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MATTHEW

Chapter 21:17-46

THE REJECTION OF THE RELIGIOUS

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. This first parable we will be studying this morning (in **Matthew 21**) – is a bit difficult to understand unless we set the stage first.
1. It is the parable of the barren fig tree that Jesus pronounces judgment upon, and it instantly withers.
 2. But let's look back over what has been going on and what Jesus has done in the last 24 hours.
 - a) He and the disciples have come into Jerusalem - the center of the spiritual life of Israel.
 - b) Up to this point, the most spiritually "blind", have been His Jewish brothers.
 - c) The Scribes, and Pharisees and Priest have been His greatest detractors!
 - d) The first thing He had to do (in the last study) after He rode into town like a King – was to go to the temple and "clean house".
 - e) And once-again, He had to defend himself against the scribes and priests because they were jealous of the children **shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David."** (**Verse 15**)
- B. Jesus is going to "officially" pronounce judgment upon Israel for their rejecting Him as Messiah.
1. I would like to read you a very interesting passage in light of this parable:
 - a) **Isaiah 34:1–4 (NKJV) — 1 Come near, you nations, to hear; And heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, The world and all things that come forth from it. 2 For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations, And His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter. 3 Also their slain shall be thrown out; Their stench shall rise from their corpses, And the mountains shall be melted with their blood. 4 All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree.**
 - b) Very interesting, but we know that before the Lord places the gospel into the hands of the Gentiles, it was presented to and rejected by Israel!
 - (1) Israel was supposed to be a fruitful fig tree, but there was no fruit!

- II. **MATTHEW 21:17–21 (NKJV) — 17 THEN HE LEFT THEM AND WENT OUT OF THE CITY TO BETHANY, AND HE LODGED THERE. 18 NOW IN THE MORNING, AS HE RETURNED TO THE CITY, HE WAS HUNGRY. 19 AND SEEING A FIG TREE BY THE ROAD, HE CAME TO IT AND FOUND NOTHING ON IT BUT LEAVES, AND SAID TO IT, "LET NO FRUIT GROW ON YOU EVER AGAIN."** IMMEDIATELY THE FIG TREE WITHERED AWAY. **20 AND WHEN THE DISCIPLES SAW IT, THEY MARVELED, SAYING, "HOW DID THE FIG TREE WITHER AWAY SO SOON?" 21 SO JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO THEM,**

“ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, IF YOU HAVE FAITH AND DO NOT DOUBT, YOU WILL NOT ONLY DO WHAT WAS DONE TO THE FIG TREE, BUT ALSO IF YOU SAY TO THIS MOUNTAIN, ‘BE REMOVED AND BE CAST INTO THE SEA,’ IT WILL BE DONE.

- A. The disciples are “blown away” because they see the tree wither and die right before their eyes, but that is really not the main point.
1. The tree should have had edible fruit on it, but it was only an outward show of leaves!
 2. Israel was only an outward show of “leaves” – but if they had listened to the Lord they would have been bearing fruit!
 - a) So, it is even for the Christian today – if we will listen to the Lord – we will bear fruit. If we do not – we wither and eventually die spiritually.
 - (1) Proponents of the “positive confession” movement like to use **verse 21** as proof text that miracles are an act of your own faith, but Jesus is not saying to have faith in your own faith!
 - (2) He is saying have faith in Him! And if He wants the mountain moved – it will move!
 - (a) *“We can only believe for a thing when we are in such union with God that his thought and purpose can freely flow into us, suggesting what we should pray for, and leading us to that point in which there is a perfect sympathy and understanding between us and the divine mind. Faith is always the product of such a frame as this.” (F.B. Meyer)¹*
 - (b) It is important to note that there were only two “destructive” miracles that Jesus ever performed (this and the events that ended in the destruction of the herd of pigs, **Matthew 8:30–32**)² but neither were directed at people.

III. MATTHEW 21:23–27 (NKJV) — 23 NOW WHEN HE CAME INTO THE TEMPLE, THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE ELDERS OF THE PEOPLE CONFRONTED HIM AS HE WAS TEACHING, AND SAID, “BY WHAT AUTHORITY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS? AND WHO GAVE YOU THIS AUTHORITY?” 24 BUT JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO THEM, “I ALSO WILL ASK YOU ONE THING, WHICH IF YOU TELL ME, I LIKEWISE WILL TELL YOU BY WHAT AUTHORITY I DO THESE THINGS: 25 THE BAPTISM OF JOHN—WHERE WAS IT FROM? FROM HEAVEN OR FROM MEN?” AND THEY REASONED AMONG THEMSELVES, SAYING, “IF WE SAY, ‘FROM HEAVEN,’ HE WILL SAY TO US, ‘WHY THEN DID YOU NOT BELIEVE HIM?’ 26 BUT IF WE SAY, ‘FROM MEN,’ WE FEAR THE MULTITUDE, FOR ALL COUNT JOHN AS A PROPHET.” 27 SO THEY ANSWERED JESUS AND SAID, “WE DO NOT KNOW.” AND HE SAID TO THEM, “NEITHER WILL I TELL YOU BY WHAT AUTHORITY I DO THESE THINGS.

- A. I love it! The people who think they are in charge and in power are really powerless!
1. Jesus puts them in a “double-bind”. If they say that John’s ministry was from the Lord, then they have no excuse for not believing in Him – since his ministry was

¹ Guzik, D. (2013) [Matthew](#). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik (David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible), p. Mt 21:20–22.

² Guzik, D. (2013) [Matthew](#). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik (David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible), p. Mt 21:18–19.

- even greater than John's!
2. But if they reduce John's ministry to a work of the flesh – they are afraid the people will revolt against them because the crowd believed John was a Prophet.
 - a) So, they come up with a “politically correct” answer – vague and useless – so Jesus answers their question.

IV. MATTHEW 21:28–32 (NKJV) — 28 “BUT WHAT DO YOU THINK? A MAN HAD TWO SONS, AND HE CAME TO THE FIRST AND SAID, ‘SON, GO, WORK TODAY IN MY VINEYARD.’ 29 HE ANSWERED AND SAID, ‘I WILL NOT,’ BUT AFTERWARD HE REGRETTED IT AND WENT. 30 THEN HE CAME TO THE SECOND AND SAID LIKEWISE. AND HE ANSWERED AND SAID, ‘I GO, SIR,’ BUT HE DID NOT GO. 31 WHICH OF THE TWO DID THE WILL OF HIS FATHER?” THEY SAID TO HIM, “THE FIRST.” JESUS SAID TO THEM, “ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU THAT TAX COLLECTORS AND HARLOTS ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEFORE YOU. 32 FOR JOHN CAME TO YOU IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND YOU DID NOT BELIEVE HIM; BUT TAX COLLECTORS AND HARLOTS BELIEVED HIM; AND WHEN YOU SAW IT, YOU DID NOT AFTERWARD RELENT AND BELIEVE HIM.

- A. The 2 sons in this parable are two groups of people (maybe 4) – the Jews (Israel) and Gentile (sinners).
 1. Jesus (the “man” in this parable) asked the “sinners” to go work in His vineyard, and they refused, but later changed their mind and obeyed.
 - a) This is symbolic of repentance.
 2. He also asked Israel to work in His vineyard, and they said, “Yes”, but did not go.
 - a) This is symbolic of religion.
 3. The tax collectors and prostitutes of the day repented under John's ministry, but even after seeing this, the Scribes and the Pharisees would not let go of their religion and accept the righteousness of John's ministry!
 4. Could this also apply to church people?
 - a) Most admit that the Word of God is true.
 - (1) They intend to get serious about it someday.
 - (2) They talk about doing the Father's work.
 - (3) They keep up the external appearance of religion, but their heart is not right with God.
 - (4) They think that words and promises are enough.³
 5. Jesus puts it a different way!

V. MATTHEW 21:33–46 (NKJV) — 33 “HEAR ANOTHER PARABLE: THERE WAS A CERTAIN LANDOWNER WHO PLANTED A VINEYARD AND SET A HEDGE AROUND IT, DUG A WINEPRESS IN IT AND BUILT A TOWER. AND HE LEASED IT TO VINEDRESSERS AND WENT INTO A FAR COUNTRY. 34 NOW WHEN VINTAGE-TIME DREW NEAR, HE SENT HIS SERVANTS TO THE VINEDRESSERS, THAT THEY MIGHT RECEIVE ITS FRUIT. 35 AND THE VINEDRESSERS TOOK HIS SERVANTS, BEAT ONE, KILLED ONE, AND STONED ANOTHER. 36 AGAIN HE SENT OTHER SERVANTS, MORE THAN THE FIRST, AND THEY DID LIKEWISE TO THEM. 37 THEN LAST OF ALL HE SENT HIS SON TO THEM, SAYING, ‘THEY WILL RESPECT MY SON.’ 38 BUT WHEN THE

³ Guzik, D. (2013) [Matthew](#). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik (David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible), p. Mt 21:28–32.

VINEDRESSERS SAW THE SON, THEY SAID AMONG THEMSELVES, 'THIS IS THE HEIR. COME, LET US KILL HIM AND SEIZE HIS INHERITANCE.' 39 SO THEY TOOK HIM AND CAST HIM OUT OF THE VINEYARD AND KILLED HIM. 40 "THEREFORE, WHEN THE OWNER OF THE VINEYARD COMES, WHAT WILL HE DO TO THOSE VINEDRESSERS?" 41 THEY SAID TO HIM, "HE WILL DESTROY THOSE WICKED MEN MISERABLY, AND LEASE HIS VINEYARD TO OTHER VINEDRESSERS WHO WILL RENDER TO HIM THE FRUITS IN THEIR SEASONS." 42 JESUS SAID TO THEM, "HAVE YOU NEVER READ IN THE SCRIPTURES: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? 43 "THEREFORE I SAY TO YOU, THE KINGDOM OF GOD WILL BE TAKEN FROM YOU AND GIVEN TO A NATION BEARING THE FRUITS OF IT. 44 AND WHOEVER FALLS ON THIS STONE WILL BE BROKEN; BUT ON WHOMEVER IT FALLS, IT WILL GRIND HIM TO POWDER." 45 NOW WHEN THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND PHARISEES HEARD HIS PARABLES, THEY PERCEIVED THAT HE WAS SPEAKING OF THEM. 46 BUT WHEN THEY SOUGHT TO LAY HANDS ON HIM, THEY FEARED THE MULTITUDES, BECAUSE THEY TOOK HIM FOR A PROPHET.

A. Conclusion

1. It took them a while, but they finally got it! Jesus was rejecting them!
2. The parable made perfect sense, until it was applied to them – then they could no longer see the Truth!
3. They said, (41) ... "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons."
 - a) Well the "other vine-growers" are born-again Christians!
 - b) For it is the repentant heart that pays him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons."
4. One last point: when confronted with Christ there are only 2 choices, to fall upon Him and be broken (repentance), or have the Rock fall upon us and be crushed (religion).