

# MATTHEW

## Chapter 21

### *The Triumphal Entry*

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, **“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”** <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup> **“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”** <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, **“Hosanna to the Son of David!”** **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”** **“Hosanna in the highest!”** <sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, **“Who is this?”** <sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, **“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”**

**21:1** *Jerusalem.* See map No. 9 at the end of the Study Bible. (CSB)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Magi came from the east to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” This disturbed the King Herod greatly because he was obviously nearing the end of his life and was not entirely sure who would succeed him on the throne. Herod’s violent and bloody reign had demonstrated how determined he was to maintain his grip on power. Herod’s fear was aroused, all of Jerusalem was disturbed with him. (PBC)

Thirty-three years passed between Christmas and Palm Sunday, and during that interval Matthew does not record a single time that Jesus was called a king. He was called “Son of David,” and that Messianic title certainly had royal overtones (2 Sam. 7:12-13), but it was not until the Palm Sunday parade that Jesus was proclaimed to be a king (Luke 19:38); John 12:13). And once again we are told that the whole city of Jerusalem was stirred. (PBC)

When Jesus was 12 years old, he went up to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. This was something pious Jews did every year (Luke 2:41-42). So we can assume that Jesus made many trips to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. But this time was different. Jesus was very much aware that he was going up Jerusalem to die. (PBC)

*Bethphage.* The name means "house of figs." It is not mentioned in the OT, and in the NT only in connection with the Triumphal Entry. In the Talmud it is spoken of as being near Jerusalem. (CSB)

This was a village on the south-east side of the mount of Olives, which was a hill about two miles east of Jerusalem, beyond the valley of Jehospaphat. Through this valley ran the brook Cedron or Kidron. (Concordia Bible with notes)

The village of Bethany was located on the eastern slope on the Mount of Olives, about 2 miles from Jerusalem. For many travelers it was the final station on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples arrived at Bethany six days before the Passover (John 12:1). Evidently they enjoyed the hospitality of their friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus for a few days. While they were there a special meal was prepared in Jesus' honor in the house of Simon the leper (Mt. 26:6-13). (PBC)

After the miracle at Jericho, Jesus had come directly to Bethany, a small town on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. Here He had been a few weeks before, when He had raised His friend Lazarus from the dead, thereby greatly intensifying the hatred of the Pharisees and high priests, John 11, 53. On this occasion the Lord reached Bethany on a Sabbath and spent the day in the house of Simon the Leper. At the supper made for Him there, Mary had anointed Him for His burying, John 12:7. (Kretzmann)

The next morning Jesus continued His journey. But the report of His coming had reached Jerusalem, and many of the festival pilgrims left the city to meet Him, singing the joyful hymn of festive occasions: "Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!" John 12, 12. 13. With the vanguard of this multitude Jesus came to Bethphage, the "house of figs," a small village on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives, almost adjoining Bethany, on the main road to Jerusalem. (Kretzmann)

**SENT TWO DISCIPLES** – These two are not identified. Jesus frequently sent paired workers were the task (Mk. 6:7; Lk. 10:11). It well may be connected to Deuteronomy 19:15 where two witnesses were required for a criminal accusation. In Matthew 18:16 it again calls for two witnesses in the case of an offense given. (TLSB)

As Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the last time, he won it the intention of all the people of Jerusalem to be focused on him. That is why he made special preparations before entering the city. (PBC)

At the entrance to this small town Jesus halted for a time, in order to send two of His disciples as a delegation. He gives them explicit directions: In this very place lying just before them they would at once, without difficulty, find a she-ass tied,

having her foal with her; without asking leave, loose and bring, as though they were the owners. (Kretzmann)

**21:2-3** Jesus needed only a single mount. He commanded that the donkey and her colt be brought to Him in order to fulfill the prophecy recorded in Zec 9:9 (cf vv 4–5). (TLSB)

**21:2** *donkey*. An animal symbolic of humility, peace and Davidic royalty (see notes on Zec 9:9; Lk 19:30). See also note on Mk 11:2. (CSB)

A donkey symbolized humility, peace and David's royalty. In the Orient the donkey was regarded as greatly inferior to the horse. He might have asked the Father for twelve legions of angels as his personal attendants. The picture is pure paradox. The act is symbolic. He would come as the King of humility and of peace to show that his kingdom is not of this world. The kings of earth conquer by oppression. Jesus shall be victorious while he would seem to surrender. He must enter the realm of death in order to vanquish death. But there shall be a change in the end; when the cloak of humility is removed, his glory shall be resplendent as the sun. Then he shall sit, not upon a donkey, but upon the white horse of his kingdom and shall go forth conquering and to conquer (Rev 6:2) Only the eyes of faith may discover in this man the King whom the prophet Zechariah speaks. (Ylvisaker)

WITH HER COLT – This meant that the colt had not been ridden on to this point. Jesus directs his disciples to bring both animals, even though he would ride on only one. The mother was taken in order to make the foal willing to go. Luke tells us that this colt had never ridden on. For sacred purposes, animals must always be selected which had never been used (Num 19:; Deut 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7). Jesus would also be laid away in an unused grave. (Ylvisaker)

**21:3** IF ANYONE SAYS ANYTHING TO YOU – This means to say anything against your taking them. (Concordia Bible with notes)

HE WILL SEND THEM RIGHT AWAY – He speaks as the omniscient and omnipotent. All is known to him, everything is at his beck and call, and the preparations are as for royalty itself. The disciples have no clear conception of these arrangements, but in silent obedience they execute the command of the master. (Ylvisaker)

Jesus could have entered Jerusalem under His own power. However, He rode the donkey to fulfill and reenact the kind of royal inaugurations described in 1 Kings 1:32-40. (TLSB)

And should the owners or any other person remonstrate as to their right in taking the animals away, the mere word: The Lord hath need of them. He has a reason for wanting them, would serve as a password, bringing about immediate obedience and glad yielding on the part of the owner. Three significant points:

The Lord knew that the animals were at the designated place, and He again took an opportunity to convince His disciples that nothing was hidden from Him. His word has almighty power and authority. As the minute occurrences of the future are open before Him, so He, Lord to whom all things belong, can influence the heart of the owner even at a distance to yield to His wishes. The two disciples were absolutely in the dark as to the object of their mission, John 12, 16, and undoubtedly went with great reluctance to carry out His command, which might have brought them into unpleasant difficulties, but they go at His word, since they knew from experience that He would remove all dangers. Thus the disciples of Christ of all times may trust implicitly in the Word of their omniscient, omnipotent Lord, knowing that even in dark ways His authority will uphold them. (Kretzmann)

**21:4-5** Jesus entered Jerusalem as the promised Messiah. Zec had much to say about the advent of the messianic age (cf Mt 26:31). See notes, Zec 9:9; Jn 12:16. (TLSB)

Note Zechariah 9:9: *your king is coming ... humble*. This King is unique, one of a kind, the Messiah. John Wycliffe: “Christ mounted these animals to condemn the riding of pope and cardinals, and of the inferior bishops too, who are wont to ride in superfluous pomp on war-horses decked out with gold and silk” (TT, 190). Luther: “Here there is no violence, no armor, no power, no anger, no wrath.... Here there are only kindness, justice, salvation, mercy, and every good thing” (AE 20:94). In His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus gave public proof that He is this promised King (Mt 21:1–11). (TLSB)

**21:4** WHAT WAS SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHET – The prophecies of the OT concerning the Messiah, were all fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, thus proving with absolute certainty that he was the Christ. (Concordia Bible with notes)

This, the entire occurrence, with all its single incidents, was done in just this way in order that the words of the prophet, Zech. 9, 9, might be fulfilled. Cp. Is. 62, 11. The quotation of the evangelist is a free one, embodying all that the Old Testament says of the meekness and lowliness of this King of kings. (Kretzmann)

**21:5** DAUGHTER OF ZION – This refers to the inhabitants of Zion, not the citizens of Jerusalem in general, but according to the view of the prophets and the evangelists themselves, the believer, the Church which yearns for redemption. (Ylvisaker)

This is a poetic personification of Zion, which was that part of Jerusalem where David and the kings after him dwelt. It represents Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (Concordia Bible with notes)

The daughter of Zion is the populous of Jerusalem, or the whole Jewish people. (PBC)

SEE YOUR KING COMES – This was a prophecy universally understood of the Messiah; and thus Jesus openly claimed to be the one predicted by it. (Concordia Bible with notes)

RIDING ON A DONKEY – This was the common beast of the Israelitish rulers in ancient times, Judges 5:10; 10:4; and moreover a beast of peace, in contrast with the horse, which was specially employed in war. (Concordia Bible with notes)

Their king would come to them “gentle and riding upon a donkey” so they could recognize him when he arrived. This was, of course, not the only sign by which they might recognize him; there were many others. His arrival on a donkey would not have been enough by itself to identify him positively, but it would have been plain if he had entered the city in a different manner that he could not be the promised Messiah after all, for the OT prophecies concerning the coming Savior had to be fulfilled in him. And they were! (PBC)

FOAL OF A DONKEY – Jesus rode upon the colt, Mark 11:7; John 12:14; the mother of the colt accompanying. Hence they are spoken of together by the evangelist. (Concordia Bible with notes)

Christ here discouraged all carnal, vulgar Messianic ideas and hopes. Not in the manner of a conqueror-hero, as the worldly-minded Jerusalemites expected, but on an ass, and that the foal of an ass. He made His entry into the city which was soon to reject Him altogether. It was a last great day of mercy for the city, that all the inhabitants might know the Redeemer, but they did not consider what pertained to their peace. All the greater should be the impression which the coming of the King of Grace into the hearts of His believers should make upon them. "And this it is that the evangelist admonishes to preach when he says: 'Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek'; as though he would say: He comes for thy benefit, for thy peace, for the salvation and joy of thy heart; and since they did not believe that, he prophesies that it should be spoken and preached. Whosoever but believes that Christ comes in this way has Him thus. O what preaching, singular and at this time almost unknown! Mark well each single word. The word 'Behold' is a word of joy and admonition, and refers to a thing which one has expected long and anxiously. 'Thy King,' who destroys the tyrant of thy conscience, namely, the Law, and rules thee in peace and a pleasant manner, by giving thee forgiveness of sins and the power to perform the Law. 'Thy,' that is, promised to thee, for whom thou hast waited, whom thou, laden with sin as thou wast, hast called, for whom thou hast sighed. 'He comes,' voluntarily, without thy merit, out of great love, for thou hast not led Him hither nor hast thou ascended into heaven, thou hast not earned His advent, but He has left His property and has come to thee, the unworthy one, who under the compulsion and rule of the Law hast earned nothing but punishment with thy many sins. 'To thee' He comes, that is; for thy benefit, in whatever thou hast need of Him. He comes to seek thine own, only to serve thee and to do thee

good; He does not come for His own benefit, not to seek His own from thee, as the Law formerly did; since thou hast not what the Law demands, therefore He comes to give thee what is His, and expects nothing from thee, but that thou permit thy sins to be taken from thee and thyself to be saved.... The evangelist uses only the word 'meek,' and omits the words 'just and having salvation'; for in the Hebrew language the word 'poor' is very closely related with the word 'meek' or 'gentle,' for the Hebrews call a person poor that is poor, humble, meek, restless, and downcast in spirit; as all Christian believers in general are called that way in Scriptures. For he is truly gentle and meek who does not consider the harm done to his neighbor in any other light but done to himself, takes it to heart accordingly, and has compassion on him. As such a person, that was poor and martyred for our sake, and truly meek, the evangelist describes Christ, who comes tortured with our evil and is ready to help us with the greatest of meekness and love. (Kretzmann)

**21:6 DID AS JESUS HAD INSTRUCTED THEM** – While Jesus was waiting at the entrance to Bethphage, the disciples carried out His command, receiving, incidentally, further confirmation of their trust in Him. Obedience to His Word will never cause a Christian to be ashamed. (Kretzmann)

**21:7-8** Outer garments on the animals were used as saddles. Shortly thereafter, the crowds laid their cloaks on the road where Jesus passed, much as the crowds had done at Jehu's inauguration (2Ki 9:12–13). (TLSB)

**21:7** *Jesus sat on them.* He sat on the cloaks. We know from Mark (11:2) and Luke (19:30) that he rode the colt. Typically, a mother donkey followed her offspring closely. Matthew mentions two animals, while the other Gospels have only one (see note on 8:28). (CSB)

The animals, as they were brought to the Lord, were not saddled. But now a peculiar ecstasy took hold of the disciples and of the ever-increasing multitude. (Kretzmann)

**21:8 VERY LARGE CROWD** – Jesus' raising of Lazarus had caused quite a stir and brought him a great deal of acclaim. This had also attracted attention in Jerusalem and many came out from there to meet the procession.

*spread their cloaks on the road.* An act of royal homage (see 2Ki 9:13). (CSB)

Quickly taking off their outer garments, a kind of loose coat, they spread these upon the foal, to make a seat for their Master. The example of the first disciples was infectious. All the rest of them, as well as a large number of the people, took their garments and spread them out on the way, as if to receive an emperor, a mighty king. And still the excitement spread. Since many of the customs of the great festivals were, upon occasion, transferred from one to the other, the people

did not hesitate, also in this instance, to borrow the usages of the Feast of Tabernacles. Some of them cut down or tore down branches from the trees along the way, and cast them down to make a leafy carpet before Him. But the climax of the exultation was reached at the summit of the Mount of Olives. Here the ranks of the early singers were swelled by great crowds of newcomers, and while the latter turned and marched ahead, the others followed behind the Lord. (Kretzmann)

This was a royal honor, after the custom of the times. (Concordia Bible with notes)

OTHERS CUT BRANCHES – This was an expression of festal joy. Israel had inducted its kings with branches of palms.

Branches, particularly palms, were used to adorn processions, especially religious ones. Descriptions of this custom are found in 1 Macc 13:51; 2 Macc 10:6-7. (TLSB)

**21:9** These are three separate quotations, not necessarily spoken at the same time. (CSB)

And in antiphonal shouting the joyous acclaim of the people rose up to heaven as they chanted sections from the great Hallel, with the doxology used on great festivals, Ps. 118, 25. 26. They openly proclaim Him as the Son of David, as the true Messiah, they wish Him blessing and salvation from above. Far and wide, the people joined in this demonstration in honor of the lowly Nazarene. They gladly sacrificed their holiday garments, their festival ornaments, they brought the palm branches and waved the green fronds of early spring to give full expression to their joy, to their confession of their Lord, the Messiah. It is most unfortunate that this exultation was only temporary, and quickly forgotten. And yet the Spirit of the Lord had here, for a short while at least, taken hold of the people. God wanted thus to give testimony in behalf of His Son, before the shame and the horror of the cross would be laid upon Him. And it was prophetic of the time when every tongue would confess that Jesus is the Lord. (Kretzmann)

*Hosanna.* See note on Ps 118:25–26; both prayer and praise (see NIV text note). (CSB)

The words with which they greet him are chosen from Psalm 118:25-26. This psalm was a part of the great Hallel which was intoned during the feasts of the Passover and the tabernacles, Israel's great Jubilee, when the people walked around the altar with branches of the palm and of goodly trees (Lev 23:40). The words in v. 25 and 26 were the great Hosanna, the song of praise used in the time of the second temple when the populace passed around the altar of the sacrifice, during the feast of the tabernacles, for six days once each day, and on the seventh day, seven times. The same words were in use also on other

festivals of praise and thanksgiving. “Hosanna” in the Hebrew signifies “save” or “help.” Here it means: Help the Son of David, may he succeed. (Ylvisaker)

We sing the same song each time we pray that Communion liturgy. The familiar words of the Sanctus remind us that the same Jesus who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey comes to us in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. (PBC)

*Son of David.* See note on 9:27. (CSB)

BLESSED...COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD – Jesus is openly acclaimed as the promised Messiah, with a divinely appointed destiny to fulfill. (TLSB)

*in the highest.* That is, may those in heaven sing “Hosanna” (see Ps 148:1–2; Lk 2:14). (CSB)

This meant to say “let our hosannas on earth be responded to and ratified in the highest heavens. (Concordia Bible with notes)

**21:10 WHO IS THIS** – The demonstration before Jesus continued all the way down the western slope of the Mount of Olives, across the Valley of the Kidron, and into the very city of Jerusalem itself. As usual under the circumstances, the excitement spread rapidly and carried many with it that knew nothing of the actual reason. (Kretzmann)

**21:11 THE CROWDS ANSWERED** – They confess him as savior but they really don’t know the full significance of what they are saying. They are probably still thinking he is going to be an earthly king who will rid them of the Romans. In a few days many of them will join in the cry: Crucify Him. Crucify Him!

JESUS OF NAZARETH – Title recalls the Galilean phase of Jesus’ ministry, when He was just becoming famous for His teaching and healing (13:57; 14:5; 16:14). By this time, however, the crowds unabashedly acclaim Him as Messiah. (TLSB)

**21:1–11** Palm Sunday is a high point, as a crowd at the Jewish capital openly acclaims Jesus as Messiah. It is also a turning point, however, since it galvanizes His opponents. Like the crowds in Jerusalem, we are prone to fickleness—today all for the Lord, tomorrow turning from Him. Though we often prove faithless, Jesus remains constant. His love and forgiveness never falter. • “ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’ That ancient song we sing; For Christ is our Redeemer, The Lord of heav’n our King.” Amen. (LSB 443:3) (TLSB)

### *Jesus at the Temple*

<sup>12</sup> **Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.** <sup>13</sup> **“It is written,” he said to them, ”“My**



**house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" <sup>14</sup> The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. <sup>16</sup> "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" <sup>17</sup> And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.**

**21:12–17** In the Synoptics the cleansing of the temple occurs during the last week of Jesus' ministry; in John it takes place during the first few months (Jn 2:12–16). Two explanations are possible: 1. There were two cleansings, one at the beginning and the other at the end of Jesus' public ministry. 2. There was only one cleansing, which took place during Passion Week but which John placed at the beginning of his account for theological reasons—to show that God's judgment was operative through the Messiah from the outset of his ministry. However, different details are present in the two accounts (the selling of cattle and sheep in Jn 2:14, the whip in Jn 2:15, and the statements of Jesus in Mt 21:13; Jn 2:16). From Matthew's and Luke's accounts we might assume that the cleansing of the temple took place on Sunday, following the so-called Triumphal Entry (21:1–11). But Mark (11:15–19) clearly indicates that it was on Monday. Matthew often compressed narratives. (CSB)

**21:12** *entered the temple.* Here, at the sacrificial center of Judaism, Jesus will complete His earthly ministry. (TLSB)

*sold and bought.* In the court of the Gentiles, merchants sold animals to the pilgrims coming to offer sacrifice, as it was impractical for travelers to transport animals. (TLSB)

**21:13** Cf Is 56:7, originally meant to assure Gentiles that they, too, could offer sacrifices to the Lord. This was part of the reason for the court of the Gentiles. By converting some of the temple precincts into a trading post, however, the religious leaders were thwarting God's design. (TLSB)

*house of prayer.* See note on Mk 11:17. (CSB)

**21:14** In contrast to the religious leaders, who were failing in their sacred duties by allowing the temple to be so misused, Jesus used the temple exactly as the Messiah ought: for healing. (TLSB)

**21:15** *indignant.* Children grasp what is occurring as the blind receive sight. Yet the supposed experts refuse to see. (TLSB)

**21:16** Jesus underlines the irony of children grasping the situation while their leaders fail. He also highlights another fulfillment of prophecy. (TLSB)

**21:17 Bethany.** A village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem and the final station on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem.

C 2 mi E of the temple. Because Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived there, it is possible that Jesus lodged with them. (TLSB)

**21:12–17** Immediately after being acclaimed Messiah, Jesus further provokes the Jewish leaders by driving merchants and money-changers out of the temple. Sometimes financial concerns eclipse the Church's real priority: faithfully teaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. Jesus responds to our misuse of holy things not by yanking them away from us but rather by correcting us and calling us to receive them worthily, unto faith and salvation. • "Almighty, ever-living God, grant that ... all my worship may be acceptable unto Thee; through Jesus Christ, my Lord." Amen. (TLH, p 4) (TLSB)

### *The Fig Tree Withers*

**<sup>18</sup> Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup> Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. <sup>20</sup> When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. <sup>21</sup> Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. <sup>22</sup> If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."**

**21:18–22** See note on vv. 12–17; another example of compressing narratives. Mark (11:12–14, 20–25) places the cursing of the fig tree on Monday morning and the disciples' finding it withered on Tuesday morning. In Matthew's account the tree withered as soon as Jesus cursed it, emphasizing the immediacy of judgment. For the theological meaning of this event see note on Mk 11:14. (CSB)

**21:18** After spending the night in Bethany, Jesus returned to the temple. He would spend the next several days there teaching the people and debating with religious authorities. (TLSB)

**21:21–22** Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is an "enacted prophecy" that foreshadows the judgment God will visit on the unbelievers of Jerusalem. Jer 8:13 and Mi 7:1 compare faithless Israel to a barren fig tree (cf Hos 9:10). Just as Jesus punished this fig tree, so also unbelieving Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed in AD 70. But even as Jesus acts in judgment against fruitlessness, He also promises great reward for faithfulness. Faith moves mountains and knows that its prayers are heard and answered by God. (TLSB)

**21:18–22** By cursing a fruitless fig tree, Jesus reveals symbolically God's judgment against the faithless and fruitless portion of His covenant people. Though we are saved by faith alone, producing fruit for God and His kingdom is not optional. Though

faithlessness rightly deserves God's wrath, God Himself works faithfulness in us and grants a rich reward of blessings. • Lord Jesus, You are the true vine. Apart from You, we can do nothing. Keep us united to You, that we produce abundant fruit to Your glory. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Authority of Jesus Questioned*

<sup>23</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’ <sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We don't know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

**21:23-27** Today's Gospel takes place on the Tuesday following Palm Sunday. After receiving the messianic praises of the crowd in his triumphal entry, Jesus had overturned the tables of the money changers and driven out those buying and selling in the temple (Mt 21:12). These things prompted the chief priests and elders to question Jesus' authority. The builders (chief priests) are rejecting the stone that is nevertheless the cornerstone (Mt 21:42). As a result of his teaching and actions done with authority, the chief priests and Pharisees will seek to arrest the Lord (Mt 21:46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

One might even suggest that, from the point of view of Matthew's telling of the narrative, when Jesus is able to reach back all the way to the ministry of John and indict his opponents on the basis of their obduracy, this underscores the enormity and consistency of their opposition to the reign of God that was announced and enacted by John in his own role and manifested in power and mercy by Jesus, God's Son. (CC)

**21:23** HE WAS TEACHING – Tuesday of Holy Week was a long day of preaching and teaching and confronting the leaders of the Jews. (PBC)

CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS – Their formal inquiry was but a smoke screen to conceal their secret machinations. They did not propose to consider carefully Jesus answer and to let this determine their future attitude toward His person. Their plans were fully formed in advance, and there could be no question of further inquiry or investigation. Jesus must be removed. (Ylvisaker)

Leaders continue to watch Jesus closely, hoping to find grounds to accuse Him. Within a few days, they will have succeeded in their plan to do away with Him. (TLSB)

*By what authority ... ?* See note on Lk 20:2 (They had asked this of John the Baptist (Jn 1:19–25) and of Jesus early in his ministry (Jn 2:18–22). Here the reference is to the cleansing of the temple, which not only defied the authority of the Jewish leaders but also hurt their monetary profits. The leaders may also have been looking for a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people or raise suspicion of him as a threat to the authority of Rome.). (CSB)

Chief concern of Jerusalem leaders. (TLSB)

*hē exousia*: In Matthew's Gospel, authority (*hē exousia*) flows from the power of Jesus' Word: the Lord Jesus taught the people "as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Mt 7:29). Authority is particularly wielded by means of the Word (Mt 8:9). That Word of Jesus has authority to forgive sins (Mt 9:6). But this authority that comes from Jesus has also been given "to men" (Mt 9:8). Jesus gave the Twelve authority both to heal and to cast out demons in his name (Mt 10:1). In the final words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, he announces that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (28:18), immediately before instituting the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Office of the Ministry, with the promise that he would be with his disciples to the culmination of the aeon (28:19–20). Thus the Word of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, Baptism, and the presence of Jesus all stem from this authority that Jesus has and gives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

Now Simon Magus sought to use this authority for his own enrichment (Acts 8:19). But authority is always to be used with humility, lest we "put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor 9:12; see also 9:18). The authority that has been given to the pastoral office, therefore, is to be used for edification (2 Cor 13:10). All human and demonic authority that contradicts divine authority will be done away with at the Last Day (1 Cor 15:24). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

"By what authority [*exousia*] are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" This is the question put to Jesus by the chief priests and presbyters; it is also a question put to men in the pastoral office today. "By what authority do you say, 'I forgive you all your sins'?" Questions of authority, power, and rights can cripple congregations, turning pastor and people against each other. Key to understanding Christology, Sacraments, and the purpose of preaching is the *exousia* of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The leaders' interrogation of Jesus demonstrates their prideful hearts. This is a danger faced by all Christians. Ps 26:2 teaches us to pray, "Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind." Thus we learn from this Gospel to beware lest our hearts become prideful and we concentrate on our own authority instead of Christ's. Luther writes regarding the sinful nature: " 'The subtle poison of ambition is just under the surface. This sin has often tripped even those who

have grasped God's Word purely.' From this sin all heresies have arisen; 'ambition is the mother of all heresies and sects.' . . . Against this secret villain we must pray God daily to suppress our self-esteem" (LW 12:188). Thus we also learn from this text that what we need is not self-esteem, but humility before Christ, who tries our hearts and knows how full they are of ambition, pride, and selfishness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

When they demanded to know by what authority Jesus was doing "these things," they were evidently referring to the cleansing of the temple, which happened the day before. Jesus had a great sense of timing. Since there were many pilgrims in town for the Passover, this would normally have been a busy and profitable week for the money changers and the merchants. When Jesus disrupted business at the temple, that must have been something like shutting down a shopping mall at the beginning of the third week of December. If the chief priest were counting on getting their cut of the profits, it is no wonder they were so upset. (PBC)

**21:24** I WILL ASK YOU – By asking the Jewish leaders His counter question, Jesus is not just engaging in a "power play" to ward off His enemies. If they had answered His question, they would have had their answer to who He is and what He had come to do. Jesus' question really is a call to repentance, an eleventh-hour invitation to believe in Him as Savior. This final call to repentance and faith is at the heart of the parable Jesus now tells. (PBC)

The challenge comes from the chief priests and elders, but he refuses to answer; on one level, they are challenging him. In reality,, however, the rightful King and Son of David, the rightful Messiah and Lord, turns the tables on those who challenge him and confronts them with his own demand for repentance. (CC)

**21:25** *baptism of John.* John the Baptist came, announcing the advent of the Kingdom and calling for repentance. (TLSB)

*from heaven, or from men?* See notes on Mk 11:30; ("Heaven" was a common Jewish term for God, often substituted for the divine name to avoid a possible misuse of it (see Ex 20:7). Jesus' question implied that his authority, like that of John's baptism, came from God.) Lk 20:3. (CSB)

Jesus asks the same question concerning John that His accusers have just posed about Him: what was the source of His authority? (TLSB)

The question that Jesus asks is not merely a debating tactic. The validity of the ministry of John is directly related to the authority with which Jesus was teaching and acting. John proclaimed Jesus to be the very Lamb of God (Jn 1:29); John announced that a mightier one was coming who would baptize with fire. Since John conferred upon Jesus messianic status, the question is put back to the chief priests and elders. This is the case also with us: each of us must answer what we

think about who Jesus is (see also Mt 16:15). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The Baptism of John the Baptist was, in fact, a means of grace, with power to give the remission of sins (see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 288). John “went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). This text literally states that John’s Baptism was “into” (*eis*) the remission of sins. Like the Sacrament of Baptism instituted by Jesus, John’s Baptism worked regeneration and repudiated the works-righteousness of the Pharisees. The Baptism of John functioned much like the Old Testament sacrifices in that it offered the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, although preceding in time the actual crucifixion of the Messiah. Thus the Baptism of John was not merely “from man,” but “from heaven.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The eyes of human reason cannot see this; the heavenly nature of the Sacraments can only be discerned through the eyes of faith, as Luther sang regarding the washing of Holy Baptism (*LSB* 406:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

“From heaven or from man?” Jesus asks this question of the chief priests and presbyters regarding John’s Baptism—but it could well be asked about the key points of our faith: What about Jesus? Is he merely a man, or is he also from heaven (i.e., true God)? What about the Sacraments? Are they from heaven or from man? What about the Bible? Is it from heaven (inspired) or from man (ethical teachings, myths, legends)? The question that Jesus asks is not simply to demonstrate his ability to stymie them. The question is there so we also can answer it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

THEY DISCUSSED IT AMONG THEMSELVES – If they would accept His testimony, they could not deny the Messiahship of Jesus; for John had witnessed unmistakably both as to His person and His work. The acceptance of Jesus could not be separated from the recognition of John. Both would stand or fall together. If they denied that Jesus was the Messiah they must refuse likewise to acknowledge John as a prophet, and brand him as an impostor. But John had unfortunately already gained a niche in the consciousness of the people as a true prophet. And the Jews were exceedingly proud of their prophets. (Ylvisaker)

*not believe him?* They admit to rejecting the divine origin of John’s message. In this rejection, they proved more hard-hearted than the common people. (TLSB)

**21:26** “We are afraid of the crowd.” Josephus discusses the great popularity of John the Baptist:



Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII 5 2, trans. William Whiston, 1737) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:27 WE DON'T KNOW** – They are struck by the power of the truth but they will not yield to the truth; so they reply that they do not know. Nor do they dare to speak derisively of John for fear of being stoned by the people. (Ylvisaker)

Answer given by Jesus' opponents is insincere and cowardly. Even worse is the fact that they deny the authority of God's Messiah. (TLSB)

**NEITHER WILL I TELL YOU** – Jesus is by no means obligated to give a further reply. And He does not intend to throw that which is holy before the swine of Israel to be trod under foot. But even if Jesus had nothing more to say in answer to the inquiries of the deputation from the Sanhedrin, He has many truths to present to them and to others who have gathered about Him, and He now proceeds to the attack. The symbolic discourse in the following is preeminently polemic in character, and is directed especially against the obdurate leadership in Israel. (Ylvisaker)

“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” When Jesus refuses to answer, he is not casting doubt on his authority. Rather, by refusing to submit to their interrogation, he is implicitly asserting his true authority. The point of this text is not the skillful use of language or debating technique by Jesus; rather, it demonstrates that the chief priests are rejecting the authority that has come from heaven and thus demonstrate that they are repudiating the function of their office by rejecting the one who is from heaven. Their thinking is shown to be from men, from below. “You do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (Jn 5:38–40). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:23–27** When His opponents challenge the source of His authority, Jesus exhibits a wisdom that powerfully attests to His status as one sent by God. Like Jesus' opponents, we sometimes challenge the Lord's authority and attempt to stand in judgment of Him. But God rightly judges us, not vice versa. Jesus willingly submitted to the authority of those who falsely accused Him and unjustly condemned Him to death. By His death, He won our salvation. • Give us grace always to submit to Your authority, O Lord, for it

comes from heaven and so can lead us there, where we will reign with You forever. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Parable of the Two Sons*

**28 “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ 29 “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. 31 “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.**

**21:28–32** Parable contrasts the more pious reaction of tax collectors and prostitutes to John’s preaching with the hard-heartedness of His adversaries (vv 23–27). (TLSB)

Jesus turned the tables, however, with a second question that introduced the parable of the Two Children. The two children in the parable are approached by their father in closely parallel fashion. Each responds, of course, in a different way. The first child snubs his father and disrespects him; only afterward does he experience a genuine change of heart and heed the father’s original command. This child might be called the “no-yes” figure. The second child offers an initial positive verbal response to the father but never actually carries out what he was asked to do; we might call him the “yes-no” figure. (CC)

After Jesus declares a severe judgment by comparing them to outcasts who are entering (or will enter) the reign of God (21:31), he then explains their problem (21:32) – but they do not respond to either of the children in the parable. They have been a “no-no” figure neither believing John when the outcasts of Israel believed him. Rather than being life either a “no-yes” or a “yes-no” figure, the priestly elites who are being confronted by Jesus are a “no-no” figure; how much more urgently do they need to repent and turn to One whom John announced and who, with John, came to fulfill all righteousness (3:15). (CC)

Thus, no matter their reply, the chief priests and the elders have nowhere to go. What the religious leaders should have done was to repent and believe the message of John the Baptizer in the first place! Even after refusing John at the first, for faith, for expectation of the reign of God in the Coming One could have caused them to come to their senses, change their minds and hearts, and believe. The second opportunity, however, has also come and gone. Even more important, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Jesus’ confrontation. Which has as its ultimate purpose the gathering of Jerusalem’s



children under the wings of his gracious authority (23:37), will have no effect on them. (CC)

Notice that a significant variant (adopted by the NASB and some other translations) reverses the order of the two sons in vv 29 and 30, making “the latter” rather than “the first” the one endorsed in v 31. The reading reflected below (and adopted by Nestle-Aland, NIV, KJV, NKJV, ESV, and RSV) seems to be preferable. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

**21:28** WHAT DO YOU THINK – Matthew is the only one to record this parable for us. Because it contains a call to repentance, it is a logical follow-up to the previous discussion. It is a logical follow-up to the previous discussion. It also seems to fit, a unit with the two parables that follow: the parable of the two sons centers on the ministry of John the Baptist; the parable of the tenants centers on the mission of Jesus; and the parable of the wedding banquet centers on the mission of the church. (PBC)

**TWO SONS** – tekna meaning children and is a very affectionate term that Jesus applies to his own followers and that the apostles apply to their beloved children in the Lord. A loving father is making a reasonable request of his dear children. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The father’s request was a normal request to be asked of a son. The father asked nothing out of the ordinary by requesting that his son work in the family business. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

The two sons seem to be two groups in Israel. The first son corresponds to the penitent tax collectors and prostitutes, and the second son is representative of the Pharisees, chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law who refused to heed the preaching of John the Baptist. The contrast between them is twofold: what they say and what they do. (PBC)

Jesus expresses the Father’s affection for his people in the way the father addresses his offspring: “Son.” The no-saying brother responds honestly but rudely to his dad’s request to work: he doesn’t want to. He doesn’t window-dress his lack of enthusiasm to do what his father wants. But he changes! He thinks again about his father and the consistent love he’s received from him over the years. Jesus identifies this son with the “low lifes,” whom the leaders dismiss because of their lack of formal training in God’s Word: “This mob . . . knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them” (Jn 7:49). Yet Jesus accepts their repentance and faith as they respond to the preaching of John the Baptizer. Thus Jesus affirms their willingness to “eat humble pie,” confessing their sins and believing God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

**HE WENT TO** – Notice that it is father who went to his sons and not the other way around. God always takes the initiative in His relationship with us.

What we say and what we do is always a response to what God has said and done. (PBC)

VINEYARD – In Is 5:1-7 it represents Israel as God’s treasured possession which he carefully nurtures, expecting fruit. We demonstrate that we are God’s beloved children by working diligently in his vineyard. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

**21:29** I WILL NOT – The reply of the first child is blunt, rude, and without filial respect, in violation of the Fourth Commandment – as evil answer flowing from an evil heart. He represents people who neither profess nor practice true religion, who neither fear God nor pretend to do so. In vv 31-32 Jesus identifies him as the tax collectors, prostitutes, and other overt sinners who were bold and careless in their denial of God, visible in their lifestyles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

His is no word of polite address, not “father,” nor even “master.” His is the answer of willfulness and obstinacy. (Ylvisaker)

CHANGED HIS MIND – The infrequent word *metamelomai* can mean “change one’s mind,” “regret,” or “repent.” Jesus indicates that the preaching of John the Baptist caused this very thing to happen. The case of Zacchaeus is an example from Jesus’ own ministry. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The son answered that he wouldn’t work. He clearly sinned in disobeying the will of his father. However, the son later repented and did what his father asked. Clearly, this is the son God wants us to emulate. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

Gk term also expresses regret or remorse. The son changes his behavior and does his father’s will. (TLSB)

**21:30** I WILL SIR – This one is very respectful. Resembles Isaiah’s response in Is. 6:8, “here am I, send me.” This second child clearly represents the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, who wore all the trappings of religion and exemplified the very best in spirituality. They were quick to give lip service while failing to render divine service. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The yes-saying brother is smooth and slick, calling the owner “Sir.” Jesus clearly identified this son with the authorities who played their religious games in order to avoid repenting, even though they saw others (tax collectors and prostitutes) doing so. Jesus does not rule out the possibility of the leaders entering the Kingdom; he merely says that the tax collectors and prostitutes will precede them in, having sincerely repented. Thus he gives the religionists one more opportunity

to change their minds and repent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

Though he appeared to be the good son, the second one was the more disobedient. (TLSB)

His inactivity spoke louder than his enthusiastic words. It is significant that the Greek word for “sir” is the same word that is also translated “Lord.” We are reminded of Jesus’ words in His sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). (PBC)

The second says “sir,” not “father,” as we should have reason to expect. The fawning humility evidenced in his reply at once arouses a suspicion as to whether or not he is animated by the proper filial respect toward his parent. (Ylvisaker)

The second son may have told the father what he wanted to hear, but in the end he chose not to listen to his father. There is no repentance in this son’s actions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

**21:31-32** Jesus asks the people which son did the father’s will, to which they respond that the first did. Jesus then tells his hearers that those who repented after hearing John’s message are entering heaven ahead of them, even though those “tax collectors and prostitutes” had appeared to resist God’s will like the first son. Certainly Jesus is calling all people to follow the example of the first son, who repented and finally did obey his father. However, this also gives the perfect opportunity to speak of Jesus Christ as God’s perfect Son who never changed his mind one way or the other. Jesus is not like either of the two sons. He is the perfect Son of God who is not double-minded. Jesus always obeys his father perfectly—even when that meant dying on a cross (Phil 2:8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

**21:31** WHICH..DID – The critical factor in Jesus’ question is not what each said, but each did. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

he father represents God. Jesus implicitly asks who within Israel has better discerned and fulfilled God’s will. (TLSB)

The answer involves obedience or “doing,” but it is not doing that is divorced from faith. Jesus commends the tax collectors and the prostitutes for believing the preaching of John the Baptist, and Jesus condemns His adversaries because they did not repent and believe. The distinction between repentance and believing is simply that repentance stresses turning away from sin and believing stresses turning toward God. Both are acts of faith. As Martin Luther says, faith is “a living, busy, active, mighty thing.” (PBC)

Doing the will of our heavenly Father is first of all believing in Him. Meticulous attention to all the details of the law was not what Jesus was looking for – the Pharisees had taken such obedience to excess. Their failure was their refusal to believe the Word of God spoken by His authorized messengers, John and Jesus. And so the parable of the two sons warns all of us who are serious about spiritual things to beware, lest our energies be exerted almost entirely in striving after doctrinal correctness and we regard the life of obedience as of little consequence. (PBC)

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH – Lest they miss the point, Jesus shows them what their answer reveals about their own behavior. He begins with the familiar *amen* “amen,” his seal of verity, the transliterated Hebrew word for “truth,” and “I say to you,” his stamp of authority. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

TAX COLLECTORS AND PROSTITUTES – They were the two worst classes of sinners who represent all who confess their own total depravity and believe. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

*go ... before you.* By presenting such vile characters as more pious than His opponents, Jesus puts the opponents in the worst possible light. (TLSB)

**21:32** JOHN CAME TO YOU TO SHOW – John both lived and preached the true way of righteousness. He offered “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). He also stressed the necessity for producing the vineyard’s fruit of repentance (Mt 3:8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

*the way of righteousness.* According to John the Baptist, this involved preparing to receive the coming Messiah, turning from sin, and producing the fruit of repentance (3:1–12). (TLSB)

The righteousness that Jesus and John are fulfilling, as John baptizes Jesus, is God’s righteousness, that is, God’s deeds of salvation and judgment. To be sure, there is an ethical component to John’s message. He called all to repentance and demanded that the religious leaders who were coming to his baptism bear fruit that befits repentance (3:8). John’s message about the “way,” however, was not fundamentally ethical or moral; it was eschatological and Christological. Corresponding to the child who did the father’s will in the parable, all are to believe John, who came in the way of God’s righteousness in Jesus, that is, God’s saving deeds that bring the reign of God. (CC)

*believed him.* Many people embraced John’s message, including some notorious sinners. Jesus’ opponents, however, persist in their rejection of John and the One whose way he prepared. (TLSB)

EVEN AFTER YOU SAW THIS – Jesus offered the Jewish leaders double motivation to do likewise. He reminded them that John had confronted them

also. What's more, the repentant publicans and harlots were indisputable evidence that the Gospel truly is for everyone and justifies even the worst sinners. But this double testimony of grace only caused them to become more stubborn and vicious in their unbelief. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

**21:28–32** Jesus graphically depicts the obstinance of His opponents and the depth of their sin in rejecting Him. There are times that our stubborn refusals to change our behavior are just as obstinate. In God's kingdom, no repentant sinner is ever turned away. Repentant tax collectors and prostitutes were welcomed; so are we! • “Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me, Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine.” Amen. (*LSB* 611:1) (TLSB)

### *The Parable of the Tenants*

**<sup>33</sup> “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. <sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. <sup>38</sup> “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ ? <sup>43</sup> “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. <sup>44</sup> He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” <sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. <sup>46</sup> They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.**

Jesus begins by describing a vineyard that is totally equipped, a place in which workers would enjoy working. God's old covenant kingdom was likewise very well endowed. However, the workers entrusted to produce fruit refuse to acknowledge their responsibility to God, their proprietor. They mishandle the servants (prophets) sent to collect the rightful portion owed the owner. Finally, to cap it off, they kill the s(S)on of the owner. Jesus heightens the dramatic tension at this

point in the story by turning to his audience and asking, “What would you do to tenants who acted that way?” Their twofold answer is: “Punish the perpetrators and rent the vineyard to truly productive workers!” When that second idea is mentioned, namely to open the Kingdom to Gentiles, the hearers in the parallel account (Lk 20:16) explode with emotion: “May this never be!” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

This is the second of three parables spoken by Jesus shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (cf. last week’s Gospel, 21:23–27 [28–32]; and next week’s, 22:1–14). All three parables are spoken, in succession, after the chief priests and elders of the people had questioned Jesus’ authority (21:23). By this late point in Jesus’ ministry, the division between him and the leaders of the Jewish people is sharply drawn. Our Lord’s imminent death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (“When . . . the owner of the vineyard comes,” v 40) are important for understanding Jesus’ words to the Jewish leaders. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:33–41** Parable in vv 28–32 was quite critical of Jesus’ accusers. He continues with a parable that is even more devastating, borrowing imagery the prophets repeatedly used to depict Israel’s relationship to God (e.g., Is 5:1–5). (TLSB)

**21:33** *listen to another parable.* In this context of hostile confrontation, Jesus’ brief introduction has the force of a plea at the least and more likely a warning. The command to “hear” Jesus’ teaching occurs repeatedly in Matthew, and it seems always to carry some urgency, mostly because Jesus’ teaching (as so often) contradicts normal assumptions or expectations about the reign of God. (CC)

LANDOWNER – The landowner who leases out his land symbolizes God. (TLSB)

*vineyard.* What follows are the TLSB notes from Isaiah 5:1-5 – “**5:1** *beloved.* God. *vineyard.* Israel, whom the Lord “planted” in the Promised Land (Ex 15:17; Ps 80:8–18; Jer 2:21; Mk 12:1–9). *fertile hill.* Lit, “on a horn, a son of oil.” This phrase, used only here in the OT, describes a geological formation that is superabundant in fertility. The vineyard is positioned for maximum productivity. **5:2** *dug it.* Tilled the ground. This may have been done by hand instead of with an animal-drawn plow because vineyards were sometimes planted on steep hills. *choice vines.* Cultivated vines known to produce excellent fruit. The varieties are unknown. *watchtower.* To protect the vineyard from animals or thieves. See note, 21:6–12. *wine vat.* Anticipating a good harvest, the owner hollowed out a rock that would serve as a winepress. Aph: “*I surrounded it with a fence of heavenly Watchers and I built its tower, the holy Temple. And I dug out its winepress, the baptism of the priests. And I brought down rain upon it, the words of My Prophets. And I pruned it and trimmed it, from the works of the Amorites*” (NPNF 2 13:360). *wild grapes.* Inferior fruit that does not reflect the effort of the beloved. **5:3** The Lord begins to speak. The hearers are asked to pass judgment on the fate of the vineyard

that yielded sour fruit. **5:4** *wild grapes?* See note, v 2. **5:5** *My vineyard.* Common description of God's relationship to His people (see note, v 1). *hedge ... wall.* Protective barriers around the vineyard. *trampled.* Lacking a wall, the vineyard becomes an open field to be grazed by animals or damaged by people.

"Vineyard . . . dug . . . winepress . . . tower." The details are unmistakably drawn from Is 5:1–2. Besides being one of three parables in a row, this is also one of three vineyard parables in the Gospel of Matthew (20:1–16; 21:28–32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**WALL AROUND IT** – The hedges is the Law with its precepts which surrounded Israel and separated between the Jew and the Gentile. (Ylvisaker)

**WINEPRESS** – This is the temple with its ritualism and the sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. (Ylvisaker)

*watchtower.* For guarding the vineyard, especially when the grapes ripened, and for shelter. The rabbis specified that it was to be a raised wooden platform, 15 feet high and 6 feet square. (CSB)

This is variously explained as the civic order and, more properly as the prophecy in Israel. Therefore the prophets are frequently called "watchmen" (Mic 7:4; Is 52:8; 62:6). (Ylvisaker)

*tenants.* Sharecroppers who represent the unbelieving religious leaders opposing Jesus. (TLSB)

Craig Evans has argued that we should perhaps envision the tenant farmers as relatively well-to-do and prominent figures rather than simple peasants who somehow rebel against the vineyard's owner. (CC)

**21:34 HIS SERVANTS** - A reference to the Old Testament prophets. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

If the groups of slaves in the parable represent the OT prophets, then the parable severely telescopes many centuries of biblical history. In doing so, it makes the current religious leaders responsible for the abuse and death of the OT prophets. (CC)

**HIS FRUIT** – This was the previously agreed upon portion of the harvest for payment. (TLSB)

The fruits which the Householder expects and which He has a right to count upon are the fruits meet for repentance, holiness, and righteousness. The servants who came to receive the fruits are the prophets from Moses to John the Baptist. (Ylvisaker)

**21:35–37** The tenants are the Jews, or their leaders. The servants represent the OT prophets, many of whom were killed. The son represents Christ, who was condemned to death by the religious leaders.

**21:35 KILLED...STONED** – The servant killed by stoning represents the OT prophets. Stoning was the punishment for a variety of religious infractions in ancient Israel, including defiling holy space (Ex 19:13), idolatry (Lv 20:2), practicing satanic arts (Lv 20:27), and blasphemy (Lv 24:14-16, 23). This underlines that the rebellious tenants and their master held different religious beliefs and practices. (TLSB)

Note the progressively harsher treatment of the servants. Death by stoning was an even more shameful way to be killed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:36 OTHER SERVANTS** – God sent many prophets to wayward Israel. Many of them were rejected and many were treated violently. (TLSB)

Again, a progression from the first group of servants, now to more servants, then finally to the son of the vineyard owner. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:37 MY SON** – This was an emissary par excellence. As God's own Son, Jesus deserves the highest respect. (TLSB)

Likely the son brought and could exercise legal authority that the first servants could not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:38 TAKE HIS INHERITANCE** – According to Jewish law, the tenants stood a good chance of inheriting the land when the owner died, if there was no heir. (TLSB)

**21:39 OUT OF THE VINEYARD** – Jesus was similarly put to death outside of the wall of Jerusalem, as was the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Ac 7:54-60) (TLSB)

So, too, Jesus was killed "outside the gate" (Heb 13:12–13). (See also Lev 24:14, 23; Num 15:36; Deut 17:5.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:41 WRETCHED END** – Jesus' rhetorical question about the fate of the wicked tenants forces His opponents to pronounce their own sentence. The harsh punishment perfectly fits such wicked crime. Even at that, forgiveness is repeatedly offered to those who condemned Jesus (Ac 3:17-26; 5:29-32). (TLSB)



By this statement the Jewish leaders condemned themselves, just as King David did with his reaction to the parable spoken by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 12:5–6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

*other tenants.* Gentiles, to whom Paul turned when the Jews, for the most part, rejected the gospel (Ac 13:46; 18:6). By the second century the church was composed almost entirely of Gentiles.

**21:42 CAPSTONE** – This is the second time the messianic Ps 118 is quoted in this section of Mt (cf 21:9). Jesus was rejected by official Israel, is exalted by God, who builds His Church on Jesus. (TLSB)

Jesus then quotes Psalm 118, showing that those who trash God's Anointed One will themselves be trashed. Jesus is the one to whom all people are ultimately accountable. Finally, Jesus concludes the story by saying straight out: "I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will bear its fruit." Paul lived out the directional shift in missions on his first missionary journey, as he addressed the Jews: "Since you reject [the Word of God] and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

**21:43 TAKEN AWAY** – Jewish rejection will hasten the Gentile's inclusion in the Kingdom. They are the new people who will produce fruit. (TLSB)

PEOPLE - Not just Gentiles in general and all-inclusive (since this is a singular form of the noun), but rather the Church, which is comprised of Gentiles as well as Jews. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

*ethnei:* The rare singular form of the noun (cf. only Mt 24:7) supports the interpretation that the kingdom of God will be given, not *generally* to the Gentiles, but to a more defined, unified, and singular group, e.g., the Church. A. J. Saldarini (*Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 58–63) observes that *ethnos* often refers to a voluntary organization or small social group (cited in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary Series [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004], p. 186, note 71). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

PRODUCE THE FRUIT – This means remaining in Jesus and obeying His commands (Jn 15:1-9) (TLSB)

**21:44 will be broken to pieces.** See note on Lk 20:18 – (As a pot dashed against a stone is broken, and as one lying beneath a falling stone is crushed, so those who reject Jesus the Messiah will be doomed (see Isa 8:14; cf. Da 2:34–35, 44; Lk 2:34). (CSB)

Jesus warns that anyone rejecting Him will face being broken and crushed by the weight of that most grievous sin. (TLSB)

Because they are rejecting him, they will be rejected and will fall short of the blessings that Jesus longs to give to them and to everyone. They will fall in unbelief upon this stone and will be crushed. This stone will fall upon them, and they will be scattered. (CC)

Some manuscripts omit this verse. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:45 THEY KNEW** – Jesus’ hearers understood perfectly well how and where they were represented in this parable. (TLSB)

This, along with v 23 (“the chief priests and the elders of the people”), indicates who the audience is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The two main subjects of the pericope are the master of the vineyard (i.e., the Lord) and the vineyard tenants (i.e., the chief priests and the Pharisees, vv 23, 45). The text speaks of what the Lord *has* done (established a vineyard, supplied it well, sent servants and his Son to receive its fruit) and what he *will* do (return to his vineyard, take the vineyard away from its wicked tenants and put them to death, let out the vineyard to other tenants). The parable also speaks, implicitly, of what the unbelieving leaders of the Jewish people have done and will suffer as a result of what they have done. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

However, this pericope is certainly not *only* about the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day. The application to us today is that we have been placed in the same tenant shoes as the Jewish leaders originally were. Rather than repeat their mistake, we should be warned by their error so that the kingdom is not taken from us also. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

In other words, with respect to the tenants, there is a two-sided interpretation—first, the fact of what *actually* happened to the *Jewish leaders*, and second, the continuing warning of what *could* happen to *us* if we prove unfaithful tenants. With respect to the Lord, however, there is no double interpretation. He remains “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). Both his loving acts and his just expectations remain for us today. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

In short, the Law is this: the Lord demands that the tenants of his vineyard (i.e., his kingdom) render the fruit of his vineyard. The fruit of the vineyard is repentance and faith, along with perfect love toward God and neighbor, which faith produces. The Lord also demands that those in his kingdom receive his Son and also other messengers, whom the Lord sends in his name. Just as God did

with the Jewish leaders who rejected him, so will he put to a miserable death and take his kingdom away from all who reject him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The Gospel is that by his sheer grace, the Lord has established a vineyard (i.e., his kingdom) and wonderfully supplied it with gifts that will enable an abundant harvest. Though the tenants of God's vineyard/kingdom rebel against him, in love God sends his own Son to restore his vineyard and its tenants. And though the tenants reject and kill the master's own Son, the Lord raises up his Son and makes him the chief cornerstone. By God's grace, the Lord has placed *us* in his vineyard/kingdom today. And he continues to send his Son to us and to our listeners through the ministry of his Holy Christian Church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:46** Jesus was indeed a prophet, but also much more. Thus this parable (vv 33–46), as well as the following one (22:1–14), identifies Him as God's Son. (TLSB)

**21:33–46** Jesus warns His opponents that rejecting Him will ultimately lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom. Judgment is based on one's reaction to Jesus. Those rejecting Him are excluded from God's kingdom and are consigned to the only other option: an eternity apart from God in hell. In His great wisdom and mercy, God used the murder of His Son to work salvation, and He used the rejection of Israel's leaders to hasten the extension of the Kingdom to Gentiles. • Heavenly Father, keep us united by faith to Christ, our source of life, lest we ever turn away, reject Him, and so lose our hope of salvation. Amen. (TLSB)