

PLOT TWIST

"WARNING: FALLING ROCK"

MATTHEW 21:33-46

This Week's Core Competency

Trinity – I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14 - *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

As much as we may deny it, familiarity in our faith often breeds contempt. We would never imagine ourselves falling out of love or devotion to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Yet our exposure to a plethora of Christian things, such as Christian books, Christian radio, Christian TV, Christian T-Shirts and even things as mundane as Christian breath mints (Google "Testamints") along with many other "Christian-isms," often cloud our vision of who Jesus really is. The proper understanding of who Jesus is and the full embrace of his claims are essential for vibrant life now and rewarding life everlasting. We may be tempted to diminish who Jesus truly is in order to be respected or admired by those who deny his biblical identity.

Jesus, all by himself, is a fascinating study. There is no one in history quite like him. Dr. James Allan Francis most eloquently portrayed the wonders of our Lord in his famous composition titled "One Solitary Life." This meditation was officially published in 1930. Consider Dr. Francis' description of Jesus:

*The Jesus that men want to see is not
the Jesus they really need to see.*

– G. Campbell Morgan

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village as the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty and then for three years was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born.

He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He had nothing to do with this world except the naked power of his divine manhood.

While still a young man the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. Another betrayed him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon the cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth while he was dying, and that was his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone and today he is the center of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon the earth as powerfully as has this one solitary life.

day 1

ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 21:33-46

33"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. 34When 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. 36Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37Last 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.' 39So 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."

42Jesus 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. 44He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

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

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline the word "vineyard" throughout the parable.
- * Box the word "tenants" in the parable.
- * Circle all the words of action carried out by the tenants in the parable.
- * Double underline the word of response in v. 37.
- * Put brackets around the phrase of repetition in v. 41.
- * Write in the chapter and verse of the quotation in v. 42.
- * Draw a line connecting similar words in v. 42 and v. 44.
- * Circle the word of contrast in v. 44.
- * Draw a line from "chief priests and the Pharisees" to a group of people they represent in the parable.
- * Draw a line from the word "prophet" in v. 46 to a corresponding word in v. 37.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. In what location does Jesus tell the Parable of the Tenants (see Mt. 21:23) and what does this location add to the meaning of the parable?
2. Read Isaiah 5:1-7. What clues does this passage provide for a clearer understanding of Jesus' Parable of the Tenants?
3. Identify the group of people the tenants represent and how they are distinct from the people represented by the vineyard.
4. What motives did the tenants have for their violent actions?
5. Why did the owner think his last inspector would be treated better than the others he sent?
6. What is faulty in the logic of the tenants (Mt 21:38)?
7. Jesus asks a question in Mt 21:40. Who answers the question in Mt 21:41? What is ironic about this answer?
8. In Matthew 21:42, Jesus quotes Psalm 118. What does the image in this quotation contribute to the understanding of the Parable of the Tenants?
9. From whom will the kingdom of God be taken away and to whom will the kingdom of God be given (Mt 21:43)?
10. Is Mt 21:44 only a pronouncement of judgment or is there any hope found in this verse? Explain your answer.

Jesus of Nazareth is at the same time the most unifying and most polarizing figure of history. People tend to fall into two groups - those who rally around Jesus and those who rally against Jesus. Your view of Jesus and his identity will largely define your own identity. Two of the world's major monotheistic religions understand Jesus to be at best a human prophetic teacher. Other world religions regard Jesus as an enlightened spiritual master. Atheists typically understand Jesus to be fictional or at best a poor soul made into a legend by those who never knew him. To see Jesus as the best of humanity is to invite the praise of many. To see Jesus as divine is to invite multiplied scorn.

A popular line of argument, from many who claim Jesus to be only human, is stated as follows: Jesus never claimed to be God. Jesus never said, "I am God, worship me." Christians are quick to quote the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John as a rebuttal. Skeptics will dismiss these statements from John's Gospel as later creations of the Christian community conveniently inserted into Jesus' mouth. Clear statements from Jesus about himself being God appear to be missing in the earlier gospel accounts. Looking only at the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke, one does struggle to find statements from Jesus that speak to his divinity. They can be found, but they seem to be indirect and shrouded in mystery.

There are reasons for this divine obscurity. If Jesus were to have publicly claimed to be God in the context of first century Judaism, he would have caused many social, religious and political problems. If Jesus were to have proclaimed himself as divine immediately after his baptism, he most likely would not have lived to see the first anniversary of his public ministry. Even with Jesus' rural Galilean ministry and his modest miracle working, he encountered early resistance and harsh opposition to his claims and fame. To help manage this opposition and prevent a premature arrest, Jesus began to teach in parables. These simple stories with symbolic representations often veiled the sharpness of Jesus' claims. Jesus' description of his use of parables (Matthew 13:11-17) highlighted the "secret" nature of parables and the "inside" access to understanding reserved for

those who believed. "Parable, it seems, may proclaim a truth as a herald does; and at the same time conceal truth like an oracle" (Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, 47). Jesus' parabolic claims, though indirect, often presented both his human and divine identity.

The parable we consider in this study, The Parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:33-46), is unique as a Gospel parable on many counts. Most parables are sourced in the context of day-to-day life. This parable is surprisingly associated with an Old Testament parable found in Isaiah 5, borrowing much of Isaiah's language. Using the imagery of Isaiah 5, the NT parable connects the vineyard with Israel and provides a short history of the treatment of prophets by the leaders of Israel. This story, told in the temple by Jesus, would have caught the ear of scribes and priests who would have been familiar with Isaiah's proclamations of God planting a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). This is also uniquely the only Gospel parable which concludes with the quotation of OT scripture (Psalm 118:22-23). Perhaps most unique is this parable's claim about the identity of Jesus as God's son (Matthew 21:37) and the exaltation of Jesus after his predicted death (Matthew 21:42). When Jesus introduces the "son" as someone more important than prophets, the plot twist begins. "The introduction of the son makes a significant christological statement. Mark and Luke describe him as the 'beloved' son, possibly tightening an allusion back to Jesus' title at baptism. Here Jesus shows his own self-understanding as involving a unique relationship to God, which the voice at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration makes clear" (Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture*, 425).

The Jewish leaders were quite clear in their understanding of their part in the parable Jesus told about the tenants (Matthew 21:45). They understood that Jesus was identifying them as "wretches" deserving a "wretched end" who were guilty of killing God's prophets and ultimately killing the final messenger, God's Son. Ironically, these leaders appear to be the ones who answer Jesus' question of Matthew 21:40, condemning themselves with their own assessment. Even if the

chief priests and Pharisees were unclear on the identity of "the son," Jesus made it clear that the stone they were rejecting, planning to arrest and kill was chosen by God and would be exalted by God, even after death (Matthew 21:42). Some argue that there is a play on words in the Hebrew text of Psalm 118 and the word "son" found in the parable. The Hebrew word for "son" is "*ben*." The Hebrew word for "stone" is "*eben*" and the Hebrew word for "builders" is "*hebenim*." So the ones who should have known (the "builders") should have not rejected the chosen "son/stone." God will exalt this "son/stone" to prominence even though the "wretched" tenants/builders have rejected and killed him (K. Snodgrass, *Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1998, 204).

Both the parable (Matthew 21:33-41) and the scriptural prediction (Matthew 21:42-44) sharply address the intentions and plans of the temple leaders. This is all communicated within the veiling style of a parable. But the intended recipients clearly got the message. The chief priests and the Pharisees "knew he was talking about them" (Matthew 21:45). They continued their plans to arrest Jesus after his harsh but veiled words about them (Matthew 21:46).

Jesus clearly identified himself as more than a prophet in this parable. He identified himself as the final messenger from God (Matthew 21:37). He identified himself as more than just a messenger but as "the son" who is to be respected just like as his father. This term "respect" has the connotation of "turning" or "stopping" to show consideration or esteem. The term is close to the idea of "repenting" as described in Matthew 21:32. Because of his "heir status" and because of his special relationship with his father, the "son" should have received special attention and respect from temple leaders. Instead, their contempt for Jesus and his special claims only grew.

Violent rejection of the "son" had severe consequences. By their own assessment, the leaders of Israel predicted a "wretched" end for themselves (Matthew 21:41). Jesus concluded they would lose their leadership privileges and others would take their place of leadership (Matthew 21:43). This loss of privilege opened

the door to other Jews and Gentiles to be used of God to lead in his kingdom. This is not to be understood as a total replacement of the nation of Israel with the Church. In the parable and in the details of Isaiah 5, the vineyard is Israel. Jesus introduces the category of "tenants" and replaces these evil leaders, not the entire vineyard.

Who is Jesus to you? Is he just a prophet or a good moral teacher? Can you embrace the unpopular view that Jesus is divine? To understand Jesus and fully embrace his teachings and predictions, you cannot ignore his claim to be something more than a teacher and prophet. Jesus claims to be God's Son. The "son" being sent assumes that he is "the son" before he is sent. If "the son" is the "heir" before he is killed, then he must be in an exalted connection with God before his death and resurrection.

Accepting and worshiping Jesus as God the Son has consequences. Most of the world will look down upon your acceptance of Jesus as the only true God. Are you willing to suffer as the "son" has suffered by identifying with him? Making the divine identity of Jesus a part of your identity as a Christian is a serious matter and may mean the loss of standing with family, co-workers, clients and friends.

Not accepting Jesus as God the Son is not without its own set of consequences. Matthew 21:41,43-44 describe the fate of those who reject the "Son/Stone." Matthew 21:44 is most descriptive. If one "falls" or "trips" over the Stone, he or she will be broken. Jesus is a stumbling block to many and many fall down in unbelief, unable to accept Jesus as Messiah and Divine. Others may fall down upon Christ in repentance and in brokenness accept him as the Cornerstone of all their hope and faith, both present and future. But those who ultimately resist Jesus, rejecting him and his claims as the divine Savior - their fate is dire "crushing." Those rejecting Christ will ultimately be judged severely by him (Matthew 21:44). These are sobering words for those rejecting Christ. Heaven help us to trust in Jesus as God's Son. Heaven help those whom we love who have not embraced Christ as Savior. Heaven help us to share the Gospel with those in such great need.

The Message of the Passage

***God has ultimately and finally revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus.
Humbly submit to God's Son Jesus or face dire consequences.***

day 4 EMBRACE – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:

- How is God making himself known to you?
- How does God want to change you?
- How is God calling you to change your world?

notes N STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 33 *vineyard* "It should be seen, however, that while in the Isaiah text the owner's (=God's) problem is with the vineyard, the owner's problem in the parable is with the tenants who are supposed to care for the vineyard. This subtle shift allows the vineyard to continue to refer to the Jewish people (as in Isaiah); and it also means that the vineyard is the object of God's continuing care. God as owner of the vineyard does not come to destroy the vineyard, and God as owner does not plant a new vineyard" (Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 357).

v.34 *tenants* "The vineyard owner stands for God, the first tenants for Israel's leaders, and the second group for those who replace the original, corrupt lot. All were common enough features of ancient vineyards, as were absentee landlords living abroad. On the other hand, details like the tower and winepress (applied to the temple and its altar, respectively, in the Targum on Is 5:1-7) may point specifically to the temple in Jerusalem" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 330).

v. 37 *last* "A comparative used for a superlative and means 'finally'" (John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 873). The "son" is the last one sent as the final and most important above all others sent.

v. 37 *respect* A word meaning "to reverence" or "to turn inward to show allegiance or respect." The word at times is connected with the idea of shame. The landowner thought the tenants would fear to bring shame upon the son, as he was of the same status as the landowner. This idea of "turning to respect" serves as a complement to the ideal of repentance and belief mentioned in Matthew 21:32.

v.38 *heir* The absurdity of the tenants' logic is hyperbolically extreme. "Unless the tenants believed the father to be dead, how could they expect the murder of the heir to give them the title to the vineyard?... The story smacks more of instinctive rejection and unthinking greed than of careful legal reasoning and the rejection of God's sovereignty, and therefore of his Son, by his people is more a matter of 'gut reaction' than of reasoned policy" (R. T. France, *Gospel According to Matthew: Introduction and Commentary*, 309).

v. 41 *wretched* Same word repeated twice. The word means "bad, evil, distasteful and unpleasant." Think of the harshest, most dreadful judgment and double it. "Note the sound repetition (paranomasia): 'He will bring those dreadful scoundrels to a dreadful end'" (William Hendricksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 785).

v. 44 *falls* "Falling on' the cornerstone reflects Isaiah 8:14-15 (cf. Is 28:16); the stone falling on the offender alludes to Daniel 2:34, 44, where God's kingdom, portrayed as a rock, crushes its earthly challengers. Jesus here uses a standard Jewish practice of expounding one text (Mt 21:42) by citing others sharing the same key word or concept, in this case, the divine stone. A later rabbi warned, 'If a pot falls on a rock, woe to the pot; if a rock falls on the pot, woe to the pot-either way, woe to the pot!'" (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 104).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

In our parable this week, the tenants were rebellious and rejected the landowner's plan for his vineyard. The landowner (God) will deal harshly with those who have rejected his Son. As parents, it is our responsibility to give our kids as many opportunities as possible to experience and know God. One of the ways our love for kids manifests itself is through discipline. You have been a parent long enough to know that kids can often behave like the tenants. They can be rebellious and reject the boundaries we have placed around them for their good. The following are some suggestions by Jim and Lynne Jackson, authors of *Discipline that Connects with your Child's Heart*. First, parents should maintain control in discipline situations and assure the child that they are safe. Kids will learn better when they are approached in a calm way. Second, just like the father in the story of the prodigal son, parents need to exhibit unconditional love. It helps them understand God's redemptive love. Next, communicate to your child that he is capable. He was created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Allow them to think through their actions and consequences. Lastly, Galatians 6:7 teaches us that we reap what we sow. Kids are responsible for their behavior and the consequences. Help them know how they can make restitution. Focusing more on their identity in Christ and less on behavior develops spiritual maturity.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Matthew 22:33-46

1. Who is the landowner in the story?
2. What happened to all the people he sent to collect his harvest?
3. In verse 42, who is the stone the builders rejected?

What Do You Think

In this parable, Jesus is talking to religious leaders who have rejected him and God's Word. Why do you think they didn't listen to him?

What R U Going To Do

Look up Ephesians 6:1-3. What does it mean to obey and honor? Talk to your parents about how well they think you have been honoring them lately.

Core Comp

Trinity - I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Memory Verse

Psalm 119:14 - I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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