

## Jesus' Rejection & Exaltation

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Scriptural text: Matthew 21:33-46, ESV

We have been studying some of the parables of Jesus. On this Palm Sunday we will consider our text. This is chosen because it seems so particularly important and connected to the events of this week. Matthew 21 begins with the triumphant entry of Jesus, which we celebrate, and following that triumphal entry there is some conversation the Pharisees, the religious leaders, the cleansing of the Temple and then the parables.

This parable of the wicked tenants is one in which we can learn from the Lord about Himself. This is a judgment parable.

### The Parable of the Tenants

<sup>33</sup> *"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. <sup>34</sup> When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup> And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup> And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" <sup>41</sup> They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."*

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, *"Have you never read in the Scriptures:  
"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes"?*

<sup>43</sup> *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. <sup>44</sup> And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

The Gospel of Mark opens by telling us Jesus went around proclaiming the "Gospel of God",

<sup>15</sup> and saying, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

I love Jesus' plain talk. Jesus spoke in a manner which made it nearly impossible for even common men and women to miss His meaning. His enemies could not get away from the plain offense of His simple words. He spoke to the soul and His plain talk offended the pride of man, particularly the religious leaders. The people, in following the religious leaders of the day, decided to put Jesus to death.

At the center of Jesus' life and message and ministry is a dual call to repentance and to faith. Repentance is the turning away from sin. It is a repudiation of a self-directed life. Faith is the full embrace of Jesus for all who He is, God come in the flesh, Savior, King, Messiah, Lord. Faith is and embrace of Jesus completely, wholly, fully. The Gospel Jesus proclaimed, the Good News Jesus proclaimed, is the message of repentance and faith.

Yet, the call to repent from sin and believe in Jesus is believed by many today to be outdated and archaic. To the modern ear it feels too simplistic and a bit below modern sophistication. Rather than confront man's ego and self-styled manner of life, today's Christian often presents a message which does not confront our pride, but it rather appeals to it. The offense of the Message, the offense of the Gospel, is nearly wholly abandoned in favor of a message that makes people feel happy about who we are and how we are living our lives.

For example, many pastors today define sin as a "lowered self-esteem". This is written in the books one can get in many Christian book stores. The answer to a lowered self-esteem is to believe in one's self and pursue this life, in this world, with all of the worldly attractions, to the fullest. That is the Gospel message for many in our day.

A number of years ago I came across a comic strip titled "Kudzu"<sup>1</sup> and it dealt with this problem rather humorously. There is an old country parson standing behind a pulpit. A young man in the congregation approaches him. The old country parson, Rev. Will B. Dunn, says to the young man, "Let me get this straight: the word 'sinners' is spiritually incorrect?" The young man smiles and says, "You got it. 'People of foibles' is a more sensitive, supportive, and nurturing term." The pastor nods and says, "I see." In the next frame, the reverend is preaching behind the pulpit and he preaches, "People of foibles repent!" The same young man approaches the pulpit and confronts the pastor, "Now, repent, that is too harsh. How about 'reflect' or 'reconsider' or 'take a look at'?" In the last frame the parson is behind the pulpit and he is saying, "People of foibles, check it out!"

That is the Gospel message for many this day. It has lost its offense and its forcefulness. Parables such as those we have studied and will consider in this study will bring the force of God's Message call for us to repent and avoid His Divine Judgment in full force.

Easter week is so important for us because it reminds us we, indeed, are sinners in need of God's infinite mercy. Easter removes us from the realm of the temporal and into the realm of the eternal. Easter points us to the inescapable appointment with death each one of us will have and with that inescapable appointment with God in His Judgment. Easter reveals God's wrath like no other holiday, God's wrath being poured out upon His Son because of our sin. Yet, Easter exalts God's Son as a unique Son who is God come in the flesh and take His rightful place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that process crushes human pride. Easter leads us to despair the cross so it can lead us to the bright hope of the Resurrection. How great Easter is! Easter makes the Gospel message so very clear.

As we turn to Matthew 21, we consider afresh that first day of Easter week, Palm Sunday. In this text we will learn about three offending Easter truths: first about God, second about man, and finally about Jesus. We will focus most of this study on the parable Jesus tells us about a land owner and the wicked tenants, but the context is so very important. As we begin Matthew 21, we read about the first Palm Sunday,

<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "*Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.*" <sup>3</sup> *If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once.*" <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup> "Say to the daughter of Zion,  
Behold, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

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<sup>1</sup> A daily comic strip by Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist Doug Marlette about rural Southerners. Distributed by Universal Press Syndicate, the strip ran from June 15, 1981 to August 4, 2007.

I love Luke's account, as well, of this story. In Luke's account, in Chapter 19, some of the Pharisees in the crowd come to Jesus and confront Him,

<sup>39</sup> And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." <sup>40</sup> He answered, "*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.*"

They wanted Jesus to rebuke His Disciples because they were allowing people to worship Him and laying down palm branches. They were saying it is not right for a man to receive worship reserved for God alone. He was telling them God had sovereignly ordained this day to be His coronation day, the day which He is proclaimed publically as King. God had ordained Jesus to receive verbal recognition by way of praise, even from a people who rejected Him.

Palm Sunday is curious. On Sunday, the crowds are shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," and on Friday they are shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"<sup>2</sup> How could that be? It is because God the Father had ordained His Son would be verbally recognized and if the people did not do it He would have the rocks cry out because the Son is going to be recognized as King.

On Monday, Jesus cleanses the Temple and how this infuriated the religious leaders,

<sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "*It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers.*"<sup>3</sup>

He stayed in the Temple and He continued to heal the sick and the lame and the blind,

<sup>14</sup> And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, <sup>16</sup> and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "*Yes; have you never read,*

*"'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies  
you have prepared praise'?"*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>17</sup> And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

The children were singing the song, on Monday, the song they heard on Sunday. Isn't it wonderful how children learn through singing? They were doing what God had ordained for them to do and they were fulfilling Scripture.

Then Jesus left the city of Jerusalem and He goes to Bethany. Later that night, as He is traveling to Bethany, He finds a fig tree not bearing fruit in the proper season and He curses it.<sup>5</sup>

This brings us to Tuesday of Holy Week. On Tuesday Jesus is confronted by religious leaders,

<sup>23</sup> And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

What authority are they talking about? They are talking about the authority to cleanse the Temple. They had a system going which was approved by the "authorities" and Jesus, on Monday, came and dismantled that system, "This is not going to happen in the Temple. Not this week. Not now. My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer." The chief priests confront Jesus and ask Him who gave Him the right to cleanse the Temple and to teach there. They wanted to know from where He received His "authority". This is a very reasonable question. Jesus did not check in with the Temple authority before cleansing the Temple; He did not get His permit.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:22b, 23b

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 7:11

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 8:2

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 21:18-19

Imagine inviting guests into your home. As soon as they come in they begin to rearrange the furniture. They take down some pictures. They put some of your favorite pieces of art in a closet. They bring out some of theirs and put it up where yours used to be. What would you do? You would look, first, at them in shock! Then you would say, "Who do you think you are? Who gave you the right to come in here and begin moving around my furniture?" That is a reasonable response and that is the way the religious leaders are thinking because they do not observe the authority of Jesus.

That guest would be wrong to exercise dominion over your realm and the Pharisees and religious leaders are offended. Jesus is exercising dominion over what they perceive as their realm. But, by these actions Jesus is not just claiming dominion over the realm of God's Temple, but He exercises dominion over the realm of God's Temple. The principle we learn about Jesus is: Jesus does not merely claim to have authority over all of our life and He does not merely say, "Ritch, I have authority," He exercises authority over our life and that is a huge difference.

Jesus never enters a life without exercising authority over that life. He never comes into a person, or into a church, and sits down calmly in the corner and sits passively by. Jesus is too zealous for the Father's glory to allow that in a life or in a spiritual family, the church. Jesus comes into my house and He says, "Ritch, this is how I want you to spend your time. This is how I want you to rearrange your furniture. These are the pictures I want you to put on your walls." He comes in and He exercises dominion.

And, we can do one of two things when Jesus does that. We can act like the Pharisees and become indignant and say, "Who gave You the right to do that?" and resist Him. Resistance is futile, by the way, because He is King. Or, we can submit to Him and say, "You are right. It is your house. It is not mine. It is Your church. It is not ours." Jesus is polite, but He is polite as the owner of the house so He acts like the owner. He does not ask us for permission.

In case we believe the Pharisees' rudeness was the right choice, we will take a peak at the end of the story,

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "*Have you never read in the Scriptures:  
"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes?"*

<sup>43</sup> *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you (as a Nation) and given to a people (the Gentiles and the church) producing its fruits.* <sup>44</sup> *And the one who falls on this stone (Jesus) will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

Again, resistance to the King is absolutely futile and to do so is a death warrant. It is absolute misery.

Have you ever wondered it seems as though the tables of our life are turned over and they are in chaos? Have you ever wondered, "What is happening here? It seems as though my life is in chaos." It might be, as one of the possibilities, Jesus has come in and turned over those tables because He has a right to and He cares about the zeal and about the glory of God in our life. He is turning over tables in order to cleanse us. Jesus exercises dominion without our permission.

The Pharisees ask the question, "By whose authority do You do these things?" They thought God's House was their house. Let us pray that we, as a church, would always remember that Bethany Baptist Church is Jesus' church. It is not ours and He has a right to do His will. Jesus answered by saying He would answer their question if they answered His question and then He would tell them by what authority He did those things,

<sup>25a</sup> "*The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?"*

Jesus points the Pharisees to John the Baptist, not because He is evading their question, but because He is answering them. He is saying, "John the Baptist, who has come before me, has answered your question. If you had listened to him, you would know where the authority I have to cleanse the Temple comes. John the Baptist witnessed of Me when he said, 'One who is coming after me is greater than me.' I am not even worthy to untie the lace of His sandal. He also declared, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world. This is the person

whom I said after me comes a man who ranks before me because He was before me.” That is John’s testimony. John explains, “Jesus was born after me chronologically and physically, but He really came before me because He came from Heaven. He existed before He was born of a virgin Mary. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandal because He is so much greater than I am as a prophet of God.” Jesus tells them if they would have listened to John the Baptist they would understand who He is and that He has authority from God Himself, “What do you think of John the Baptist? If you did not listen to John’s answer to your question, you will not listen to Mine.”

The principle we learn is: God is not interested in teaching us new truths if we harden our self to the truth He has already given to us. The reason we know so little about God and the joy of God’s will in our life is not that God has not clearly spoken, but that we have refused to listen. That is the reason why it is so important for us, as believers, to take the full counsel of the word of God and not reject any part of it because it is all tied together as a unified message from God for our life. The moment we begin to cut out sections of the Bible we do not want to listen to is the moment we cut our self off from God’s gracious loving message of hope and life for us.

One commentator writes, “An increasing knowledge of Divine Truth is conditioned on a humble submission of the heart and will to what has already been revealed.” If we want to learn more and more of God’s Truth then we must submit more and more to the Truth we already know.

The religious leaders get into a huddle,

<sup>25b</sup> And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’” <sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*”

They were in a dilemma by Jesus’ question. They knew what John the Baptist said and of his testimony about Jesus. At this point the religious leaders stopped asking what is true and what is from God. This is where people get to in their rebellion. They are not interested in what God says is true for our life, so much as they are interested in what is expedient. They needed something that fit their present course and their own decisions and something that will become useful and practical to help them accomplish their goals.

It is not wrong for us, in our life, to pursue wisdom and ask the question: What is going to work? What is practical? What is useful? It is not wrong to ask these questions. But, if we have not first asked: What does God say is true, then that question will lead us astray and that is what was happening to the Pharisees. They were asking the question, “What is practical, first? Then we will see if it fits into what we think God says is true.” That is the opposite way of living life.

The way we are called to live our life is to first say: What does God say is true? There will be much of that which God reveals which be very uncomfortable and which cuts against our natural will, our own opinions, our own desires and values. But, only until we get clear as to what God says is true can we rightly ask, “What is going to work in view of what God says is true?”

The Pharisees had it all upside down. God refuses to speak to a people who will not receive the truth, regardless of its impact. We may say, “Lord, I want to know the truth regardless of how it impacts my life. I want the truth because I know You are the God of Truth and I can trust You.”

There are three offending truths we will learn from the parable: a truth about God; a truth about man; and a truth about Jesus. **The first Easter truth is: God is sovereign, patient and righteous.** He is sovereign; He is the owner. He is infinitely patient; He is slow to anger. And, He is righteous; He is the ultimate Judge.

**The second Easter truth is: Man is privileged, wicked and accountable.** That is God’s testimony and that is what this story teaches us. We are privileged; we are tenants in a wonderful vineyard God created. Yet, we are wicked and we are accountable.

### **The third Easter truth is: Jesus is unique, rejected and exalted.**

<sup>33</sup> *“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...”*

The Master of the House is God. God owns the vineyard and as the Owner He puts energy into that vineyard in making a wonderful, fruitful, healthy place. Notice the care He takes to protect the vineyard. He builds a tower. He puts a fence around it. He digs a wine press, ready to make the fruit useful. Then, after investing considerable resources and energy, He leaves for another country and He leases the land to tenants. This is a common thing for land owners to do. The people listening to Jesus’ story, the religious leaders as well as the people gathered in Jerusalem that day, are listening to Jesus tell a very, very common story. And, it is also a story connected to God’s revelation in the Old Testament. Isaiah 5 helps us to understand what the vineyard represents,

<sup>1</sup> Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. <sup>2</sup> 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...<sup>7</sup> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

Does this seem familiar? Jesus is almost quoting Isaiah 5 as He begins this story with Scripture. The religious leaders are familiar with the Old Testament and they know He is referring to this passage in Isaiah.

Jesus is the God man who meditated upon Scripture day-by-day. He took Scripture to be His spiritual food even as the God man. Doesn’t that say something as to how important Scripture is in our life if we are to follow God and glorify Him. The Son of Man meditated upon Scripture and the stories He told flowed with Scripture.

This passage tells us the vineyard is Israel and that God had chosen this little nation to bear the fruit of worship and witness for His glory. He planted this Nation in the land and He showered them with the blessings of His promises and His Law and His covenants. He set aside this people, Israel, to be His people so that this people would shine His glory to the whole world. Isn’t it a remarkable thing that God chose this little Nation, one still in existence to day, to be the centerpiece of all human history. Geographically and by population it is an insignificant place, yet it is the centerpiece of human history. It is so much so, if we do not understand the history of Israel we will not understand at all the history of this world. This little Nation is the centerpiece of God’s planned and purposes for mankind. God planted the vineyard Israel for His purposes to yield a fruit of worship and witness to proclaim His glories.

The tenants of the story represent the religious leaders. The disciple Mark will say further that the tenants also represent the people.<sup>6</sup> This is not a trouble for us because Isaiah the Prophet tells us they will be like people, like priests. The people are still accountable for their actions even though they are following the religious leaders. The people willingly follow the rebellion of their spiritual leaders. This is a great warning for us, that just because religious leaders go astray does not mean we have lost the accountability to follow God in our own personal life.

This is as true as if we were being raised in a family and we have a mom or dad who are on track with God and suddenly they are off the track. They begin to live a wild and loose life and we say, “Well, mom and dad did it. They taught me the Gospel, so I guess I am free now.” No! The people and the priests are both held accountable. The people are not off of the hook of accountability to God just because the priests were leading them away from the Messiah. It is true many spiritual leaders today are living lives of disobedience and unbelief. It can become discouraging, especially to young people who see religious leaders who are not living lives that reflect obedience to God so why should they. We need to go back to the authority of God and the authority of Scripture to find the answer to that important question.

Jesus continues,

<sup>34</sup> *“When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.”*

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 12:1-12

I believe the fruit represents obedience, worship, and the witness God called for the people of Israel to give to the whole world. It is right for God to expect a return on the grace He gives to us. He gives grace, grace, grace and He sets us in this wonderful vineyard. He gives to us responsibility and stewardship. It is right for Him to expect the fruit of worship, the fruit of witness, and the fruit of praise.

There is a season of fruit gathering and that season represents, here, any day God calls us to give an account for our life. It represents the time God sent messengers to the people. There were multiple opportunities for people to give fruit back to God which God rightly deserved as the Owner. Again, the story represents a simple economic pact which was common in that day; an owner owns land and he says, "You can farm my land if you give to me twenty percent of the produce at the end and you keep eighty percent for yourself."

This was a great deal for these tenants who otherwise would have had no other opportunity to work or feed their families. Yet, notice what they do in the story,

*<sup>35</sup> "And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them."*

What an outrage! It is not too much for the owner to expect what is rightful his and it is not too much, beloved, for God to expect obedience worship and service from His people after He has given us so much grace. It is an outrage we would kick against that call of God upon our life. The Easter truth we are learning about God is: He is sovereign and He is patient and He is righteous. The patience of God is particularly on display in this story is it not?

How very slow God is to anger. Imagine you are in the place of this landowner. What would you do after your first messenger was so ill treated? Would you not call the authorities? Would you not come down with the full force of all of your resources against these wicked tenants and throw them off of the land? Yet, he does not. He sends another and another even after some are mistreated and killed. This is the patience of God. Oh, how patient He is with a rebellious people. How slow He is to anger.

Jesus is not exaggerating this story as He talks about the history of God's people. The Prophet Elijah was driven into the wilderness. Jeremiah was beaten and bound in stocks. Zachariah was stoned to death near the alter of the Temple. Isaiah was sawn in two as tradition would say. John the Baptist was beheaded. The political and spiritual leaders throughout Israel's history rejected God's sent messenger. They kept persecuting the people God had selected to deliver His truth to the Nation. What was their motive? They wanted the field all to themselves. They wanted all the glory. They wanted to be the owner.

Isn't that how Satan got started? He wanted to be like God. Isn't that how Adam and Eve got off track? They wanted to be like God and they thought the fruit would cause them to become like God. Man does not rebel against God because God failed to send clear enough messages. Man rebels against God because God refuses to give us ownership over our life, so we seek to get out from under it.

Consider God's patience. Oh, how patient He is. He has His heart full of compassion. Later, in Matthew 23, Jesus will weep over Jerusalem,

*<sup>37</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*

God's patience is sadly mistaken for weakness or apathy. We do that. The leaders of Jesus' day did not fear the return of the owner because throughout their history they treated messengers this way and the hammer had not yet dropped upon them as a Nation and a people. They thought, "God must not care how we treat His messengers." They had no fear of Him and this is why it was so easy for them to discard Jesus, the One whom God sent as His own Son.

Do you ever mistake God's patience for weakness or for apathy? What a fearful thing that is.

Notice the insanity of their rebellion and this leads us to **the second Easter truth: Man is privileged, wicked and accountable,**

<sup>37</sup> *Finally he sent his son to them...*

This is the last messenger and there is a note of sadness in the landowner's voice. This story reveals how privileged we are to be God's tenants, trusted by God with a vineyard, and yet how wicked we are with that stewardship,

<sup>38</sup> *"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'"*

What? Consider the insanity of rebelling against this landowner. How could they possibly believe their plan was actually going to work, but yet they thought that. It was because rebellion in the heart muddles the mind. Sin makes us stupid. We believe sin will actually cause us to have the fruit we really desire, that belongs to God, and we want for our self though our own means. Sin caused these folks to think, "Hey, this is a great plan. What should we do with the son." "Let's kill him and this whole vineyard will be ours." Right! Don't they know the landowner still exists and he still has power and resources. Didn't they know what would happen when they reject the son? They were blind, ignorant, and foolish in their rebellion.

### **The third truth is: Jesus is unique, rejected and exalted.**

I believe the Bible tells us we are all enemies of God and we behave opposite the way God tells us to behave; we think opposite the way God tells us to think; and we value opposite the way God tells us to value. Everything about us, our words, our actions, and our affections, are set against God. This is the reason God calls us His enemies. We are by nature children of wrath and enemies of God. That is who man is and that is why we need the Easter truth: Jesus is unique, rejected and exalted.

As Jesus tells the story, we should ask this question: What does Jesus know about Himself? First, He knows He is God's unique Son. He is not like the other prophets. He is the Son. Mark's Gospel will say the landowner sent his "beloved son". Jesus understands He is the unique Son of God. He is not like all of the other prophets and we need to consider that. Jesus is not putting Himself in a line of faithful men who have been used as messengers of God. He is God's last appeal and the Final Messenger God will send. If we miss the message Jesus gives to us we will miss God completely.

Anyone who believes Jesus is one in a long line prophets sent from God does not understand the Bible, for Jesus claims to be God's unique Son, a Son equal in authority to the Father the Landowner. The Son is the heir and He possesses equal authority. The Jews of Jesus' day understood what Jesus was claiming when He claimed to be God's Son. In John 5, we read,

<sup>18</sup> This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

They understood when Jesus put Himself in the place of the son, He is making this incredible claim to authority. Remember, He is answering the question: By whose authority do You do these things? He tells them, "I am God's Son. That is whose authority I am claiming."

Secondly, Jesus knows He will be rejected. Jesus is not fooled by the praise He receives on Palm Sunday. He is not fooled on Monday or on Tuesday. On Tuesday He tells them what will happen to the Son as they will take Him and kill Him. He knows that is what they are going to do.

In fact, in Matthew, three times Jesus says, "I know the Son of Man is going to be rejected. He will be killed by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He will be buried and He will be raised the third day."

<sup>Matthew 16:21</sup> From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Matthew 17:22 As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, *“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men,<sup>23a</sup> and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

Matthew 20:17 And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them,<sup>18</sup> *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death<sup>19</sup> and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

This parable is the fourth incident of His prediction of His rejection. Jesus not only foretold His death, but He considered His death to be central to His work of redemption. He recognized He had to be rejected, fulfilling the prophecies, in order to bear the sins of us all and that is where this Gospel is such good news to sinners who submit to the Son. The Son took upon Him our sin. He became the Lamb of God, as our substitute, dying in our place as a sacrifice for sins. Jesus knew that prior to His death. He knew what God the Father had ordained from eternity past.

Finally, He knows He will be exalted,

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, *“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing ...’”*

How does this happen? The Son is killed and the Son is the stone. Jesus is mixing metaphors and He is doing it so He is entrenched in Scripture so that the people will know He has the authority of God and that He is speaking with the authority of God. If the Son is killed how does He become the central figure for the natural life of Israel, for the people of God and for the Kingdom of God? It is through the resurrection.

Jesus understands this about Himself, that He will rise from the dead and He will be exalted as the Chief Cornerstone. In a building the chief cornerstone is the most important stone of the building. All of the other stones are set in reference to it.

This was a stone the builders said was worthless and they would not use it for any part of the building, but God picks it up and says, “No, this becomes the chief cornerstone, the most important stone in this building.” Jesus is telling them there will be a huge reversal and a huge turning. Everything that was upside down will become right side up and the Son will be glorified in the end.

Jesus is quoting Scripture, Psalm 118. But, what is “the Lord’s doing”? Some may say it is the exaltation. Yes, the exaltation is the Lord’s doing because God is sovereign and He will see that His Son Jesus rules and reigns as the Exalted King.

But, do you know what else was the Lord’s doing? It was the rejection. God had predetermined this plan for His Son to be rejected so that the Son might become the means by which you and I can be forgiven of our sin,

<sup>42b</sup> *... and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”*

Is that truth marvelous in your eyes? Can you say, “I just love thinking about this. I love thinking that God did something with Jesus, that this Easter week represents, that is just marvelous. I love thinking over and over all that God did in His Son, in His rejection and in His exaltation.”

Jesus closes with a final word of warning and we must remember this parable is a judgment parable. It is written to ask the question by the Pharisees, “By whose authority do you do these things?” It is ultimately written to prod these religious leaders and people to submit to the Son, to kiss the Son while there is still time and to bow down before Jesus as King,

<sup>43</sup> *“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God (the vineyard) will be taken away from you (the Nation of Israel) and given to a people (the Gentiles) producing its fruits.”*

This is the church age in which we are living. This vineyard, with all of the privileges God had invested in His people, His covenant, His promises, His Law, the position which this people had to be God's witness and the position God had given to them to be God's worshippers and a light for the whole world, is given to another people; it is given to us.

The stewardship is ours now and that is an awesome thing to think about. We have the stewardship of the vineyard and the landowner comes to us and says, "It is time to receive fruit. What are you doing?"

Has Israel lost the vineyard forever? No, they have not and Romans 9 through 11 tells us Israel will receive tenancy. But, for now, in this time they have lost the tenancy over this vineyard and it is given to another,

<sup>44</sup> *And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

This is a sobering word of warning. As Jesus is telling this, He is saying to the religious leaders, "You religious leaders plot to kill Me and to fall upon me to break Me. When you fall upon Me the Stone never gets hurt." Think of how they fell upon Him. Think of the mocking intended to hurt Jesus and the Stone stayed the same. Think of how they beat Him. Think of how they put the crown of thorns on His head. Think of the stripes they laid against His back. Think of the nails in His hands and in His feet. They kept falling upon Him, but He told them they were falling against a Stone.

Who gets hurt when we fall against a Stone? We are flesh and blood and He is not. He is God come in the flesh and He is the Son of God. We do not hurt the Stone, but we fulfill God's plan for Him.

But, when we fall against the Stone, what happens to us? We get broken into pieces. Then there is a day when the Stone rises up out of the ground, He is speaking of Daniel 2, and this is a sobering phrase, where a giant stone is cut out of a mountain and it falls upon the nations of people who reject Him. That Stone which is flat on the ground and passive, like a lamb before the shears of silence, so the Son of Man is silent before those who persecute Him and He lets them fall on Him, but they are the ones who get hurt.

But, then there is a day when the Stone rises out of the grounds and anyone who is still rejecting the Son at that point will be ground to death and they are no more. That is the sobering word Jesus gives through this parable.

Jesus is rejected, but He is exalted. What will we do with Jesus? If you have not believed in Him that is a big question. It is still a question for every one of us who have fallen on Him, who are a part of the tenants. What are we doing today with Jesus? May God help us to see the glory of Jesus, that we would worship Him and that we would be the witness of His glory in all the world.