

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the week leading up to the Passover. It was just a few days before His arrest. Tensions were peaking and were compounded by His entry into Jerusalem in a kingly manner and the way He cleared out the merchants in the temple (Zechariah 9:9ⁱ; Lk 19:45ⁱⁱ). The chief priest was desperately seeking a way to stop Jesus.

¹ *One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up* ² *and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority."* Luke 20:1,2 Jesus had taken over the temple. He rode in to the shouts of people proclaiming Him king. He taught every remaining day in the temple to the crowds that had come for the Passover. He was preaching the gospel. I don't think it is what we understand as the gospel, that Jesus died for our sins, but it was similar in that by faith we can receive the kingdom of God (18:17ⁱⁱⁱ). It would be only days later that they would see that the acceptable sacrifice was Jesus. We have a sample of some of the preaching in the passages that follow and one in which He predicted He would be killed (20:14,15^{iv}).

The chief priests and scribes made their way through the crowd and demanded to know by what authority Jesus acted and taught, and who gave Him that authority. Certainly, none of them declared Jesus was the Messiah. The Sanhedrin had never said He was their king. In their minds, Jesus was an out of control renegade who would not submit to their authority. (Which might indicate He agreed with the Essenes.^v) But then we must consider that they may have known the truth, at least to some degree, for when Nicodemus, one of their number, came to Jesus by night he said, *"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* John 3:2b At least some of them knew the truth.

Who gives any prophet their authority? It certainly wasn't a committee or governmental organization. The question screams of jealousy. It sounds like they are saying, "How dare you heal or raise people from the dead without our permission." It reveals the nature of their hearts wanting to play God. It was also is a self-indictment. The chief priest at the time was appointed by Rome. If Jesus was prone to quick come backs, He might have said, "Well, it certainly wasn't Rome!" But then, Jesus only says what the Father tells Him (John 5:19^{vi}), which gets to the heart of the issue.

³ *He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, "*⁴ *was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"* Luke 20:3,4 Jesus answered in rabbinical style, which is to answer a question with a question. "Was John's baptism from heaven or from man?" The Sanhedrin didn't authorize John to prepare the way for the Messiah and to ask people to repent and be baptized. Who ordains prophets? Who ordains anyone in any ministry?

What is ordination in our day? You can get a mail order ordination. You can be ordained by a Bible denying organization. Seminaries of all stripes ordain graduates of their particular doctrines. The pastors in our community who knew me held an ordination ceremony for me. That was highly unusual. A godly ordination ceremony only affirms what heaven has already done. I have met men who at the start of our conversation told me they were ordained ministers. That is a red flag for me. When someone has to tell you that they are anointed by God, they probably aren't. When they insist on the title of reverend, I don't revere them (2 Corinthians 10:18^{vii}).

If the Sanhedrin appointed Jesus king of Israel, it would certainly mean He was not. It was because of Jesus' anointed words and actions that the people recognized what the power mongering leaders refused to see. The chief priests saw their power slipping away and knew they had to act. But, at the moment, they were stuck with an unanswerable question.

⁵ And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?'" ⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." Luke 20:5,6 If they said from heaven, they would be answering their question to Jesus, and Jesus could then ask why they didn't believe John. John said Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29^{viii}). John told them they needed to repent and called them a brood of vipers (Matthew 3:7^{ix}). If they said John wasn't a prophet, they would lose face with the people who knew that he was. The chief priests feared that if they denied John was a prophet they might even be stoned. This showed they weren't interested in truth. It also shows us that there was quite a lot of tension between the ruling class and the common people. Jesus was a man of the people, a factor that caused the leaders to fear Him (Matthew 14:5^x).

⁷ So they answered that they did not know where it came from. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." Luke 20:7,8 The chief priests would not commit one way or the other. The wisdom of God stopped them in their tracks. Jesus didn't have to answer the question because they wouldn't answer His question. But to the public, the answer was obvious. John was appointed by heaven. So was Jesus. Heaven appointed is another way to say God appointed Him King of the kingdom of God.

We need the wisdom from above to answer those who would attack Jesus' authority in our day (James 3:17^{xi}). It is still under attack every day, only now, it is the common person who wants to play God. They have no ecclesiastical positions, but they feel like the chief priests. If people are told Jesus is God, they feel their power to do their own thing and live as they want slipping away. They will ask, "Who gave Him the right to say what offends God?" It is the same question the Pharisees are asking isn't it? When we are confronted, we need to follow Jesus' example of taking a moment and look to God for wisdom to answer, perhaps with a question, which will expose what is really behind the world questioning Jesus' authority.

⁹ And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while." Luke 20:9 Jesus was teaching in the temple, and the leaders had just questioned His authority. In Matthew it appears that Jesus is telling this parable to the religious leaders (Matthew 21:32,33a^{xii}). Here in Luke it is to the people, which can mean both the public and the leaders. This parable is bold and easy to understand. The truth of it was obvious and Jesus backed it with Scripture. The meaning was so shocking that the people responded to the conclusion with, "Surely not!" It may be one of the reasons the people would later be yelling to crucify Him. They didn't like the truth He was proclaiming or the way He backed it with Scripture directly from the psalm they were quoting at the triumphal entry.

The vineyard owner is God. The land of Israel and the Jewish people are His vineyard, and the leaders of Israel are the tenants. When the Jews returned from bondage in Egypt they were planted (Psalm 80:8^{xiii}). Isaiah 5 is the Song of the Vineyard. Jesus

was retelling the same song but adding some details. Matthew 21:33^{xiv} gives us a few more details that go along with Isaiah 5^{xv}. In that parallel passage we learn that the vineyard was planted, fenced, a winepress was dug, and a watch tower was built. Everything was done for a successful vineyard. Then it was rented out to tenants.

The parable is for us too as everything we possess is on loan to us from God (1 Corinthians 4:7^{xvi}). In that sense all the world is a vineyard, and we are all tenants. Everything is prepared in advance for us to care for our lives and produce fruit.

¹⁰ When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Luke 20:10 The landlord sent a servant at the end of harvest season to collect His share of the crop as rent. But the tenants have decided they don't want to pay their rent, and so they beat the servant and sent him away. The servant represents the prophets. God is at the very least owed our repentance for wasting our lives and selfishly consuming all He gives us, ignoring our indebtedness to Him. Repentance is what the prophets came to collect. After a prophet declared God's message of the unfaithfulness of God's people and their lack of fruit, and the mercy of God simply asking for the fruit of repentance, the people decided instead to beat the messenger and send him away (Acts 7:51,52a^{xvii}; Hebrews 11:37,38^{xviii}).

We should not think of God as we do a man or woman, but it might help us to relate if we try to imagine something like this happening to us. What if you were going on a long journey and so you rented out your house and all its furnishings. Then the tenants never paid their rent. You ask the rental agency to check to see why the rent check never comes. The agent says it was horrible. There were junk cars in the driveway. Items in the house were missing. Farm animals were living in the house and it reeked. The tenants took the agent out and severely beat him. Would you send the tenants a note asking them to apologize, to please clean up the place, start paying on time, and promise that you would then forgive all the back payments? That is a poor illustration, but I hope it gives us a little sense of God's great grace and mercy.

¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Luke 20:11,12 The owner of the vineyard sent another servant, but they beat him too, and topped it off by humiliating him. He sent a third servant, and this time the servant was beaten so severely that he was wounded. This is grace upon grace. I'd have sent an eviction notice and filed charges after the first servant was beaten. Wouldn't you?

¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' Luke 20:13 When we hear the owner will send his beloved son, we think he has lost his mind. But at that time, it was possible for a tenant farmer to lay claim to the land if the landlord was gone for more than three years (M. Baba Bathra 3:1). The presence of the son was counted as that of the landlord, so by killing him and hiding the body they could say the landlord had never returned. Remember that the harvest God is seeking is the repentance and respect of the tenants. God will go to such extreme lengths to get us to realize what a mess we are and how great His mercy and love are toward us.

It is not as if the owner doesn't have an idea of what will happen. Jesus already knew what they would do and is predicting it in this parable (9:22^{xix}). But in the process, He was going to change the hearts of many. Prophets/servants were not enough to change

the heart of man. Our sin debt had to be paid. We had to see the great expression of His love. And once the debt was paid, we could receive the Spirit who would produce more fruit from our lives that God is seeking, the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23^{xx}).

¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' Luke 20:14 The tenants wanted it all for themselves. They would take as their own all that the owner had prepared. They thought the way to do it was to kill the heir. The leaders of Israel thought they could kill Jesus, keep their power and wealth, and not face any consequences. The world was their oyster and they wanted all of its pearls for themselves. Kill God and Israel would be theirs.

I have wondered what they were thinking when they heard Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. John tells us they decided to kill them both (John 12:10,11^{xxi}). How greedy and spiritually sick do people have to be to think that way? And yet, I think to some extent we do the same every time we quench the Spirit. *Spurgeon said, "If you reject him, he answers you with tears; if you wound him, he bleeds out cleansing; if you kill him, he dies to redeem; if you bury him, he rises again to bring resurrection. Jesus is love made manifest"* (C.H. Spurgeon as quoted in Preaching the Word Commentary).

Can a person kill the Son and have the world? We attempt to do that every day by ignoring His voice until the day we are born-again. What would it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his soul (9:25^{xxii})? We can gain the world. Satan offered it to Jesus (4:5,6^{xxiii}), and he is glad to give a little portion to whoever will worship him, at least for the few short years we live. But the end is worse than we can imagine.

¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" Luke 20:15,16 This is what was about to happen. Jesus is predicting His soon coming fate. He would be taken outside the city walls and crucified. It was one of the most horrible ways invented by man to die. Some of His listeners would take part in fulfilling this prediction. He was warning them of the consequences.

What would the owner do to them? They won't just get an eviction notice. He will destroy them. They are guilty of abuse of the servants and murder of the son of the owner. The vineyard will be given to others. Every Jew who was listening knew what this meant. The vineyard is Israel. Gentiles were going to possess it. Jesus called that coming epoch the times of the Gentiles (21:24^{xxiv}). "Surely not!" was not because the son was murdered but because the vineyard was given to others (Luke 4:29^{xxv}; 2:32^{xxvi}).

The listeners couldn't imagine such a thing. Their ancestors had gone into captivity in Babylon. They had tried so hard to keep the laws so it wouldn't happen again. They made laws to keep from breaking the laws. But the fruit of changed hearts was what God was seeking, and instead of that, their hearts only grew harder. They saw themselves as God's special people and expected that Jesus was going to lead them in conquest of the world. They actually thought Jesus was the means to having the world. His words were so shocking they could hardly bear to hear them.

¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"? Luke 20:17 Then again in rabbinical fashion He ended the story with His proof texts from the messianic psalm which they had sung upon His triumphal entry into Jerusalem just days before. He was saying, "If you can't believe this will happen, just remember the rest of the psalm you

quoted to me!" He quoted Psalm 118:22. The broader passage reads, ²⁰ *This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.* ²¹ *I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.* ²² *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.* ²³ *This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.* ²⁴ *This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Psalm 118:20-24

The psalmist was praying to have a gate of salvation opened for him. Then with eyes of faith He saw it. This is why Jesus called Himself the gate in John 10^{xxvii}, the gate to the sheepfold of which the LORD is the shepherd. It is the gate all the righteous enter to be saved. He is our salvation, our Yeshua. That is Jesus Hebrew name, salvation. But then the psalm turns to the verse Jesus quoted. He will first be rejected by the builders, those leaders in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, and then He will become the cornerstone of the new and living sanctuary in which God dwells.

Verses 23 and 24 of that psalm go on to say that this is a marvelous work - from rejection to cornerstone. It is the work of the LORD. This is the day the LORD has made, refers to the day Jesus was rejected so that the message of salvation would go to the whole world. That is our reason to be glad and rejoice in it. We say it every day, as every day we experience the effects of Jesus as our cornerstone and being the sanctuary of God. Did you realize all that is behind that verse?

¹⁸ *Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*" Luke 20:18 Alluding to the rock in Daniel 2, and quoting Isaiah 8:14,15, Jesus gave a severe warning and an answer to the source of His authority. The verses from which Jesus quoted read, ¹⁴ *And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* ¹⁵ *And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.* Isaiah 8:14,15 Even as He was speaking the words were coming to pass. The listeners were offended that He would suggest that Jerusalem be given to the Gentiles. They fell into the trap of wanting the earthly more than the heavenly. They stumbled over Jesus' words because their hearts were set on the wrong things. In 40 years, they would literally be broken and crushed as the legions of Rome levelled the city. Many of the survivors were *taken* as slaves. No wonder Jesus' wept when He envisioned the results of their rejection of Him.

There is also a final fulfillment of the stone falling. It is from Daniel 2:34,35^{xxviii}. It was the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as interpreted by Daniel. The kingdoms of the world were represented in a giant statue of a man. A stone was cut out a great mountain and fell upon the image crushing it to pieces. It was the kingdom of God crushing the corrupt kingdoms of man. And the rock became a mountain that filled the whole earth. In other words, Jesus will return to reign over all the earth forever. The leaders questioned Jesus' authority. Jesus gave the answer, "I am the Rock! I'm taking over!" What a claim!

The verses Jesus quoted so perfectly predicted what was coming that when the disciples looked back on what He had said they would see it had forever been the plan of God for our salvation. They could see the mercy and grace extended to all who will believe as the rock began filling the whole earth (Matthew 24:14^{xxix}). Can you see it?

The vineyard owner expects fruit. Amazingly, He is willing to forgive and make it possible for us to bear fruit. Will we kill the Son or repent and receive His mercy and grace, be born-again, filled with His Spirit and bring forth fruit unto God? He is the gate of salvation (Titus 3:5-7^{xxx}). Will you enter in?

Questions

- 1 Why were the Jews asking Jesus about the source of His authority?
- 2 Why was that ironic?
- 3 How did Jesus' wisdom baffle them?
- 4 How is the parable an answer to their question?
- 5 What are the parallels in real life to the parable?
- 6 How does this demonstrate the extent of God's mercy?
- 7 Why did the Jews reject the thought?
- 8 In what ways was the parable prophetic?
- 9 What happens to the rejected stone?
- 10 What fruit is expected from us?

ⁱ **Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

ⁱⁱ **Luke 19:45 (ESV)**

⁴⁵ And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold,

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 18:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

^{iv} **Luke 20:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?

^v The Essenes believed the high priest was corrupted by Roman oversight and use of the solar calendar. They rejected the legitimacy of the temple in their day.

^{vi} **John 5:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

^{vii} **2 Corinthians 10:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

^{viii} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{ix} **Matthew 3:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

^x **Matthew 14:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.

^{xi} **James 3:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

^{xii} **Matthew 21:32-3a3 (ESV)**

³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

³³ "Hear another parable."

^{xiii} **Psalms 80:8 (ESV)**

⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

^{xiv} **Matthew 21:33 (ESV)**

³³ "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.

^{xv} **Isaiah 5:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

^{xvi} **1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

^{xvii} **Acts 7:51-52a (ESV)**

⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

^{xviii} **Hebrews 11:37-38 (ESV)**

³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

^{xix} **Luke 9:22 (ESV)**

²² saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

^{xx} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xxi} **John 12:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,

¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

^{xxii} **Luke 9:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

^{xxiii} **Luke 4:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.

^{xxiv} **Luke 21:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

^{xxv} **Luke 4:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.

^{xxvi} **Luke 2:32 (ESV)**

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

^{xxvii} **John 10:7 (ESV)**

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

^{xxviii} **Daniel 2:34-35 (ESV)**

³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

^{xxix} **Matthew 24:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

^{xxx} **Titus 3:5-7 (ESV)**

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.