

5. Two Parables for the Pharisees: The Two Sons (Mt 21:28-32) and the Wicked Vinedressers (Mt 21:33-46)

In Matt 21:23-22:1, the elders came to him and challenged his authority. The common people of the day had accepted Jesus' authority from the beginning of his ministry. In Matt 7:28-29 at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew recorded, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." A centurion in Matt 8:8-12 explained clearly the issue of Jesus' authority. Jesus responded with the same conclusion that he is now going to give to the elders:

8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The two parables of this study follow a dramatic situation where the elders ask Jesus who gave him authority. Jesus answered by presenting them a dilemma that they could not answer.

Matt 21:23-27: 23 *Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"*

24 *Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism — where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"*

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

27 *So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."*

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Then Jesus followed with two parables, which illustrated what happens if you reject and kill the master's son.

The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like a Man That Had Two Sons

Matt 21: 28-32: 28 *"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'*

29 *"'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.*

30 *"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.*

31 *"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"*

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them,

"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

The first son represents the tax collectors and prostitutes who generally rejected God but who with the advent of Christ accepted God. The second son of this parable are the elders representative of Israel

who being the chosen of God rejected the Lord. The first group is similar to the centurion of the introduction. This parable and that statement in Matthew 8 show that under Christ what one does determines his salvation. The final lesson of the parable applies throughout the ages: people must repent and believe Christ to be saved.

The second parable of the planted vineyard illustrates that not believing, the Jews killed John the Baptist and would soon kill the very son of God.

The Landlord Planted a Vineyard

Matt 21: 33-44 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

*"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"*

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

The conclusion of this parable is in verse 43, which reiterates the lesson of the Lord's first parable: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

Jesus relates the killing of the son in this passage the prophecy in Psalms 118:22-23: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" The testing of Jesus as a capstone shows the ultimate destruction of those who reject him. This is the same rock upon which Jesus said, "I will build my church." Matt 16:18. Paul spoke of this same foundation in 1 Cor 3:10-11: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Peter traced this same figure from the Old Testament forward in 1 Peter 2:4-8 and concluded,

4 As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

*"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."*

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone,"

8 and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

Conclusion

Matt: 21:45: When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

The chief priests and the Pharisee knew what Jesus meant. It is clear that the kingdom of God will go to those who produce its fruit. It will no longer belong to the physical kingdom of Israel. People who stumble will stumble because of their disobedience.

Study Questions

1. Why were the people amazed at Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? _____

2. How did the centurion in Matthew 8 describe authority? _____

3. How did the elders test the Lord? _____

4. What dilemma did Jesus place them in? _____

5. What was the meaning of the two parables? _____

6. Who will be allowed to enter the kingdom of God? _____

7. Did the chief priest and the Pharisees understand Jesus teaching? _____

8. Did they leave searching for the truth? _____ What were they looking for?
