

God's Earnest Plea To His People.

Text: Matt 21:33-46

Suggested Hymns:

191, 248, 305, 840, 249

1) What More Could I Have Done?

2) Where Is My Fruit?

3) Is Christ Your Stumbling Block or Cornerstone?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 21:33-46, ³³ *“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.*

³⁴ *Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. ³⁵ And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. ³⁷ Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’*

³⁸ *But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

⁴⁰ *“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” ⁴¹ They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”*

⁴² *Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? ⁴³ “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. ⁴⁴ And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”*

⁴⁵ *Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. ⁴⁶ But when they sought to lay hands*

on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.
(NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

It was the middle of Holy Week. Our Lord was preaching in the Temple, surrounded by the ever present, and ever critical Pharisees. He told them that they were like a son whom his father had asked to work in his vineyard. *“I go, sir, but he did not go.”*¹

Before they can answer, the Saviour continues. Abruptly and with deep emotion Jesus says: *“Hear another parable.”* He tells them, the powerful story of the wicked vinedressers.

He clothes it in the familiar imagery of Isaiah, which they could not but understand. They are not only disobedient, but rebellious sons. He climaxes His message by driving it home and applying it with a dramatic quotation from a Messianic Psalm.²

Unless they repent, God’s Cornerstone, which they rejected, will dash them to pieces. This solemn scene is before us in our text. Sternly, and yet with seeking love, God is speaking to the Jews and to His people of all times, also to us.

Let us consider *God’s Earnest Plea to His People*. God asks three touching questions: 1) What More Could I Have Done? 2) Where Is My Fruit? And 3) Is Christ Your Stumbling Block or Cornerstone? May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. “What More Could I Have Done?”

The landowner made a Vineyard. How deeply Jesus felt about it all can be noted from the hurried way in which He begins His parable ³³ *“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.*

In this text Jesus lists six acts of the landowner, quickly strung together with connecting “and’s.”

This landowner had purchased young grapevines and planted a vineyard. Around it he built a hedge fence to keep out destructive animals. He dug a winepress or vat in which to store the precious grape juice. He built a tower from which the entire vineyard could be watched and guarded.

So God had bought and planted Israel as His vineyard. We read in Isaiah 5:1-7, ¹... *My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill. ² He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.*

³ *“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?”*

⁵ *And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it.”*

⁷ *For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.*

In the Temple the wine of God’s Word flowed freely, protected by the tower of David’s strong kingdom.

The landowner then made an agreement with vinedressers. Some landowners would hire an overseer and run their vineyard themselves. Others would rent the land to a tenant for a cash rental.

In this parable a third method is used, of renting the vineyard out on shares, the fruits being divided between the landowner and the workers. — So God had made an agreement with Israel. In a sacred covenant on Mount Sinai He had made them His people.

Since it took two to three years for a new vineyard to bear fruit, the landowner went away into a far country, as if to give his vinedressers a free hand

in working his vineyard faithfully. — After Israel had been established in the Holy Land, God more and more withdrew from personal contact with them and permitted them self-government through their kings. God had done so much for His people!

What is the application for us? Surely, God has done much for us. He has made us, our Church, a part of His vineyard. He has separated us from the world by a hedge of loyalty to His Word. We have the precious wine of the Gospel in all its doctrinal purity flows freely in our midst. He has granted this vineyard growth from a handful of immigrants in the 1800's.

God has called us to work in this vineyard as His vinedressers, as labourers together with God. — And although our Lord has gone into a far country, ascending up into heaven, He still helps and protects us with His might.

Yes, God has dealt bountifully also with us. As we think of His manifold blessings and benefits, do we not hear Him pleading with us as of old through Isaiah the Prophet ⁴ *What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it?*

And yet the tender care of God for His people is met only by man's rebellion and wickedness, as God pleads furthermore:

2. "Where Is My Fruit?"

Our text continues, ³⁴ *Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.* At harvest-time the owner returned from the far country and requested his fruit. He expected a return from all that he had put into this vineyard. — God, too, expected Israel to be like a tree that brings forth his fruit in its season.

³⁵ *And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.* Instead of giving the owner the fruit to which he was entitled, the wicked vinedresser took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. — How true this parable was of the reception given to God's messengers by Israel!

God's servants *were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword.*³ They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented. And although God sent other servants more

than the first, and although He even sent John the Baptist, they did to them likewise.

³⁷ Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The landowner "had only one, a beloved son." We read in Mark 12:6, *⁶ Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'*

The very patient landowner of the vineyard thought that they would respect his one and only son. But hoping to get his inheritance, they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

I am sure we know that "beloved Son" who on "*a green hill far away, without a city wall,*"⁴ was crucified. What lack of fruit on the part of Israel! What rebellion, deliberate and aggravated, on the part of her leaders!

What is the application for us? God asks us, too: "*Where is My fruit?*" Many people do not heed. Looking at the Religious Affiliation data for Australia, Christianity has decreased from 86% in 1971 to 44% in 2021.⁵ From 2016-2021 there are 28,000 less Lutherans in Australia.

And those who belong to a church, perhaps even to our congregation, where are they? Where is their loyal service? Let us remember that these fellow members are our responsibility.

We who are present. Do we bring the fruits for which God is looking? What about our Communion attendance? Do we not find even jealousy, slander, and hatred in our lives?

Is our life transformed, or still conformed to the world? We read in Romans 12:2, *² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

Yes, God asks you and me today: "*Where is My fruit?*"

Knowing the tragic results of disobedience and rebellion, God finally pleads with His people:

3. “Is Christ Your Stumbling Block or Cornerstone?”

Stumbling Block

Jesus asked a question. ⁴⁰ *“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”* ⁴¹ *They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”*

Having completed His parable, Jesus now applies it and condemns Israel’s leaders out of their own mouth. *“What will the owner of the vineyard do to those wicked men?”* He asks.

Even though the Pharisees perceived that this parable portrayed them, they could not admit that before the people, and pretended not to be aware of it. Therefore they answered boldly *“He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”*

Jesus’ verdict is *“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.* In Psalm 118 which tells of the coming of Messiah it is prophesied that the very leaders would reject Him. Jesus tells them plainly, you are the builders who reject God’s Cornerstone!

Jesus announces their doom. ⁴³ *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.* ⁴⁴ *And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”*

As a nation and as individuals they must feel the wrath of God. The Kingdom will go to those who were formerly not His people. Whoever comes to fall by denying the Messiah will be broken; and he who stubbornly tries to stand against the progress of His kingdom will be crushed to pieces by this Stone.

What is the application for us? Fulfilled prophecy shows that the Bible is indeed the truth of God. How carefully we ought to heed its warnings! — How earnestly God has warned us through wars, economic turmoil, earthquakes and so forth. Shall we, like the Pharisees, pretend that we do not understand? Must Christ be to us a stumbling block?

God's Way. Even though His people were rebellious, although we, too, are by nature "*children of wrath*,"⁶ God found a way to help. As our text says it is entirely *the LORD's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes*. The beloved Son, who was slain by the wickedness of men, has become God's Redeemer for all the world!

The Cornerstone.

In ancient building methods the cornerstone interlocked two walls of a building and helped to support the entire structure. So Christ, rejected by men, became God's Cornerstone. On Him the great Architect of the Church lays the living stones, the believers, for a holy temple in the Lord, for a habitation of God through the Holy Spirit.

There is no way of helping the world today except by the means of grace. Wars seldom settle anything.

May God preserve us from the sinful folly of standing stubbornly against Christ. May He help us to build firmly, in our personal life and in our church work, upon Christ, the everlasting Foundation Stone of God.

Then we shall be both living stones in His temple and faithful labourers in His vineyard. May His Holy Spirit help us thus to heed today God's earnest plea to His people. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 21:30

² Psalm 118:22

³ Hebrews 11:37

⁴ Hymn 84

⁵ www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia

⁶ Ephesians 2:3