this man was speechless. They had shown self-complacency, ingratitude toward God's merciful invitations and no reverence for His Son, their true King.

22:13 Then the king said to the servants. These *servants* (*diakònis*) are not to be identified with the other "servants" (*douloi*) who had served as the king's heralds. The latter are apostles and prophets, the former are angels who at this feast are appropriately termed "attendants or table waiters" (*diàkonoi*). (Cf. other texts that describe the function of angels as ministers of divine justice: 13:39, 41f., 49f.; their presence at judgment: 16:27; 25:31; II Thess. 1:7f.; Rev. 14:10, 19.)

Bind him hand and foot. Why? Would not the shame of this public exposure and forcible removal from the wedding feast have sufficed to guarantee that this unwanted intruder would not return?

1. Apparently not, because the man could perhaps have attempted to make the necessary preparation after the deadline, whereas being bound *hand and foot*, he must see that such tardy reformation is hereby categorically excluded.
2. Jesus intended to exclude all hope that anyone could hope to sneak into the Kingdom and then, when exposed, have a second chance to be readmitted. There is to be no purgatory, either Catholic,

Protestant or Universalist, that somehow saves those who died without having made the required provision God expects.

3. The Lord hereby implies that the possibility of evading God's condemnation is totally out of reach. The damned are hopelessly bound by an irreversible sentence they cannot resist.

Cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Jesus' language slides easily from the parable to the reality, because *the outer darkness* would be especially blinding to this wretch who had grown accustomed to the bright lights of the wedding supper, and he would be *weeping* at his great loss and *gnashing his teeth* in anguish at the realization that his failure is completely his own. On *the outer darkness* and *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, see 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30; cf. Ps. 112:10; Acts 7:54. (Cf. one interesting ancient Jewish opinion about the wicked's punishment in a dark place barred from light and hope: Wisdom 17.)

Who can complain that the king excluded everyone he found unfit for HIS feast, even if it meant bouncing them out the door right from the table where the unfit sat ready to partake? But the man's sentence is equal to his crime. By his bold unwillingness to show appropriate appreciation for his king's generosity and failing to enter into the spirit of the feast, he showed himself fully equal to those unhumiliated, unsanctified citizens who despised the king's bounty from the very beginning. So he must share their judgment: they were ALL BARRED from access to the king's royal reception.

IV. THE BOTTOM LINE (22:14)

21:14 **For many are called, but few chosen.** On another occasion someone asked Jesus, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (Luke 13:22-30). Rather than answer directly what could be but an idle question, He redirected their attention to the real problem: "You must make your own personal calling and election sure, without worrying about the relative number of elect who eventually make it!" In that context Jesus overturned Jewish nationalistic expectations, while predicting Gentile participation in the Messianic banquet in the Kingdom of God. Here, however, the Lord actually spells out how many will be saved; *few*. (Cf. 7:13f. and other similar reversals of popular estimates: 19:30; 20:16.)

It makes little difference whether, in His story, Jesus put these words in the mouth of the just king or not, since the latter had done

everything humanly possible to call the *many*, but due to the well-known circumstances, *few* were finally *chosen*. How *many are called*? In Jesus' context it must mean not only the hundreds of thousands of Hebrews over the centuries who were called to ready themselves according to the requirements announced by the prophets, but also the thousand million Gentiles who *are called* now by the Gospel (I Thess. 2:14). Also among the many called are the hypocrites in the Church who appear to have accepted the Gospel invitation but refuse to make the sacrifice of time, effort and expense to please God. Here too are those who pretend to believe and those who, secretly or openly, drop off the Vine (John 15:1ff.) by not trusting Jesus to supply them their life. Perhaps they substitute their own source of life or try to appropriate Jesus according to their own terms. But they are all called. Christ illustrated why God called the many, but chose to save the few who chose to accept His invitation. Being *chosen* depends entirely on the answer we give to the *call*. But this is no fresh revelation, because God had always been calling many, but choosing few in every part of Old Testament history. (8 people in the ark, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised Land, Gideon's 300, the concept of the remnant, etc.)

Why are so *few chosen*? In Jesus' story it is completely related to each man's free choice to make himself ready to meet the king's requirements. This principle explains Peter's exhortation to make our CALLING AND ELECTION sure (II Peter 1:10). So *few are chosen*, because most folks do not want what God has to offer. They are either indifferent to it or are outright hostile, while others who think they want it suppose they can get it cheaper. The rejects eliminate themselves in droves! So, ironically, they are not chosen, because they chose not to be chosen! The elect of God, therefore, are always those who choose to meet His requirements for election.

With Jesus there is no easy optimism about human moral perfectability. While God's invitation is indiscriminate, His final selection is not. He is no indulgent Heavenly Grandfather whose only program is that, after all is said and done, it might be written: "A good time was had by all" (C. S. Lewis). Rather, He is a God of high holiness who will not tolerate iniquity even in the outcasts, the underprivileged and the scorned! They too must respond to His demands for a change of commitment, submitting to life within His will.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the points of similarity between this parable and the one preceding it.
2. Show how this parable differs from the one preceding it.
3. Of what expression or phase or section of the Kingdom of heaven is this story illustrative?
4. How does this parable fit in the train of thought expressed by Jesus in His answer to the challenge of His authority, the parable of the two sons and the parable of the wicked husbandmen? What new thoughts does it bring out?
5. How many invitations did the king make to his subjects? Why was more than one necessary?
6. What is the picture involved in the expression: "My oxen and my fat calves are killed"?
7. What varying kinds of reactions did the king's messengers find among those invited to the feast?
8. What was the king's emotional reaction to his citizens' treatment of his invitation?
9. What did the king do about his subjects' treatment of his invitation and his messengers?
10. When the prepared wedding feast lacked banqueters, what did the king order his servants to do about this shortage?
11. In what two significant ways had those originally invited to the feast proved themselves "unworthy" of it?
12. Where were the king's servants to find banqueters to share in the feast?
13. What kinds of people did they find and bring back?
14. What is the implied responsibility of the guest "who had no wedding garment"? What had he done wrong?
15. What was the king's attitude toward this man?
16. What is Jesus' conclusion to the parable? What did He mean by it?
17. Identify the various details in Jesus' story:

a. The king and his son	g. Those who were invited second
b. The wedding feast	h. The king's servants who issued the second invitation
c. Those who were invited first	i. The wedding garment
d. The messengers sent to call them	j. The unprepared wedding guest
e. Their reaction toward the king's messengers	k. The king's arrival to see his guests
f. The king's treatment of his unworthy subjects	

18. What is the meaning of the allusion to "outer darkness"? Where is this place?
19. What is the meaning of "the weeping and gnashing of teeth," that is, who has the eyes to weep and the teeth to gnash, and what sentiment are they expressing when they do this?
20. According to Jesus' story, why is it that *many are called, but few chosen*? Indicate the specific failures Jesus pointed out that caused the rejection of the many.

SECTION 58

JESUS ANSWERS CAPTIOUS QUESTIONS

A. QUESTION OF TRIBUTE TO CAESAR

(Parallels: Mark 12:13-22; Luke 20:20-26)

TEXT: 22:15-22

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare him in *his* talk. 16 And they sent to him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one: for thou regardest not the person of men. 17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not? 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites? 19 Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius. 20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? 21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. 22 And when they heard it, they marvelled, and left him, and went away.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In the splendid compliments the Pharisees' disciples gave Jesus, are they telling the truth? Is there any statement in their estimate of His ministry and personal life that is false? If you think their words are their honest evaluation of our Lord, how do you account for Jesus' unhesitatingly negative reaction to them? Do you think it possible to hide hatred and malice in such apparently generous praise? If so, how does this work?