

If I Reject Jesus?  
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Allen Power

Matthew 21:33-46

Imagine the headlines: Entire staff of real estate firm murdered by tenants while attempting to collect rents. Sub-headline: Founder's son is also killed by tenants.

A wealthy investor builds a beautiful office building with all the amenities for conducting business. Soon the building is fully occupied. But the tenants form a conspiracy to not only refuse to pay rent, but to kill anyone who comes to collect.

**How would the public respond? What if you were on the jury?**

The story is outrageous. The version of it Jesus told the religious leaders the week of His crucifixion was also outrageous; but effective in making His point.

Big Idea: Rejecting Jesus is not a choice without consequences. Rejecting God's Son means destruction. Those who reject Him will one day pay dearly for it.

- It had been three days since Jesus rode into Jerusalem. In that time he had cleaned the moneychangers out of the temple and become more "in their face" with the Jewish religious leaders.
- Matthew 21:23 (ESV) tells us, <sup>23</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?"
- Jesus responded: Where did John the Baptist get his authority to baptize?
- It was a "Catch-22." They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn't believe John. <sup>26</sup> But if we say it was merely human, we'll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet." <sup>27</sup> So they finally replied, "We don't know."
- Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things."<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus began to confront the sin of the Jewish leaders by teaching in parables and asking questions.

Questions that caused the wicked leaders to reveal their own guilt.

- His second parable was about a vineyard owner; and some evil tenants.

Matthew 21:33–46 (ESV)

### **The Parable of the Tenants**

<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.

- Like our earlier story of the owner of the building, this was an illustration that would have resonated with the people to whom Jesus was speaking.

- **What does the vineyard represent? Who does the owner represent? What about the servants sent to collect the rent? Who was the son? Who were the tenants?**
- This parable is a synopsis of the story of the nation of Israel. God chose them as His people and gave them the privilege of serving Him. Over and over they refused to obey God and chose to do things their own way.
- God's patience was amazing as He sent messenger after messenger (the prophets of the Old Testament) to try to bring the people to repentance.
- **How were the prophets treated by the nation of Israel?**
- They beat Jeremiah, killed Isaiah, stoned Zechariah...<sup>2</sup> The prophets were always being abused, threatened, and in some cases murdered.

2 Chronicles 36:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

- **What does this say about God's patience with people today?**
- God is incredibly patient with people.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

- However, there is an end to His patience at some point.

Romans 2:4–5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

- Verses 40 and 41: **How did Jesus' questioning trap the leaders?**

- The people listening to the parable were caught up in the drama and did not realize that they passed sentence on themselves.<sup>3</sup>
- Then Jesus goes in a direction that seems totally random. Instead of a vineyard, suddenly He was talking about a stone (quoting Psalm 118.)
- Often in the Old Testament, God is referred to as a rock or a stone (Deut. 32:4, 18, 30–31; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46)<sup>4</sup>
- **In this case whom did the stone represent? In what ways is He the stone?**

Isaiah 8:14–15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> 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.”

Romans 9:31–33 (ESV)

<sup>31</sup> but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. <sup>32</sup> Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

- A stone can be something firm to build on or something to trip over. Jesus as Messiah can be either one depending on how people respond to Him.
- “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Jesus came to be the rock upon which men and women can build an eternal life.
- On the other hand, Jesus said (v.44): “...*the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*”
- Life Application Study Bible: “...*at the Last Judgment God’s enemies will be crushed by [the stone]. In the end, Christ, the*

*“building block,” will become the “crushing stone.” He offers mercy and forgiveness now and promises judgment later. We should choose him now!* <sup>5</sup>

- As we said, rejecting Jesus is not a choice without consequences. Rejecting God’s Son means destruction. Those who reject Him will one day pay dearly for it.
- Verse 41: **What did the religious leaders say should be done to the wicked, murderous tenants? What does Jesus say in verse 43?**
- **How does this speak to Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah? To whom does Jesus say the kingdom will be given? Who is that?**

ESV Study Bible: *“The leaders have failed to carry out their obligations to God both in their personal lives and in leading the nation of Israel. Their privileged role in caring for God’s vineyard/ kingdom is now being taken away and given to a people producing its fruits. The church will be a new “people” (Gk. ethnos, “nation, people”) consisting of disciples, both Jews and Gentiles, gathered out of many “nations” (28:19; plural of Gk. ethnos) and brought together as one new “nation” (1 Pet. 2:9; singular of Gk. ethnos) in the unfolding of God’s kingdom in the present age.”*<sup>6</sup>

- There is some difference of opinion among believers regarding the role of the nation of Israel at the end of time. Some say the church (all who have followed Christ; Jew or Gentile) will be the “true” Israel (Galatians 3:29; Romans 9:8.) Some call this “replacement theology.”
- What about the role of the “ethnic” or “national” Israel? All of this is beyond the scope of our lesson. If you want to study further: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-church-and-israel-in-the-new-testament/> <https://www.gotquestions.org/all-Israel-saved.html> <https://www.gotquestions.org/replacement-theology.html>

- My opinion? Scripture calls us to love the nation of Israel and pray for the peace of Jerusalem. I trust God to sort out Israel's role at the end of time.
- In the meantime, this text calls for you and me to take action.

### So, What's the Takeaway?

In Acts 4:11–12 (ESV) Peter said to the Jewish rulers:

<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.”

- Rejecting Jesus is not a choice without consequences.
- Rejecting God's Son means destruction. Those who reject Him will one day pay dearly for it. I pray no one here today is in that place.
- Sadly, so many people see Jesus as a “take it or leave it” proposition. *“If you're all about Jesus, good for you. But I don't want to hear about it because I'm just fine without him.”*
- Someone with that attitude needs to watch for falling rocks. That belief will get you crushed.
- God is so patient with sinful people. But there is a limit to His patience.
- That's why we need to do everything we can to help those around us to accept Jesus as a stone on which to build for eternity, and to keep them from stumbling and falling in that decision.
- As the Psalmist wrote: ‘The stone that the builders rejected [Jesus] has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.’

<sup>1</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 21:25–27). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 1724). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 78). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 78). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>5</sup> Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 160964-160965). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Crossway Bibles. ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 119051-119054). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.