



# Potomac Hills

## Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
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Matthew 21:23–46  
Version

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### *“The Reversal of the King”*

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled  
*“The King and His Kingdom!”*

#### **Matthew 21:23-46**

*“And when He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”<sup>24</sup> Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.<sup>25</sup> The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’<sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

*<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’<sup>29</sup> And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went.<sup>30</sup> And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.<sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*

<sup>33</sup> “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. <sup>34</sup> When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup> And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. <sup>44</sup> And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” <sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> And although they were seeking to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, because they held Him to be a prophet.”

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand these parables, to see ourselves in them, to learn their lessons, to apply them to our lives. So help us to consider what it means to follow You in faith and repentance. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: “Who is this guy?”**

Last Sunday I went out to lunch with a couple guys and we were swapping stories, mostly true, and I realized on the way home that one of my stories would be a good introduction to today’s message. So, to those guys, sorry you have to hear it again. And for the rest of you, if you were here back then, you heard it in November of 2002, as I’m sure you’ll remember. Anyway, the story comes from when I commanded a basic training company at Fort Jackson, SC, back in the mid-80’s. One night, my company was on a live-fire assault exercise where you low crawled, on your bellies, through this range while machine guns were fired over your head. And just to make things interesting, there were demolition pits on the course, surrounded by concertina wire (which is like barbed wire), and these demo pits would explode every few minutes.

Now the machine guns were set on towers and fired about 12–15 feet over your head so you weren’t in any real danger, but your depth perception isn’t that great in the dark, and so when you saw those tracers fly by, you would swear that they were mere inches away. ... And so your adrenaline levels were up, the noise from the machine guns firing was deafening, there’s explosions going off, and you were pushing and yelling at everybody to keep moving and get through the course.

Mostly, you didn't want anyone to freeze out there and get stuck. You didn't want anyone to lose their equipment or weapons on the course and have to go back to get them. So you watched everyone, and yelled at everyone, and pushed everyone to get through. And when you finished the course, there was a big trench at the end that everyone sort of flopped into, and the platoon sergeants and squad leaders would go around and check everyone out, making sure they were okay and they had all their equipment.

Well, I'm one of the last ones to clear the range and get down into the trench. And I'm walking down the line checking to make sure everything's getting done. And I looked way down at the end of the trench ... about 30-40 yards away ... and there's these two soldiers sitting up on the side of the trench.

Definitely **not** a good thing.

So I yell down there, "What are you doing? Your drill sergeant said get down in the trench, so you had **best get down** in the trench!" And both guys jump down in the trench. And I walked down there, and I'm thinking, "**Who ARE these guys?**" And I'm ready to rip into them. But just as I get up to them, I realize ... they weren't my troops. ... It was the Battalion Commander, a Lieutenant Colonel, and the Brigade Commander, a full Colonel.

And I'm sure they're thinking, "**Who IS this guy?**"

And now I'm thinking, "I'm a dead man."

And I just stopped ... and I hear the Brigade Commander say, "Evening, David. We're down in the trench."

Fortunately for me, they thought it was pretty funny.

You see, I thought **I** was the authority in that situation.

But then I came upon **another** with real authority, far beyond my own.

And at the end of Matthew 21, we come across a similar situation. There's a group of people, the Chief Priests and the Pharisees, who think they're the authority, so they challenge the authority of another, Jesus Christ, because they fail to recognize the real authority that He **has** and they fail to recognize the real authority that He **is**. And just as Jesus turned the tables in the Temple, so now He turns the tables on His accusers. So let's turn to our text for this morning, Matthew 21, starting at verse 23, where we see ...

#### **v. 23–27: THE CHALLENGE IS REVERSED** <sup>1</sup>

*"And when He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"<sup>24</sup> Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.<sup>25</sup> The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"<sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."<sup>27</sup>*

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**1** The Context and Exposition of the text are adapted from my sermons, "Jesus Challenged by the Pharisees" 11/24/02 and "Jesus Challenges the Pharisees" 12/1/02, both preached here at Potomac Hills. And the sermons, "Prostitutes Before You" 3/11/01 and "The Parable of the Last Messenger: On Sin" 8/28/94, both by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, [sermons.redeemer.com](http://sermons.redeemer.com); Logos Bible Software 4: *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*; "By What Authority?" by Dr. Sean Michael Lucas, First Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, MS, 11/19/13, [www.fpcpca.net](http://www.fpcpca.net); "By What Authority?" by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 4/4/99, [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org); and "Responding to Authority" by Dr. Phil Newton, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 11/14/04, [www.southwoodsbc.org](http://www.southwoodsbc.org).

*So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”*

You will remember that Jesus has now come to Jerusalem. He rode into town on a colt with a crowd following Him, covering His path with palm branches and cloaks. And as He passed, they shouted praises to Him. And as He came into Jerusalem, He gave people an opportunity to see that He was coming as King, and that one day He would be coming again as King.

Then He chased the men selling animals and changing money out of the Temple. And He set up shop there in the Temple, healing people and teaching them about God. People gathered around Him, and they were listening carefully to Him. But even while He was teaching, the priests and teachers and elders were plotting how they could get rid of Him. So they began to ask controversial questions that held the possibility of tripping Jesus up and getting Him to say something that either went against the Law, or something that would damage His credibility with the people.

And so His opponents decided to test Him on the issue of **authority**, after all, they were really just trying to find a way to **arrest** Him, they were **plotting** against Him, and ultimately, seeking to **destroy** Him. We see at the end of our passage today, **Matthew 21:46**, “*And although they were seeking to **arrest** Him ...*” And in the next chapter, **Matthew 22:15**, “*Then the Pharisees went and **plotted** how to entangle Him in His words.*” And in the parallel passage in Luke we read, **Luke 19:47**, “*And He was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to **destroy** Him.*”

What authority did Jesus claim? Now those who walked with Jesus day by day **knew** that He was more than just a poor boy from Nazareth. He taught with **authority**, He healed with **power**, and He argued with **clarity** against the religious leaders. In many ways the Gospel of Matthew has just one point ... **Who IS this guy?** The crowds, the disciples, the religious authorities, and even Jesus Himself ... all seem absorbed in answering this question ... **Who IS this guy?**

Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem was grounded upon two displays of authority: **first**, His triumphal entry when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amidst the joyous adoration of the crowds; and **second**, the cleansing of the Temple when He drove out the moneychangers. The Scriptural reality is that **the true Temple** had come to the temporary Temple! Jesus’ cleansing act signaled both the coming destruction of Herod’s Temple and Jesus’ sovereign role as the Temple of His people. So, for a few glorious days the new Temple [Jesus] sat in the old Temple [the building in Jerusalem] and taught with marvelous authority, just as He had done at the very beginning of His ministry when the people of Capernaum reacted to His teaching in the Synagogue, **Mark 1:22**, “*And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them **as one who had authority**, and not as the scribes.*” Similarly, after the Sermon on the Mount we read, **Matthew 7:28-29**, “*And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching,<sup>29</sup> for He was teaching them **as one who had authority**, and not as their scribes.*” So how does He get away with usurping their authority? **Who IS this guy?**

And so the religious leaders go into action ... Jesus’ assertion of authority doesn’t go unchallenged. As soon as the chief priests, scribes, and elders could put their heads together, they swept down on Jesus, **verse 23**, “*And when He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”* Specifically, they wanted to know what

authority lay behind His triumphal entry, the Temple cleansing, and His right to teach in the Temple.

The **teachers** of religious law, or the scribes, had authority. They had studied with the rabbi's. They had qualifications. They were the seminary professors of their day. The **priests** had authority. They had inherited the position of priest going all the way back to Aaron and Levi. They were the leading ministers of their day. The **elders of the people** had authority. Their age and experience had gained them the leadership in the social and economic affairs of the community. They were the leading elders of their day. And together, these three groups of authoritative people made up the ruling council known as the Sanhedrin. And they knew that Jesus had no formal training with the rabbi's, no priestly lineage, and He didn't have the age and experience of the elders. So how does He get away with usurping their authority? ***Who IS this guy?***

You see, **derived authority** was a major pillar in their system. The act of teaching was typically a tedious chain of citing different authorities — “Rabbi Meir says ... but Rabbi Judah says ... but Rabbi Simeon also permits ...” But Jesus didn't teach this way. He **was** the authority! Moreover, they correctly assumed that no leader of Israel had been consulted about the **correctness** of Jesus' activities, much less had given approval. They hoped, therefore, that He would be forced to admit this and then would be discredited in the eyes of the people.

Jesus saw the trap and with effortlessly put a counter question to them that they dared not answer ... look at verse 24, “*Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.*”<sup>25</sup> *The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?*”

The problem was, John the Baptist was a popular hero. Vast crowds of people had received his baptism of repentance as they confessed their sins. We saw that way back in **Matthew 3:2, 6**, “***Repent***, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ... and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, ***confessing*** their sins.” Likewise we see in **Luke 3:3**, “*And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of **repentance** for the forgiveness of sins.*”

But the **leaders** had refused. And John the Baptist confronted them, **Matthew 3:7-8**, “*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”*<sup>8</sup> *Bear fruit in keeping with **repentance**.*” Luke tells us they **rejected** the words of John, **Luke 7:29-30**, “*When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,*<sup>30</sup> *but the Pharisees and the lawyers **rejected** the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.*” Now, amidst the crowds of people in the temple, it wouldn't be wise to **deny** that John's authority was from Heaven. But if they said his baptism **was** from Heaven, they would be admitting they had sinned in rejecting his baptism.

Even worse, they would have to admit that Jesus was the Messiah because John had announced in **John 1:29-32**, “*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*<sup>30</sup> *This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me.’*<sup>31</sup> *I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, **that He might be revealed** to Israel.”*<sup>32</sup> *And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him.”* There was **no way** these leaders would even consider that Jesus was the Messiah. So, with

Jesus' question hanging heavy, these self-assured know-it-alls meekly answer, **verse 27**, "*So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."*"

Cowards! If they truly believed Jesus was a fraud, it was their **duty** to tell the people, regardless of the personal cost. But they were opposing Him for self-centered reasons and so Jesus responded, "*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*" But Jesus doesn't just stop with reversing the challenge, He then tells them a parable which demonstrates that, contrary to what the religious leaders thought in considering themselves to be the true believers, in reality ...

#### **v. 28–32: THE BELIEVERS ARE REVERSED**

The story Jesus tells could have been a common scene in Jewish households ... <sup>28</sup> "*What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'*" <sup>29</sup> "*And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.*" <sup>30</sup> "*And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.*" <sup>31</sup> "*Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."* Jesus said to them, "*Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.*" <sup>32</sup> "*For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*"

In this simple story, the father had the right to command his sons to go into the vineyard. They had the responsibility to obey. None of the religious leaders would have disagreed with their responsibility to recognize the father's authority. Anyone of them would have judged the second son as a rebel and worthy of punishment for spurning his father's authority.

Keep in mind that these men comprised the Supreme Court of Israel. They regularly declared judgments on those who resisted authority. But they couldn't see how they had **rejected** Christ's authority. Though they could see the **implications** in the story, they **refused** to see the evidence of Christ's authority over their lives in commanding them to **repent and believe**.

Jesus Christ called attention to John's message. But who listened? The religious leaders? Not at all, **verse 32**, "*For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*" So concerning the religious leaders, Jesus is saying that they were like the son who said, "I will," yet didn't go into the vineyard. They were long on talk but short on obedience. Submission to God's authority **in Christ** demands more than words. It's a call to faith and obedience **to Christ**. The God who sees our hearts is never impressed with outward profession that doesn't result in inward submission to Christ.

An amazing thing is found in Jesus' declaration, end of **verse 31**, "*Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.*" It was the lowest and the least in Israel that responded and found hope in the authoritative message of John concerning the Messiah. The most despised people in Israel, though at first rejecting obedience like the first son, repented and followed after the Lord. They believed the message of John the Baptist, and later Jesus Himself. They believed and followed. Though they had lived lives of rebellion through greed, dishonesty, and immorality, they repented of their sin and believed on the Redeemer sent by God — the Lord Jesus Christ.

The religious leaders had positioned themselves as the most spiritual men of Israel. Yet Jesus Christ declares just the opposite. The very ones that the religious leaders would have rejected and given **no chance** to be part of God's kingdom, were the ones that Jesus singled out

as kingdom citizens through faith in Christ. That declaration of Jesus throws open the doors of His kingdom to all that will believe on Him. So the challenge to Jesus' authority is reversed, the understanding of who the true believers are is reversed, and then we see that ...

**v. 33–41, 45–46: THE POWERFUL ARE REVERSED**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>33</sup> “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. <sup>34</sup> When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup> And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” ... <sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> And although they were seeking to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, because they held Him to be a prophet.”

Pretty pointed words. Jesus was telling a parable to let the priests, the teachers, the elders, the Pharisees know that **He knew exactly** what was going on. He knew **exactly** what they were trying to do. He knew **exactly** what they were they like. And they understood all that as well. They **got** the point.

And they weren't happy about it because the picture Jesus paints employs an image that everyone readily understood — **a vineyard representing Israel**. Israel thought of itself as the vineyard of God, and a number of Scriptures make that allusion, including **Psalm 80, Isaiah 27, Jeremiah 2, Ezekiel 19, and Hosea 10**. But the most famous is the Song of the Vineyard in **Isaiah 5**. There Isaiah describes God's loving care for His vineyard, but ends it with this verse, **Isaiah 5:7**, “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”

God had done everything to ensure that Israel would become fruitful. But Isaiah describes His disappointment with the vineyard because it yielded only **bad fruit**, and finally Isaiah describes His judgment of it — and His mourning over it. The vineyard / Israel connection was so much a part of their national consciousness that the very temple in which Jesus was standing sported a richly carved grapevine, sculpted around the door that led from the porch to the Holy Place. This vine had immense sacred meaning in the eyes of the Jews.

Jesus had everyone's attention as He began the Parable of the Vineyard Keepers. But where Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard was about the failure of the vineyard, Jesus' parable would be about the failure of the **keepers** of the vineyard ... the **leaders** of the Israel. And just to make sure they understood it, He made it an allegory where the master = God the Father, the vineyard = Israel, the tenant farmers = Israel's leaders, the servants = the prophets, and the Son = Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> The references of Israel and the vineyard imagery are adapted from *Abiding in Christ* by James Rosscup, page 28. The descriptions of the leaders of Israel are adapted from the books, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 9:21-18:34* by Dr. John Nolland, page 950-954; *The Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Luke* by Dr. Leon Morris, pages 211-212; and *According to Luke* by Dr. David Gooding, page 318

Clearly, the meaning was that God established Israel as His vineyard, put spiritual leaders (the tenant farmers) in charge of it, and didn't show His presence for a long time. The longer God was gone, the more remote and powerless He seemed, and the tenant leaders began to assume that His absence was permanent. An abusive attitude **festered** in the leaders that the vineyard (or Israel) was, in effect, **their possession**. With the passage of time, the leaders committed a terrible breach of contract, so to speak, which became readily apparent at harvest time,

All this was done, Jesus said, because Israel's leaders had become so successful from the fruits of the vineyard that they wanted to keep the harvest for themselves. Finally, the outrage in the parable **peaks** with the ultimate violence, **verse 37**, *"Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"*<sup>38</sup> *But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'"*

And, of course, the son they would murder **was Jesus**.

Don't miss the huge distinction that Jesus made between Himself and the religious leaders. The leaders were tenants, but He was the Son and heir. Jesus Himself was the author of this **death parable**; you could call it **His prophetic autobiography**. He foretold this back in **Matthew 20:17-19**, *"And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way He said to them,"*<sup>18</sup> *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death"*<sup>19</sup> *and deliver Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day."*

The parable teaches two things about God's patience. It is long-suffering. And it has its limits. God's judgment comes only after showing patience to His people. There was a **terminal severity** awaiting the unrepentant leaders, **verse 40**, *"When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"*<sup>41</sup> *They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."* This was partly realized in the national judgment that took place at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But the ultimate reference is to eternal judgment for Israel's leadership, and the reassignment of leadership to a people who were mostly Gentile, as is recorded in the book of Acts.

There is eternal peril in resisting Christ's authority. This isn't thought of as especially horrible to anyone who rejects Christ because they don't believe it in the first place. But believers think of it as **the most horrible** thing. Why? **Because we believe it!** The penalty of rejecting Jesus' authority is damnation, the wrath of the Lamb! The parable forces you to ask ... **Who IS this guy?**

So the challenge to Jesus' authority is reversed, the understanding of who the true believers are is reversed, the people who had all the power would lose it when their stewardship and keeping of the vineyard of Israel would be reversed, and then finally, we see that ...

#### **v. 42-44: THE REJECTION WILL BE REVERSED**

If you remember, the people were quoting **Psalm 118** on Palm Sunday. And now, after telling the parable, Jesus directs them back to **Psalm 118**, this time to **Psalm 118:22** where the stone that becomes a cornerstone was understood to be the Messiah, **verse 42**, *"Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'"*

The “builders” here were not stonemasons, but those who were the builders of Israel — the leaders of Israel. “Builders” was a popular image for leaders in Jesus’ day. **Psalm 118** prophesied that the leaders of Israel would reject the stone — the Messiah, Jesus — who following His rejection would become the cornerstone. Christ is the cornerstone in the eternal temple of God. In the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone, we see Jesus symbolized in His rejection and crucifixion, but then through resurrection becoming the risen Lord and Savior.

So **authoritative** is Jesus that He is **the judgment stone** for every person, culture, and nation of all history. Whether you fall on Him or He falls on you, the result is the same — **destruction**, look at **verse 44**, *“And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”*

The first function of the stone (bringing disaster to those who fall on it) is derived from **Isaiah 8:14-15**, *“And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”* The corresponding function of the stone, falling on some in judgment — *“and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him”* is derived from **Daniel 2:34-35**, which describes a supernaturally sculpted rock that smashes to pieces the statue of gold, silver, bronze, and clay (representative of the world’s kingdoms) that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Our awesome, risen Lord will return as a great crushing weight to judge the world. And His authority **cannot be ignored!** Our attitude toward Jesus is everything. We will either rise or fall according to our faith or lack of faith in Him. If we fall on Him, He will fall on us, bringing eternal destruction on our souls. For your own sake I have to ask ... Is He your Lord? Is He **your authority**? **Who IS this guy?**

This parable is like no other Jesus has told. It is the only one that contains **His own obituary**. Imagine how He must have **felt** as He told it to His followers ... as He told them (and us) of the fate that was waiting for Him. All this the Savior did, knowing full well that in a few days the wicked tenants would throw Him outside the city walls and have Him killed. And **still** He told the story ... **still** He shared the parable ... **still** He held out, in this final warning, hope for a new-found faith and repentance, which is God’s grace to sinners.

The parables come to us cloaked as prophets. God’s Word points out the sin in our lives that we’re blind to. We can receive and believe what it says. Or we can **reject** it and **refuse** to recognize its authority over us. In Acts, chapter 3, Peter and John are confronted by a man lame from birth and he asked them for alms. He was a beggar, expecting to receive something from them. And in my all-time favorite verse, Peter says, **Acts 3:6**, *“I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”*

And after healing the crippled man, Peter and John are arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, **the same religious leaders** who challenged Jesus in our passage this morning, and they give **the same essential challenge** to the apostles. We pick up the story in Acts 4, where the Apostle Peter lays that challenge before us as recorded in **Acts 4:7-12**, *“And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” [By what Authority?] <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by Him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> **This Jesus is the stone that was***

*rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.* <sup>12</sup> *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

If you don't accept His authority, you can't expect others to accept His authority. **You can't** give what **you don't** have. **You can't** give the Good News of God's Grace as its found in Jesus Christ if **you don't** have it yourself. **You can't** call people to repent and believe if you **don't repent** and believe. **You can't** tell people about the Savior if **you don't** believe He's your Savior.

This table behind me is **a Gospel table**. It's about receiving grace from the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about coming to Him in **faith** and **repentance**. It's about acknowledging Him as the authority in and over your life. Is He the stone of offense that you're stumbling over? Or is He the cornerstone upon which your faith is built? **Is He Your King?** Ask yourself ... **Who IS this guy?**

Think about that ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Help us to repent and believe the Gospel. Help us to acknowledge the authority and Lordship of Christ. Help us to come to the throne of grace and find help in our time of need. Help us to come to this table in faith and repentance, bowing before our King, who loved us and lets us into His Kingdom, to eat at the King's table. And, as always, help us to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.*

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