

GOD'S MARVELOUS LOVE

Matthew 21:23-22:14

Key Verse: 21:42

“Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”””

In the previous passage we learned that Jesus entered Jerusalem as a gentle and humble king, riding on a donkey. Then he cleared the temple and restored it as a house of prayer. The religious leaders reacted strongly. In response, Jesus explained through three parables how wicked they were and how patient and loving God is. Especially, Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23, **“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”** The religious leaders were so evil that they rejected and even killed Jesus. Yet God would make him the cornerstone of his salvation work. God’s way of working is inscrutable. He uses even the evil deeds of people to accomplish his good purpose in salvation. God always works for the good of those who love him (Ro 8:28). These days, we hear of so many evil things happening every day. We are naturally shocked, angry and fearful, and can feel helpless. However, we need to see what God is doing and to trust him. As we do, a sense of wonder and awe will fill our hearts and enable us to serve him and others joyfully. Through Jesus’ parables, let’s learn of God’s marvelous love and see how he works to carry out his salvation purpose.

First, the parable of the two sons (21:23-32). After Jesus cleared the temple, the noise of business was no longer heard. Instead, the life-giving words of God could be heard echoing throughout the temple as Jesus taught (23a). When people heard the word of God, their souls were revived. They were happy and full of joy. On the other hand, the chief priests and the elders of the people were full of indignance and a murderous spirit. They confronted Jesus: **“By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?”** (23b) They understood that Jesus was acting as the Messiah, but they rejected him because they had not authorized him.

Jesus answered their question with his own question and promised that if they answered him, he would answer them. The question was, **“John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human**

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origin?" (24-25a) If they said, "From heaven," he would ask, "Then why didn't you believe him?" If they said, "Of human origin," they were afraid of offending the people who believed that John was a prophet (25b-26). So, after discussing it among themselves, they said, "We don't know." Accordingly, Jesus refused to answer their question (27). However, in his great wisdom, by telling parables, Jesus helped them understand their spiritual condition, root problem, and the coming consequences. And, despite their failures, God would fulfill his salvation purpose. Most importantly, Jesus revealed God's patience, wisdom, and love, and how he exercises his authority.

Jesus began his first parable by asking, "**What do you think?**" Jesus wants us to think for ourselves based on the truth. We tend to follow the pattern of this world without discernment. But we must think and follow the truth. The religious leaders were so blinded by self-righteousness that they were unaware of their wicked condition. Through the first parable, Jesus helped them to recognize their condition in the sight of God. There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "**Son, go and work today in the vineyard**" (28). Immediately, his son responded, "**No, I will not.**" But later he changed his mind and went (29). Then the father went to the other son and told him to go and work in the vineyard. He answered, "**I will, sir,**" but he did not go. Then Jesus asked, "**Which of the two did what his father wanted?**" "**The first,**" they answered. Jesus explained the meaning of this parable (31b-32). Like the first son, the tax collectors and prostitutes were very rebellious at first. They were selfish and pleasure-seeking. But when they experienced the consequences of their sinful life, they became humble and repented. On the other hand, the religious leaders, like the second son, seemed to be very obedient. But they refused to follow the way of righteousness that John the Baptist showed them. Even after they saw the changed lives of tax collectors and prostitutes, they did not repent and believe. They were self-righteous and very proud.

The point of this parable is in verse 31b: "**Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.**" It was shocking. Why was this happening? Here we can find the deep truth about the kingdom of God: we can enter only by grace, not by works. Like the Pharisees, some people assume that by doing many good things they can enter the kingdom of God. But this is not true. One of the most respected

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Buddhist monks, Sung Chul, said as his last words, "We can never cover our evil deeds by our good works." John Wesley, as he neared death said, "Only by the blood of Jesus can I approach God; it is not by anything I have done." No matter what we have done, good or bad, the only way to enter the kingdom of God is to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus (Mk 1:15). The problem is that although we know this truth very well, we can easily become self-righteous based on what we have done. This is especially true for those who have served God wholeheartedly for many years. When we become self-righteous, we become unthankful to God and judgmental toward others. Peace and joy disappear. Instead, fear and anxiety, anger and complaints fill our hearts. One of my friends shared his experience. After being overweight much of his life, he lost 30 pounds after much struggle. He looked good, but he became self-righteous and judgmental toward overweight people. One person told him, "I liked you better when you were overweight, because you were graceful." It is good for overweight people to lose weight, but this should not make us self-righteous. Self-righteousness makes us proud and useless; it even makes us God's enemies (Ro 10:3). On the other hand, God's grace makes us humble, thankful, loving, kind and generous. We need to always remember God's grace and hold on to it.

Second, the parable of the tenants (21:33-46). After hearing the first parable, the religious leaders were in shock. Still, they did not understand what their root problem was. So, Jesus said, "**Listen to another parable.**" There was a rich landowner. He planted a vineyard in fertile soil and invested a lot of time and money to make it productive. He made it very secure by putting a wall around it and building a watchtower. He also installed a winepress in anticipation of producing good wine. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place (33). For farmers to work in that vineyard was a great privilege and blessing. Their work environment was very good, and no one was lording it over them as a supervisor. They could work together freely and creatively to produce a good harvest; it was ideal for Millennials. The only thing they needed to do was to give the owner his share of the fruit at harvest time (34). What a good owner! This parable is a concise summary of God's blessings upon his chosen people Israel.

When harvest time approached, the owner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. Suddenly the tenants became crazy. They seized

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his servants; they beat one, killed another and stoned a third (35). They completely forgot that they were not owners, but just tenants. About twenty years ago, our UBF church bought the house just across the street. The owner had passed away about eight months earlier, and the tenants had lived there free of charge. Some were drug dealers and one was a prostitute. As a representative of our church, I informed them that we bought the building and gently asked them to leave. Then one of them shouted at me, "This is my house! Get out! I have a big dog and I am going to call the police!" Fortunately, I was not hurt. But the tenants' reaction really surprised me. It is totally irrational. After enjoying all the privileges of the vineyard, the tenants did not want to give any fruit to the owner. They assumed that the vineyard was theirs. We can become like these tenants so easily. When we are in need, we cry out to God for help with a humble spirit. But in the time of success and blessing, we easily forget about God and live as though we are the owners. It is so easy for young people to claim their lives and futures as their own, ignoring the love and support they received from parents and mentors, not to mention from God. It is so easy for women, after marriage and having children, to try to possess their families as their own, ignoring God's purpose for them. It is so easy for men, after being given a trust from God, to use it for their own glory and purpose instead of God's. But we are not owners. We are only stewards of all that God has given us. As a steward, we should do our best to offer fruit to God. When we do so, we can maintain God's blessing and live happily in his vineyard.

How did the owner respond to the tenants' evil actions? He could have evicted the wicked tenants right away, or even destroyed them. However, he patiently tried to understand them. He may have thought that his servants had been rude. So, he trained more servants to be humble, considerate and diplomatic, and sent them (36a). But this had no effect on the tenants; they treated these servants just like the first group. At this point, we may think the owner would react strongly and decisively to punish them. To our surprise, he showed even greater patience and respect toward the tenants. After much struggle, he decided to send his son. He was not naïve; he knew from experience how wicked the tenants were, and that it was a huge risk. Still he had hope for them, saying, "**They will respect my son**" (37). This kind of patient, self-sacrificing love is beyond understanding. In fact, this is the love of God. God's love is so patient and faithful. His love is so sacrificial and unconditional. His love is so deep and wide and high and long. In a word his

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love is marvelous. God's love leads us to repentance. Apostle Paul asks in Romans 2:4: **“Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”**

How did the tenants respond to this love? They mistook patient love for weakness. When the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, **“This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance. So, they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him”** (38-39). Jesus' parable now shifts from history to prophecy. He foretold what would happen in just a few days. The religious leaders condemned Jesus to death as a criminal. They crucified him and threw him outside the city. God had borne with them through his longsuffering patience. But this was the last straw. Jesus concluded by asking what the owner would do to the tenants. The religious leaders answered, **“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time”** (41). Ironically, they pronounced God's judgment on themselves. Here we learn that God is not only a God of love, but also a God of judgment. God's fearsome judgment would come upon them and they would not be able to stand. As Jesus prophesied, Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. The nation was scattered.

Jesus explained the meaning of the parable based on Psalm 118:22-23. Let's read verse 42. **“Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”’”** They had studied the Bible diligently but did not understand its meaning. It was because their spiritual eyes were closed due to their pride and greed. Nevertheless, they were fulfilling prophecy. Jesus compared them to builders. They had their own idea of the Messiah and made their own plan. To them, Jesus seemed useless, so they rejected him. But God made Jesus the cornerstone, which is the most important stone in the entire building. Peter spoke of this in Acts 2:23-24, **“This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”** Peter concluded, **“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah”** (Ac 2:36). When the leaders

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of Israel failed, it seemed that God's redemptive plan had failed. But God never fails. God used their wickedness to bring about his great salvation. Today the Super Bowl will be held. For years, we have prayed for our people to worship God on Sunday, not football. It is interesting to see how God is working. Nick Foles is the leader of one of the teams who play today. During national interviews, he shared that playing football is just a temporary job.¹ His passion and calling from God is to be a pastor for high school students. He is studying in seminary and wants to discipling young people to become Christian leaders. This is marvelous and amazing. God never fails. God will raise a royal priesthood and a holy nation in America for his world salvation purpose.

In verses 43-44 Jesus applied the parable to the religious leaders. Since they rejected Jesus, the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to others who would produce its fruit. When they heard this, they realized that Jesus was talking about them (45). They should have repented. But instead, they looked for a way to kill Jesus (46).

Third, the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14). Through this parable, Jesus tells how the kingdom of God will be taken from the chosen people Israel and given to the Gentiles. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (1-2). This was the most joyful occasion in the entire kingdom. To be invited to this banquet was a very special privilege; it was honor from the king. The king sent his servants to cordially remind the invited guests to come. Surprisingly, they refused to come. This was tantamount to rebellion against his authority, a serious crime that deserved immediate punishment. But this king was very gracious and patient. He sent some more servants, and this time he advertised how exquisite his menu was. All kinds of gourmet beef were prepared: filet mignon, Brazilian Angus, Italian beef, top sirloin steak, together with exotic fruits and vegetables. A world class orchestra would perform. It was a well-prepared celebration and everything was ready. The king pleaded: "Come to the wedding banquet" (4). But they paid no attention and went off, totally ignoring the king's humble plea. Some seized his servants, mistreated them, and even killed them. It was unthinkable. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

¹ <http://www.fox29.com/news/local-news/nick-foles-plans-to-become-a-pastor-after-football-career>

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After the tragic event, it seemed that the king would cancel his banquet. But he did not. Rather, he extended his invitation to those who never expected to be invited. He sent his servants to the street corners to invite anyone they found. All kinds of people came, including the good and the bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. This anticipates the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. Though the invitation was freely given, the king noticed a guest who had not put on the wedding clothes he had provided for them. These wedding clothes represent the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Christ (Ro 1:17; 13:14). Those who did not put on their wedding clothes were cast out into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (13). Jesus concluded: **“For many are invited, but few are chosen”** (14). This is a warning to those who trust in their own righteousness. Only those who clothe themselves in Christ's righteousness participate in his banquet.

In this passage Jesus compares God to a father, a landowner, and a king. These are positions of authority which must be respected. At the root of our sinful nature is rebellion against God's authority. This causes us to commit the most terrible sins, even putting the Son of God to death. But God made Jesus the cornerstone of his great salvation work. When we come to Jesus with all our sins and failures, he forgives us, changes us and uses us in his great redemptive work, like little living stones (1Pe 2:4). In his marvelous love, inscrutable wisdom, and by his almighty power God does things that leave us in awe and wonder. When we know and serve this God, we can find hope, peace and strength every day to serve him and others joyfully.