

21:23 *When He was come*- This is *erchomai* , and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

*By what authority*- Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

*Who gave You this authority?*- To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

21:24 It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

*If you answer Me*- The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :27 that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

21:25 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

*From Heaven, or of men*- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the

approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

*They reasoned with themselves-* This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :27 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

21:26 *The people-* They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

*All count John as a prophet-* And yet the Lord had said that "the men of this generation" held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

21:27 *We cannot tell-* See on :25 *They reasoned with themselves* and :24 *If you answer Me*. The Greek means 'We cannot know'. They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

*Neither do I tell you-* He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

21:28 *A man*- God.

*He came*- In the form of John, who “came unto you” (:32- a related word is used for “come”). God was manifest in the preaching of John, just as He personally comes to men through our preaching. This accounts for the special sense of Divine presence which we have in our efforts to preach His Son and appeal to men. Paul can speak of how God Himself appeals to people through us (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1).

*Son*- These people were already in the family of God. They represent those to whom John the Baptist came (:32).

*Go work*- The Lord’s interpretation is that the “work” required was belief and repentance (:32). The work of God is indeed to *believe* in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:29). This definition of ‘works’ was so different to that held by Judaism, according to which ‘works’ were physical acts of obedience to specific legal regulations. And yet clearly the Christian call is to action, to “works”, without which any profession of faith is “dead”. We are to “go trade”[s.w. “go work”] with the talents given us, and the man who does not so work with them will be condemned (Mt. 25:16). Paul’s apparent deprecation of “works” in Romans (Rom. 4:4,5; 6:23) is surely to be understood with reference to “the works of the Law” of Moses (Rom. 3:27; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5,10), i.e. works done in obedience to that legislation in the hope of salvation upon that basis. The call is to work in response to the call. Not simply assent to theology, the specific doctrines of a Christian denomination, join a Christian social club; but work, labour, toil for Him in His service.

*Today*- The suggestion is that there is urgent work to do, presumably harvest was ripe and what was not gathered today would be lost. The refusal to work was therefore rooted in a refusal to appreciate the significance of their work. Without it, harvest would be lost, and they would all be the poorer.

*My vineyard*- The vineyard must refer to the means of bringing forth spiritual fruit, according to the Lord's use of the vine figure in Jn.15. Being in the vineyard is therefore all about bringing forth the fruits of spirituality, showing forth the moral likeness of God. This is the intended “work” we are asked to do. And yet the idea of being called by God to work in His vineyard [Israel] was language used in Judaism for the call of the priestly class to do the work of religious specialists amongst the nation of Israel, God’s vineyard. But the parable teaches that this is God’s invitation to everyone in the new system of things which He is developing.

21:29 *I will not*- Not so much a bald refusal as 'I don't wish to, I don't have the desire to'.

*Afterward*- This Greek word is used three times in Matthew 21 (and only 9 times elsewhere in the NT). The Jews are criticized for not repenting "after" they had seen the whores repent at John's teaching (21:32); and "afterward" (AV "last of all"), after sending the prophets of which John was the last, God sent His Son to appeal to Israel (21:37). The son who initially refused to work therefore speaks of those in Israel who refused to hear the prophets and John, and yet "after" all that appeal, responded to the Lord Jesus.

*Afterwards he repented*- Exactly the same words in :32. Afterwards- after the Lord's ministry- they did *not* repent. The Jews who initially responded to John are therefore are the son who said he would work but never did. The same Greek word for "afterward" is also found in :37: "Last of all [s.w. "afterward"] He sent unto them His Son". The Lord's coming was intended to bring the disobedient son to repentance- and to go work in the vineyard.

*And went*- To work in the vineyard. The motivation of the man to labour was because he had repented and been forgiven. His motive was not simply obedience out of respect to his Father, but rather now was it gratitude for forgiveness.

21:30 *I go, Sir*- Literally, "I, Sir!". The suggestion is that he was presenting himself as more obedient and respectful than his brother. And yet as so often, those who consider themselves the longer and harder workers in the vineyard, feeling superior to their weaker brothers, are in fact less than them in practice. Surely the Lord had in mind Ex. 24:7: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient".

*Went not*- In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

21:31 *Did the will*- The contrast is between doing the will of God, and simply saying in words that we will. This is the very tension which the Lord illustrates in the parable of the houses built on sand and rock. The same words for 'doing the will of the Father' are found in 7:21: "Not every

one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *does the will of My Father*". Israel's response to John had been a saying of "Lord, Lord" to Jesus, a prompt response to the request to work in the vineyard- but they never went further. They did not actually repent, even though John's message had been a call to repentance. Repentance can be easily 'made' in words, but this is merely surface level. We need to examine our own repentance in the light of this caveat. Surely the Lord had this same category in view when He spoke of how "many stripes" await the one who knows his Lord's will, but doesn't do it (Lk. 12:47 s.w.). As ever, the Lord had Himself in mind as He spoke such demanding words. He was the Son of the Father who "did the will" and finished His "work"; who said yes straight away, and fulfilled it (Jn. 4:34; 6:38; Heb. 10:7,9 s.w.). In all our teaching of others we must likewise never take our eyes off our own position before God.

*The tax collectors and prostitutes-* Matthew, the speaker and author of this Gospel, had been one of them, a tax collector. His appeal for others to respond to the call was therefore interlaced with his own recognition and proclamation that he was in the category of those who had initially said 'No', but afterwards repented. Doubtless the Lord was aware that His followers included tax collectors and prostitutes and He was seeking to justify them.

*Go into the Kingdom of God before you-* To 'go before', *proago*, means just that. The word has just been used of how the crowd 'went before' Him in His [parody of a] triumphant entry into Jerusalem (:9). It doesn't necessarily mean that they would enter the Kingdom, for as mentioned above, the Lord's teaching was that those who did not do the will of God would not enter the Kingdom at all. The idea is rather that the harlots and tax collectors would go into the Kingdom as their heralds, suggesting that their judgment at the time of the Kingdom would be on the basis that the serious sinners had repented and entered the Kingdom, but they had not. And that fact would be waiting for them as they arrived for judgment at the gates of the Kingdom. Paul may be alluding to this when he says that the sins of some men 'go before' them to judgment (1 Tim. 5:24 s.w.). Or it could be that even at this dire moment, the Lord still entertained the hope that His persecutors and enemies would enter the Kingdom finally, even if the whores would have a better place in the Kingdom than them.

21:32 *John came-* His coming to the people was as it were God's coming to them (:28,30). God was manifest in him, as He is in all preachers. We are His voice and appeal to men.

*In the way of righteousness-* The very phrase used in 2 Pet. 2:21 about the Christian Gospel. John's work had been to prepare the Lord's "way" (3:3; 11:10), over which Messiah could have come in glory to Zion, in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies about this. The Lord is referencing the idea that if Israel had responded to John, then the triumphant entry into Zion which He had just parodied earlier in this chapter could really have been achieved.

*When you had seen it-* The second son who had said 'Yes' but not gone to work needed to become as the first son; realizing he was no better than the first son, and likewise repenting and going to work whilst there was still time, to achieve at least something in the Father's vineyard. But it was a bridge too far for the Jewish leadership and Israel in general to make this connection- that they had to shift from their self-righteousness into the position of the whores and tax collectors.

*You didn't believe him-* This was clearly intended to address the inner thought of the audience, that "If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?" (21:25). The Lord knew their thoughts- clearly, in this instance at least, not so much as from direct Divine revelation, but from His sensitivity to them and reading of their minds.

John the Baptist was a popular preacher. All Jerusalem went out to hear him. Even the hardline Orthodox were baptized by him. People liked his hard line austerity, his criticism of them. They lined up to hear it, and to confess their sins to him. But Jesus interpreted it differently. He said John's ministry was like children wanting to play at funerals with some other children- so they started weeping, but the others still wouldn't respond. Jesus came, piping; He wanted them to play weddings. But still they didn't respond in true repentance (Lk. 7:32-35). The Lord judged that Israel didn't respond to John; indeed, *if* they had truly received him, he would have been the Elijah prophet for them (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.). What this teaches is that believers can respond to a tough line, to the ra-ra of an uncompromising moralizing message; and yet not *really* repent nor accept the Lordship of Jesus in their hearts. Mt. 21:32 states clearly that the Jews generally didn't believe John the Baptist, nor repent. And yet they flocked to him in apparent repentance and were baptized. As we all know, repentance is one of the hardest things to be thoroughly genuine about.

*Repented... believe-* Mt. 21:29,32 parallel 'repent and work' with 'repent and believe'. As the Lord said in Jn. 6:29, the work of God is to believe- in the forgiveness of sins. The experience of repentance and forgiveness will result in an ever deeper faith, and the works of gratitude which are inseparable part of faith. The parable speaks of repenting and going to work in the Father's vineyard; as if care for our brethren, seeking their fruitfulness and that of this world [after the pattern of the vineyard of Isaiah 5] is the obvious work of repentance. The Lord castigated the audiences of John the Baptist that they did not "repent, that ye might believe". Repentance would lead to faith... and yet it is faith which leads to repentance. The two things work together to form an upward spiral of growth.

*Believed him-* Their repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness of sins which John spoke of necessitated their belief in Christ as the lamb of God, the sacrifice for sin, of whom John also spoke. The repentance he urged them to make suggests that forgiveness was available- but his message was that that forgiveness was possible ultimately through the work of Jesus as the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). Paul explained this in so many words: “John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him” (Acts 19:4).

*When you had seen it-* The good example of others contributes to our experience of the upward spiral. And yet if we don't respond to them, we can be held accountable for it and slip into the downward spiral. Thus the Lord held the elders of Israel guilty because when they saw the whores and tax collectors repenting at John's preaching, "you, when you had seen it, repented not". They should have been influenced by the repentance of those people; they should've allowed repentance to be contagious. But they didn't, and so they were held guilty for that. The Lord is telling the Jews that they were even more culpable for not repenting at the preaching of John the Baptist because the publicans and sinners had done so; and they hadn't. They should've changed their minds ['repented'] after they saw the publicans and sinners repent- so the Lord incisively observed and judged. The implication of that seems to me to be that we are intended to be inspired to faith and repentance by that of others. This is why the Christian life is intended to be lived in community.

*Repented not so that you might believe him-* This is an awkward phrase in the Greek, and the translations which suggest ‘You didn't repent and believe him’ are being too simplistic. There is definitely a causative sense implied- they did not repent *so that* they believed him. To repent, to change their minds as required by John, involved believing his message, which was about Jesus as the lamb of God who took away sin and thereby gave meaning and possibility to their repentance. Here, the Lord connects repentance with belief; yet we read that in practice, people believe and are baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sin. So belief and repentance are connected. The belief in John that is spoken of here was effectively a belief in Jesus: “John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him” (Acts 19:4). If we repent, change our minds and decide to respond, then immediately the issue of forgiveness is thrown up. Have I now been forgiven? Can I be? How? And this is what leads seamlessly into faith in Christ as the lamb of God to take away our sin.

21:33 There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:

*"Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill [The environment was ideal]. He dug it up [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], gathered out its stones [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], planted it with the choicest vine ["the men of Judah"], built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], but, behold, a cry of distress".*

*Hear-* The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

*Householder-* Literally, the head of the family. Clearly in this parable it refers to God, but the Lord used exactly this term to refer to Himself specifically (10:25; 20:1,11; Lk. 13:25). It is far too simplistic to conclude 'Therefore Jesus is God'. There is too strong a weight of Biblical evidence against that position. The titles and functions of the Father are clearly applicable to the Son- and in fact the same Greek word is used about us as believers "in Christ" (13:52; 24:43).

*Planted-* The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who



come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. See on :34 *The winepress*. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

*Hedged it round about-* The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

*A winepress-* This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness (Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their

own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

*Tower-* It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit.

*Went into a far country-* Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particular careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

*Let it out-* Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

21:34 *Drew near-* A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

*He sent-* The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

*His servants-* The prophets (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

21:35 *Beat-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35).

Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head.

*Killed... stoned-* There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who

demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

*Other servants-* The two groups of servants is unique to Matthew's account, and is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the "former prophets" and the "latter prophets".

21:36- see on 13:19.

21:37 *They will reverence-* Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds "My beloved Son". Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son".

The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants.

21:38 *When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves* – That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to "*When they shall see him, there is no beauty that they should desire him*" (Is. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

*This is the heir-* The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him

coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*Seize on his inheritance-* Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

21:39 *Caught... cast out... slew-* Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they "took Him, killed and cast out of the vineyard". The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying;

the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

*Cast Him out-* This has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:42). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshiping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

21:40 *When the Lord of the vineyard comes-* The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

21:41 *Miserably destroy those wicked men-* In the Greek, "miserable" [*kakos*] is related to "wicked" [*kakos*]. Those men will suffer their own wickedness. And just as the Jews said that those wicked men would be punished with their own wickedness, so out of their own mouths they were judged; in the same way as the Father had asked the Jews to "judge between Me and My vineyard", even though they were the vineyard (Is. 5:3). It would seem that the literal words of the rejected will be quoted back to them at the day of judgment (Lk. 19:22 "Out of your own mouth will I judge you"; Jude 15 "To convict all that are unGodly... of all their hard words"). This is just as David was invited to speak words of judgment on a sinner, and was told: "thou art the man". God will remember against Edom the specific words they spoke when Jerusalem fell (Ps. 137:7 RV). See on 12:37.

*Let out-* The Lord's judgment is different. He will *give* the vineyard to the others (:44). And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (:43; Jn. 15).

Mk. 12:9 records that the Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would “come and destroy the husbandmen”. This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

*Their seasons-* Literally, 'times'. But for the Lord there is only one harvest. Once the fruit is ripe from the first harvest, then it will be reaped. Or it may be that God's aim is that we the husbandmen bring forth all the required fruits (of the spirit) "in their seasons". This indicates that over time, the various members of the body between them will bring forth every aspect of God's spirituality. The parable of the talents indicates how we have each individually been given something different by Christ. The parable of the pounds is along the same lines; as is the story of the Master who went away and left his servants looking after the house. *Each* of them was given his own *separate* work to do (Mk. 13:34). This accounts for the way in which each of us will be judged according to our own works- i.e. according to how far we have done those things which Christ intended us personally to do.

21:42 *Never read-* They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*Rejected-* The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

*Become the headstone-* If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

*Marvellous in our eyes-* In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our*

eyes... *we* will rejoice and be glad... *we* have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation in Mt. 21:42 is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

21:43 *The Kingdom of God*- The whole vineyard system is spoken of as the Kingdom of God. The Jewish people were therefore not the Kingdom of God- because the Kingdom was taken *from* them and given to others. They had been instated as God's Kingdom at Sinai, but now, by implication, that status was being withdrawn from them.

*A nation*- In the singular. The various nationalities of the new group of workers are irrelevant, we are seen as one new nation, a new people.

*Bringing forth the fruits thereof*- This is subtly different to 'rendering Him the fruits in their season' (:41). The new nation are no longer merely tenants, but are the vine themselves; the fruit is to be on them. And this is exactly the way the imagery of viticulture is used in Jn. 15.

*Fruits thereof*- Spiritual fruit is the fruit of the Kingdom. The fruits of the Spirit in terms of personality traits, characteristics etc. are the fruits which will eternally be seen in the Kingdom. They are a firstfruits, a foretaste, of the Kingdom age. In John's terms, we are living the eternal life now, the kind of life which we shall eternally live.

21:44 *Will grind him to powder*- There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world- being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him,



really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on 3:11.

21:45 *They perceived*- The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple.

*Of them- Peri* in this construction more means 'through'. They realized that their very own words of :41 were the Lord talking to them. They had been trounced, and stood self-condemned. And so they went blindly ahead in their hurt pride and confirmed it by planning to murder the Son who had been sent to them. They should have stopped in their tracks and repented. They realized they had uttered the words of their own condemnation. The Lord Jesus had spoken to them through their own words. They were furious about it. The only options were to repent, to give in; or to go madly ahead, fuelled by the hurt pride of a moment, and do the unthinkable in murdering God's Son.

21:46 *They sought*- The very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod.

*To lay hands on Him*- The Greek for "Lay hands on" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (26:4,48,50,55,57).

*Feared the multitude*- We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

## Notes

(1) See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132.