

PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Matthew 21:33–46

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. [v. 42]



In this chapter, our Lord Jesus establishes his authority as our great high priest. We see it clearly demonstrated by his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his cleansing of the temple, and cursing the fig tree which did not bear fruit. [Mat. 21:1–22] Teaching as one having authority, our Lord then describes Israel's rebellion against God and its consequences.

The vineyard often appears in scripture as a symbol of Israel. The Lord gave the people a fruitful land and everything necessary to prosper there. God expected fruit in return, acts of worship and obedience. But Israel – the tenants – reject the owner. When he sends for fruit from the vineyard, they attack and kill his messengers, the prophets. The owner finally sends his own son. Recognizing him as the heir, the tenants agree to murder the son, even as the chief priests and Pharisees planned to do with Jesus.

Stephen, the first martyr, condemned the Jewish leaders: *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”* [Acts 7:51–53]



Charles Thévenin, *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*

What should be done with the tenants, Jesus asks? The people agree: the owner will utterly destroy them and rent the vineyard to men who respect his authority. Then Jesus asks, “Have you never read the Scripture, *‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’*” [Ps. 118:22]? What does the Lord mean by this saying?

The meaning comes into focus when we apply the lesson to ourselves. Kingdom Disciples know that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But what of those who reject him? What caused the Jewish leaders to turn away from Christ? Trusting in their own righteousness, they saw no sin in their lives and had no need of a Savior. Maintaining an *“appearance of godliness”* [I Tim. 3:5], they denied the Lord's authority, just like the evil tenants. And, whenever any of us assumes we have earned God's favor because of our behavior and not because of the Savior, we fall into the same deadly error. May we always look to Christ as our chief cornerstone, *“the author and finisher of our faith!”* [Heb 12:2]

Evening Lesson, Wednesday, May 15, 2019