

The Parables of Jesus #16

The Restoration of the Vineyard & the End of the Evil Vine Growers

Part II

Let's begin with a brief recap. Below is the portion of the parable we covered in part 1.

Matthew 21:33-41,43,45

Listen to another parable. *There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and put a winepress in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again, he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son. But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.... Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.... When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.*

What were the *three symbolic acts* that Jesus performed which formed the context for this parable?

1. Matthew 21:1-11 (Zechariah 9:9)
2. Matthew 21:12-14 (Jeremiah 7:11)
3. Matthew 21:18-19 (Jeremiah 8:13)

What was the primary Old Testament prophecy (taunt song) that Jesus drew from in this parable? In your own words, do your best to explain the parable.

The following was our conclusion from part I:

"The parable of *"The Restoration of the Vineyard & the End of the Evil Vine Growers"* is the story of how God in Christ was at that time restoring His Kingdom, judging and removing his unfaithful servants, and transferring the stewardship of his kingdom (his vineyard) to his righteous New Covenant people. The fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age in AD70 *signified the complete end of Judaism and the Jews as a covenant-people of God*, and; that the kingdom of God had been transformed into its New Covenant form and given to the body of Christ to render to Father *the fruit of righteousness and justice.*"

Now, let's turn our focus to the last portion of the parable. And remember, since we already know the "end of the story" (the interpretation of the parable) we need not look for a new interpretation in these verses. The verses that follow simply *reiterate the same truths as we have seen in the previous portion of the parable*. In my opinion, a clearer understanding of these verses can be gained by reading them in the following order....

Matthew 21:42-45

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, *"The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes? And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.* Therefore, I say to you, *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.* When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, *they understood that He was speaking about them.*

What Old Testament passages did Jesus ask the chief priests and Pharisees if they had ever read?

1. Psalm 118:22-23
2. Isaiah 8:14-15

Why did Jesus ask them if they had ever read these passages?

Was Jesus “literally” asking them if they had ever read Psalm 118 (Hallel - Heb. “praise”) and Isaiah 8?

What was Jesus really asking?

How do these passages reiterate the “story” of “*The Restoration of the Vineyard & the End of the Evil Vine Growers*” that Jesus was telling through the parable?

To find out, we must investigate the context of these Old Testament passages. Notice the first parallel....

Psalm 118:22-23

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

Matthew 21:42

Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, *The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?*”

The historical context of Psalm 118 is King David’s ascension to the throne following the defeat of Saul and the end of his kingdom which had opposed the kingdom of David. David was the “stone” that the rulers of Israel had rejected who had now become the “chief corner stone” (the founder the kingdom, and architect of the temple of God). (Read Psalm 118:1-23)

In the parable, Jesus (the Son of David) replaces king David, and the rulers of Israel replace the “kingdom of Saul”. Jesus was now the “stone” that the rulers of Israel were rejecting. Like David, Jesus was enthroned as Yahweh’s King and became the “chief corner stone” (the foundation of His kingdom, and builder of His Temple) the at the overthrow of his enemies (the Jews) and the end of their earthly kingdom, the “world” of Judaism. Jesus was telling an old story anew. *He and his followers constituted true Israel and the true kingdom of God, and Judaism the rebellious kingdom of Saul which was destined to pass away.*

Here is the second parallel....

Matthew 21:44

And *he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.*

Isaiah 8:14-15

Then He shall become *a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over*, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. *Many will stumble over them, then they will fall and be broken; they will even be snared and caught.*

The historical context of Isaiah 8 is the judgment and exile of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722BC; which would also affect the southern kingdom of Judah. For those who would “fear the Lord” (the remnant), He would be to them “a sanctuary”, but to those who not, he would be to them “a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over”. (Read Isaiah 8:1-15)

In the parable, Jesus is Yahweh (the Lord) of the Old Testament, who has become both “sanctuary” and “stumbling stone” for Israel. Although judgment will come upon Judah, so will mercy. For those who “fall on Christ” (the Stone) and are “broken” (humble themselves before him), he will become *their sanctuary*. But, for those who do not, on them the Rock (Christ) will fall and “scatter them like dust” (he will judge and destroy). Again, Jesus was retelling Israel’s stories in a new and unexpected way. *He had become the “Mountain of the Lord, the Rock of Israel” (Isaiah 30:29), kingdom and temple of God, and Judaism a house and den of robbers.*

In support of this interpretation, consider what Peter had to say concerning *the identity of both the stone and the builders*....

Acts 4:1-12

As they were speaking to the people, *the priests and the captain of the guard and the Sadducees* came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. On the next day, *their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.* When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “*Rulers and elders of the people*, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, *that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead - by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

1 Peter 2:4-8

And coming to *Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men*, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, *you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* For this is contained in Scripture: “*Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone*, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed.” This precious value, then, is for you who believe; *but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone, and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.*

In conclusion:

“The *Son of the Landowner* (Jesus) was the “Corner-Stone” of the New Covenant temple that was being built in the first century that the leaders of Jerusalem (the builders) had rejected. They had stumbled over Christ, and as a result, He would “scattered them like dust” and tear down their temple at the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish age in AD70. *The transfer and restoration of the Vineyard to the Church was the restoration of the kingdom of heaven to “true Israel” who had put their faith in Christ as the Rock and Temple of the Lord.* The parable of “*The Restoration of the Vineyard & the End of the Evil Vine Growers*” is not just the story of how God in Christ was restoring His Kingdom, judging his unfaithful servants, and transferring the stewardship of his kingdom (his vineyard) to his righteous servants. It is also the story of a Stone, whom Israel would reject, but whom the Father would set as the foundation of his spiritual temple and the sanctuary of His New Covenant people. As we produce the *fruit of righteousness and justice*, the Vineyard of the Lord provides for the Father His share of His eternal kingdom-harvest.

Continued in Part III....