

MATTHEW

21:28-22:14

Matthew 21:28-22:14

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 8th June 2025 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: John 3:16-20

Introduction

We have got around two thirds of the way through chapter 21 in our verse by verse study of Matthew's gospel account. An account that was written down by this former tax collector, now one of Jesus' disciples, within just a few years of these events happening. And what he has been recording in this chapter is the start of the week that ran up to Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, beginning with the record of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, of course. And that day, known as Palm Sunday, wasn't any ordinary day, but rather the events of it took place on the specific date that the prophets Daniel and Nehemiah together had foretold over 500 years before!

And that should get our attention, that multiple details of what went here on were prophesied accurately with such precision *hundreds of years before*. And it *should* have gotten then attention of the Jewish leaders and people also, who had these *same* scriptures in their hands to read and understand, but they had failed to do so. And worse still, the leaders were now turning *on* Jesus, rather than turning *to* Him.

And back in verse 23 we *read* that they had questioned His authority, to which Jesus responded by asking by whose authority *John the Baptist* had spoken. But, we *read* they were not prepared to give an answer because they'd boxed themselves into corner, for if on one hand they had answered that John had acted under *God's* authority, then Jesus would have simply been able to ask why they didn't *believe* John — but on the other hand if they had said they *didn't* believe John spoke with God's authority, then the people would have been mad at them, for the people *did* believe John was sent by God.

Of course, ultimately, if they had admitted that John was sent by God, and spoke the truth, then Jesus would have been able to challenge them as to why they did not believe Him either.

But, as mentioned last time, He wasn't trying to be clever or smart with them, but rather He was trying to get them to think. For as we pick up our study in verse 28 today, we'll read... "*But what do you think?...*" before He speaks three parables to them — two in this chapter, and one in the next.

And as a quick reminder, the purpose of parables is to illustrate truth and make it clear by comparison with something that is already familiar to the hearer. And indeed, the examples Jesus used would have been familiar to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, to whom He spoke these three parables.

Overview of chapter twenty one

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- ~~v1-11 — Triumphal entry (right worship)~~
- ~~v12-17 — Cleansing the temple (because of wrong worship)~~
- ~~v18-22 — The fig tree (trusting God for who He is)~~
- ~~v23-27 — Jesus' authority questioned (questioning God as to who He is)~~
- v28-32 — The parable of the two sons (contrasting responses)
- v33-46 — The parable of the wicked vinedressers (rejection of God)

So then, the first of those parables is known as the parable of the two sons (in which we see two contrasting responses to their father) — and we'll read that in verses 28-32. From verses 33-46, we'll read the second parable, known as the parable of the wicked vinedressers (which vividly demonstrates rejection of God).

Overview of chapter twenty two

- v1-14 — The parable of the wedding feast (many called, few chosen)
- v15-22 — The Pharisee's disciples and Herodians question Jesus
- v23-33 — The Sadducees question Jesus
- v34-40 — The Pharisees themselves question Jesus
- v41-46 — Jesus questions the Pharisees

Then, as we move into chapter twenty two, we will read the third of our parables this morning, which is known as the parable of the wedding feast. And that parable in particular should cause us to think too.

Next week, we'll study the rest of chapter twenty two, and we'll see first that the Pharisee's disciples (along with the Herodians) question Jesus, followed by the Sadducees, and then the Pharisees themselves. Before in the final six verses we'll see Jesus question *them*, concluding with Matthew's comment that "*...no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.*" And so we are nearing a crunch point — a moment where people are deciding whether they will believe and follow Jesus, or whether they will reject Him.

A decision that ultimately you and I need to make too. So let us take a look at what Matthew writes.

Chapter twenty one

Again, as a reminder, in the prior verses the Pharisees had questioned Jesus' authority, to which *He* responded by challenging them as to what they believed about *John the Baptist's* authority. And when they refused to give an answer, He said to them, "*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*" and continuing on immediately after that, He said:

Matthew 21:28-32

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

And so, in this parable Jesus says there were two sons — one who at first refused to work in His father's vineyard, but afterwards changed his mind and went. And another who said "I'll go!" but then never showed up, whose actions didn't match his words. And Jesus draws the Pharisees into this, asking them which of the two sons did their father's will. And of course, the answer is obvious, that it was the one who *did* the will of his father, not the one who merely *said* that he would do the will of his father. And that's what the Pharisees gave as their answer.

But Jesus now turns to them, effectively saying *that is what you've done!* For you've made a great show and spectacle out of your religious practices, often in the temple, and standing on the street corners to pray out loud, but your hearts are so *far* from God, and you have failed to obey Him. But on the contrary — Jesus says these sinners — these tax collectors and prostitutes that you're quick to condemn, *have* turned from their sin and have followed Me. Yet, despite seeing that happen in plain sight, you have dug your heels in, rather than recognise the state of your own hearts.

And oh what a personal disaster this was to them, though they hadn't recognised it as such, that these men who had the scriptures in front of them, who had *everything* they needed to know the goodness of God, had not recognised Jesus for who He was, and had not turned to Him in repentance and faith. For their hearts were too hard. And from the outside looking in we can see how sad, how crazy that was, right? But what of us?

Well, sadly, there are many who have done that today, who have made a great show of going to church, of taking part in rituals, of talking about community, and make a great fuss about church politics and by-laws, who in some cases carry around a great big Bible, but who know very little of it, whose hearts are unchanged, whose lives have *not* been transformed by the gospel, for they have gone to church, even regularly, but failed to come to Christ. And it would be a disaster to you or I personally if that were us.

So what about you? Is the church somewhere you go, or something you are? Do you love Christ? Do you long to read the Bible? Do you have any interest in praying? Are you looking forward to being with Him? And do you want to serve God with all you have, or do you want to get away with the minimum you can so that it looks like you do? If you are not able to honestly answer yes to those questions, if in fact you have just been *doing* church, rather than *being* it, then please — I beg you, awake out of your sleepy state, and get right with God today.

Jesus continued, saying next:

Matthew 21:33

"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.

And so, this is pointing toward the vineyard that is the nation of Israel (which God established), made clear by Isaiah chapter 5 which says "*For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel*", which is a passage the Pharisees *should* have been familiar with. And we read there of the care with which God had established the nation:

Isaiah 5:1-4

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved
A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:
My Well-beloved has a vineyard
On a very fruitful hill.
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.
"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.
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?

And using this parable to show them a parallel with the nation, and with *them*, Jesus continues:

Matthew 21:34-39

Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Now first, what grace there was in what God had done, continually sending prophets to Israel to turn their hearts back to Him, even though they had so willingly disobeyed Him. Yet, sadly, the parallel continued to their actions, and couldn't have been more clear, for this is *exactly* how the nation of Israel had treated those servants God had sent, who were the prophets He sent throughout the years, of whom we read in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:35a-38

...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And now, the Pharisees had already started plotting Jesus' death, and so He is showing and warning them in the clearest possible terms that they were on track to do the very same wicked thing that the vinedressers did to the landowner's son, and kill Him.

And so He asks them a pointed question:

Matthew 21:40

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

And what choice did they have but to answer like this?:

Matthew 21:41

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."

Their answer showed they understood the great wickedness of the vinedressers in this parable that had killed the landowner's servants, and his son, and that they understood there was inevitably going to be justified consequences to the actions of those individuals.

But beyond that, this was an incredibly prophetic answer considering these men were hypocrites, for not only was what they were saying true of the men in this parable, but also of the destruction coming upon Jerusalem and upon Israel in the decades that followed this. Furthermore, what they said also pointed to the fact that God would now turn His attention to another people, to other vinedressers that *would* yield fruit, and that is the church. Not a *replacement* for Israel, but a people that *for now* would be the ones through whom God would work, until such as time as the fulness of the Gentiles is complete (such as we read in Romans 11).

And this destruction of the nation and the city of Jerusalem, which would come about under the rule of the Roman Emperor Titus in AD70, echos what Isaiah wrote too, a prophecy fulfilled first in Israel's captivity in Babylon. We read in chapter 5:

Isaiah 5:5-7

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.
I will lay it waste;
It shall not be pruned or dug,
But there shall come up briers and thorns.
I will also command the clouds
That they rain no rain on it."
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.

And, once more calling the Pharisees attention to the scriptures, we read:

Matthew 21:42-44

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 marvellous in our eyes' "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

What an indictment on these Jewish leaders, what a damning observation of them. But could that be said of us? Could it be that Jesus would be justified in saying to you or me; "Have you never *read* your Bibles?!"? Let that not be the case in any matter — let us rather be men and women who *know* what our Bibles say, that as King David said, so we may say to God *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You."*

Here, quoting from Psalm 118, Jesus speaks of Himself as the chief cornerstone (as Peter also said in Acts 4, also quoting from this same Psalm). And Jesus also states here that the kingdom of God would now pass to another nation, which again, is the church, just as Peter writes in his first letter:

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

So then, like Israel were to proclaim God's praises for all He had done for them — for establishing them, for saving them, for providing for them — so we are now to proclaim God's praised for all He has done for us! But note; Jesus gives a warning here. For He says *"whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."* That is, we must decide on how we approach Him.

For if you go to Jesus in humility, confessing your sin, crying out to Him to save you, then He will gladly be your Saviour, paying for your sin. But if your heart is hard, and you refuse to acknowledge your sin before Him, then He will fall on you with an unimaginable force as you meet Him as your judge, and He sees justice is served to all those who have no-one to pay for their own sin but themselves.

So then, this is the very real decision that each man and woman *must* make. As CS Lewis put it:

Now is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It won't last forever. We must take it or leave it.

C.S. Lewis

And here in Matthew, Jesus is presenting that chance to the Pharisees. And we read in verse 45:

Matthew 21:45

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

They felt the conviction, they knew He was speaking right at their hearts. But their response?

Matthew 21:46

But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

So then, rather than come to Jesus in repentance, rather than admit their guilt, they planned to get rid of Him. And their only reason for not doing something in that moment was the fear of man. And that is a true story of many who want nothing to do with Jesus. They know that God and His Word has much to say about them, but they simply don't *want* to hear it — for as we read in John's gospel account earlier; *"everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."* Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher, once put it like this:

The only real argument against the Bible is an unholy life. When a man argues against the Word of God, follow him home, and see if you cannot discover the reason of his enmity to the Word of the Lord. It lies in some sort of sin.

Charles Spurgeon

If that is you this morning, I beg you, don't let your love of sin, of that which you know God says is wrong, keep you from Him. It simply isn't worth it, for your eternity depends on this.

Chapter twenty two

Now, with the Pharisees determined to get rid of this Man, and only pausing at this moment because they didn't want a riot on their hands, Jesus continues to challenge them as He gives this third parable in a row. And He really is going to leave them without excuse. We read on into chapter twenty two:

Matthew 22:1-3

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.

What we have here then, is a picture of God the Father arranging a marriage for Jesus, His Son. A concept that is not unfamiliar to those of us that are Christians, for we read much through the New Testament about the church being the Bride of Christ (which is ultimately what Christian marriage points towards). And of course, we also read in Revelation about the marriage supper of the Lamb that will take place one day.

However, we must remember that God didn't start His plan of Salvation focussed on the church, but rather He spoke often to His special people that He had made, being the children of Israel, who are *still* dear to Him, that they might turn in worship and obedience to Him.

But we know, from all the Bible records, that despite God's kindness in sending them prophet after prophet to turn their hearts to Him, they kept walking away, ignoring the warnings of the consequences of disobeying Him. And, just like those invited the wedding were not willing to come, so Israel were not willing to turn their hearts to God. Yet despite that, we read in verse 4:

Matthew 22:4-5

Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." ' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.

And so, here in this parable, the King was kind, and he was patient, and he continued to extend his invite to the wedding, and even prepared a lavish banquet for those he had invited, but they treated it as some trivial thing, and went their own ways. And of course, that seems *foolish*, for imagine the honour of being invited to a royal wedding of a good and kind king, and considering it a small thing!? But that was exactly what Israel had done, as they had continued to turn their hearts from God to lesser things such as their work and commerce, despite promising "*We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.*". And worse still, we read in verse six, as Jesus continues this parable:

Matthew 22:6

And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

And that is sadly just like Israel had treated many of the prophets, just as we read earlier from Hebrews chapter eleven, and as Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for as recorded in chapter eleven of *Luke's* gospel account, where we read Him say:

Luke 11:47-51

Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

And so, while God was and is patient, this could not go on forever, and we read the next verse in this parable:

Matthew 22:7

But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

And that does not seem unreasonable, does it? And as far as *Israel* was concerned, this undoubtedly pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, less than 40 years after Jesus spoke these words.

But what now of the invite that had been sent? Well, we read in verses 8 & 9:

Matthew 22:8-9

Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'

And so what this points to is a turning point, where, following the rejection of the invite by those who it was first extended to, others would be invited to the wedding. And this speaks of how the good news of the gospel was given to the Gentiles too, that *they* might be saved. That's us! That's you and me! And in this parable, and in reality, we see that there was a great response, Jesus saying next:

Matthew 22:10

So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

And so both the good and bad from our perspective were invited, for the invite wasn't based on works, but rather faith, simply needing to accept the invite that had been given to them. This is God's grace at work. This is the wonder of being grafted in, as the Bible puts it.

But, there is a warning still to come. For we read in verse 11 on:

Matthew 22:11-12

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

And it seems that, here in this parable, this individual had sneaked into the wedding venue, but was not dressed appropriately — and when confronted didn't have a word to say. Which, to us might seem an unusual circumstance. Sure, we may have been to a wedding or two where someone turned up a little more casual than we'd expect, which may or may not have seemed that appropriate, but there's something deeper here.

For you see, in this culture, garments were sometimes provided for *all* guests, and it was a huge insult to refuse to wear the garment provided to you. And so what Jesus was pointing to through this parable, was that if we stand before God without the covering of His blood as payment for our sin, we will likewise be left speechless, as we will have no defence, no way of paying for our sin.

It won't matter if we have spent our lives coming to church on Sundays, and it won't matter if we've even had a role or responsibility in a church. What will matter is if we are dressed appropriately — not in a suit and tie, or elaborate dress, but whether we are dressed in Christ's righteousness. What will matter is whether we have put on Christ, as the apostle Paul puts it.

And to refuse the salvation Jesus offers, the covering for our sin that He offers, is the biggest insult we can make to God, which is why that is what is the unpardonable sin. For if we refuse God's salvation, there is nowhere else to turn, as the man in this parable found out, for we read:

Matthew 22:13

Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

And the parallel should be clear, that anyone who refuses to accept God's wonderful gift of salvation, the covering that He offers, will likewise find themselves in a terrible place. Not merely a lack of eternal life, but facing a horrible and eternal torment that awaits all unbelievers who refuse to come to Christ.

Of course, some will think that when they stand in front of God that they will have it out with Him, that they will be able to tell Him a thing or two about how He should have done this or that. But the reality is that they will find themselves utterly humbled and speechless before Him, as *this* man was silent before the king when he was discovered to have no appropriate clothing.

And one of the reasons they will find themselves so utterly lost for words, is that Jesus has offered His free gift of salvation to *all*. That is, He has offered His covering for sin to everyone, but sadly there will be few that will be found to have taken Him up on it, whom for His glory will be those that He chose, knowing that they would come to Him in repentance and faith. Which is why we read His final words to conclude this parable, which are:

Matthew 22:14

"For many are called, but few are chosen."

And as one commentator put it:

Whether or not you accept the wedding garment is up to you, but Christ has provided it for you. The invitation has gone out to everyone, but you will have to come on the King's terms.

Conclusion

And so this morning, if you have not done that, if you have not come to Jesus in repentance and faith, then that is the single most important and most urgent thing you need to do today. It's unwise to delay doing so, for you don't know what tomorrow holds. You could meet your maker sooner than you think. So make sure you are ready to meet Him.

And for those of you who have gone to church for many years, let me ask you — are you really saved? I'm not trying to get you to doubt your salvation if you are. But the last thing I want to see is for any of you to sit here week after week, nodding in the right places, singing the right songs, saying the right things, but not actually knowing Jesus. That would be a disaster. So be sure that you know Jesus.

And for those of you, whom I believe to be most here this morning, that *have* put on Jesus as your Saviour, whose sins *are* covered by His blood, I urge you, consider these things:

Application questions

- Are you truly obeying the Lord, or just saying that you are?
 - Are you so familiar with your Bible, that Jesus would not say to you "Have you never read...?!"
 - How desperate are you to see others come to their senses, and come to Christ?
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