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Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“KINGDOM ALLEGIANCE”
Matthew 21:33-46

□ Please turn to Matthew 21:33-41.

A man leases his vineyard to some tenants. When the fruit ripens he sends servants to collect his profits. But the tenants abuse and even kill them.

The landlord wants to maintain a constructive relationship, so he sends more servants. But these meet the same violent end.

The third time around the landlord sends his son. Surely, they will respect him! But when those tenants see the son they seize him, throw him out and murder him.

The tenants so conclusively reject the landlord’s servants and son that he brings **“those wretches to a wretched end and [entrusts his] vineyard to”** others.

◆ Let’s consider the context:

■¹ In Matthew 21:1-11 Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, like an ancient king. The crowd spreads branches on the road and shouts **“Hosanna to the Son of David!”** **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”**

■² Next, in verses 12-17, Jesus enters the temple, drives out the buyers and sellers, and heals the blind and the lame. The children who see this shout, **“Hosanna to the Son of David.”** The chief priests and teachers of the Law are incensed at this.

■³ In verses 18-22 the Lord passes a fig tree that looks healthy but has no fruit. **“May you never bear fruit again!”** He commands, and the tree withers.

■⁴ In verses 23-27 the chief priests and elders challenge Jesus: **“By what authority are you doing these things? ... who gave you this authority?”**.

■⁵ In verses 28-32 Jesus tells the Parable of the Two Sons. A father instructs one to go work in the vineyard. He sassily says, **“I will not”**; but then he goes and does it. Meanwhile the man goes to his other son, who politely says, **“I will, sir”** – but never lifts a finger. Then, Jesus warns the chief priests and elders: **“The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. John came to you to show you the way ... and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did.”**

That leads directly into Matthew 21:33-46.

❖ Notice the common themes in these episodes: 1) the Kingdom of God; 2) Jesus’ kingship; 3) the acceptance of Jesus as king by many ordinary people; and 4) the rejection of Jesus by many priests, teachers, and Elders. All four themes collide in the Parable of the Tenants.

God the Father is building a kingdom (his **“vineyard”**). In the past, the Lord entrusted the care of his kingdom to Israel’s spiritual leaders (the **“tenants”**).

But they presumed that the kingdom was theirs to possess, rather than to steward. They acted as if the blessings of the kingdom were a possession to be hoarded, instead of a trust to be shared.

God sent prophets (his **“servants”**) to turn Israel back to him, but they were rejected. Israel’s

kings and priests should have led the nation in repentance, but they tended to be the most resistant.

Now the Father has sent his Son to Israel. Many ordinary people have received him as their king, but many spiritual and political leaders have not. Worse yet, they will engineer his crucifixion in a few days.

Consequently, the stewardship of God's kingdom is being expanded. It will be given to all who receive Jesus as king – not just religious folk, tax collectors and sinners, too; not only the descendants of Abraham, Gentiles as well.

- The key to the parable is in verses 42-44. Would someone please read it for us?

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

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

“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. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” {TNIV}

★ Citizenship in God's kingdom, fruitfulness there, and stewardship of its blessings all hinge on Jesus. He is either the unshakeable cornerstone, the foundation of life in the kingdom – or the terrible rock on which we are smashed to bits outside. It all depends on our reception of Christ.

◆ Without question, the Lord's warning in verse 44 reminds his listeners of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in

Daniel. In it he sees an imposing statue. Different parts of the image are made of different metals, from a gold head to feet of iron and clay.

Then, {2:34-35} **“a rock [is] cut from a mountain by supernatural means. It [strikes] the feet ... smashing them to bits. The whole statue”** collapses into pieces so small **“the wind [blows] them all away without a trace. But the rock... [becomes] a... mountain that [covers] the whole earth.”**

The statue symbolizes the kingdom of the world. Each part of it represents a different dominant world empire, which are all manifestations of the same thing.

This kingdom looks magnificent. Daniel {2:31, NLT} describes it as **“a huge and powerful statue of a man, shining brilliantly, frightening and awesome.”**

Yet, something unexpected is going to happen: a stone will smash it. The kingdom of the world will come crashing down, but the stone will {Wright} **“grow to become a mountain: a new sort of kingdom, ruling the whole world in a new sort of way.”**

Jesus is that stone. Most of Israel's spiritual leaders are rejecting him; but his Father will vindicate his Son when He conquers death and ascends to heaven. Mere men are refusing to give Jesus a place, but God Almighty will give him the place of highest honor, the top cornerstone.

What is more, Christ Jesus has come to establish a new reality, {Wright} **“the kingdom of God through which the kingdom of the world will shiver, shake, and fall to the ground.”**

The organizing principle of the Kingdom of God is whole-being love for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and *αγαπε* love for others. Its hallmarks are humility, service, generosity, mercy and faithfulness.

In God's kingdom {Lk 7:22} **“the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”** Thirsty people are given living water that becomes {Jn 4:14} **“in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** Starving people are given {Jn 6:35} **“the bread of life”** and **“never go hungry”** again. {Mt 11:28} **“Weary... burdened”** people are given **“rest.”** In his kingdom God lifts {Lk 1:52} **“up the humble,”** gives us {Lk 1:77, 79} **“knowledge of salvation”** and guides **“our feet into the path of peace.”**

Does anyone want to be part of that? I do!

However, the kingdom of God is so radically unlike the kingdom of the world that many do not recognize it even when it is staring them in the face. They relate to Christ as if He was not their king (but just a good, moral teacher, or a miracle worker who is convenient to have around in a pinch). They try to substitute some counterfeit kingdom (like religion or the American Dream) for the real kingdom of God.

That is what happened with those first century spiritual leaders who did not receive Jesus as their Messiah, and who rejected his vision of the kingdom. God gave them opportunity after opportunity to embrace his kingdom, and they missed it every time! Hence, **“those wretches [came] to a wretched end”** and God entrusted

the stewardship of the kingdom to others, even tax collectors and prostitutes.

If this is what happened to many of the people of Israel, to whom God gave {Ro 9:4} **“the adoption...the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises,”** we dare not think it cannot happen to us!

It all comes down to Jesus. May we receive him as our King. May we fully participate in *his* kingdom.