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Parables: Rejection

By Bryan Hodge

"He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." ~ John 12:48

Let us consider one "rejection" parable.

The wicked vinedressers (Matthew 21:33-40)

The Setting (Matthew 21:23-32): The chief priests and elders of the people confront Jesus, questioning his authority. They ask, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you authority?"

Jesus answers by saying in effect that his authority is from the same source as John's. Remember that John pointed the people to Jesus (John 1:20-34; 3:30). He acknowledges only two sources of authority. Either the source of authority is from heaven (God) or it is from men. He asks "the baptism of John - where was it from, from heaven or from men?" That is, was John a prophet of God, or not?

They realize that they are in a dilemma. If they say, "from heaven," the next question likely will be, "Why then did you not believe him?" If they say, "from men," they will outrage the people. John was very popular (Matthew 14:4-5; 21:26). They decide it best to answer, "We do not know." Their answer was disingenuous.

Jesus understands that they are not genuine. They are not really seeking truth, but fodder for opposition. Thus, he does not grace them with a direct answer.

He tells the parable of The Two Sons. He remarks, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterwards relent and believe him."

The parable (Matthew 21:33-40): A landowner develops his land. (1) He plants a vineyard. (2) He places a hedge around his vineyard to protect it from animals. H. Leo Boles commented, "They built hedges of wild aloes and other thorny shrubs to keep out the foxes

and wild hogs..." (The Gospel Advocate Commentary on Matthew, p. 422). (3) He digs a winepress. H. Leo Boles commented, "A vat which was prepared to hold the wine when pressed out; these vats were hollow places dug into the earth and lined with stone, or sometimes cut out of solid rock" (ibid). J.W. McGarvey commented, "The winepress consisted of two tub-shaped cavities dug in the rock at different levels, the upper being connected to the lower by an orifice cut through its bottom. Grapes were placed in the upper cavity, or trough, and were trodden by foot. The juice thus squeezed from them ran through the orifice to the trough below" (The Four-Fold Gospel, p. 590). "This method of expressing the juicing is frequently alluded to in the scriptures - Nehemiah 13:15; Lamentations 1:15; Isaiah 63:2-3; Jeremiah 48:33, et al. (McGarvey, Matthew and Mark, p. 184). (4) He builds a tower. McGarvey commented, "A place where watchmen could be stationed to protect the vineyard from thieves as the grapes ripened for vintage" (The Four Fold Gospel, p. 590). (5) He leases his vineyard to others. We are not told if the agreement is a fixed amount, or a percentage of the harvest. Both methods were used.

Time comes for fruit to be collected. The owner is in a far away country. (1) He sends servants to represent him. The vinedressers mistreat them. One is beaten. One is killed. One is stoned. (2) He sends a greater number of servants. They too are mistreated. (3) He, then, sends his son. He reasons, "They will respect my son." However, the vinedressers respond, "This is the heir. Come let us kill him and seize his inheritance." We are told, "So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him."

Jesus asks a question of the listeners: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to these vinedressers?" They answer, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

The application (Matthew 21:42-48): Jesus says, "Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." We are told, "Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet."

The characters - (1) The landowner is God (v. 33 cf. v. 43). (2) The vinedressers are the Jewish leadership (v. 43, 45). (3) The servants are God's prophets (cf. Matthew 23:34; Acts 7:52). (4) The son is Jesus. Wayne Jackson commented, "The admission that the son was the 'heir' reveals that the murder of Christ was not a totally ignorant act on the part of the Jews" (The Parables in Profile, p. 34). Perhaps not all were completely ignorant; though, many were (Luke 23:34; Acts 3:17). (5) The hedge perhaps represents the special relationship, advantages,

protection, and opportunities of Israel (cf. Isaiah 5:1-7). (6) The other nation is the church (1 Peter 2:9 cf. Deuteronomy 14:2).

We have two choices: (1) We can accept Jesus as the chief corner to be built upon (Matthew 21:42 cf. Matthew 7:24; 1 Peter 2:4-5; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20). (2) We can reject him, stumble over him, and be crushed by him (Matthew 21:44 cf. Matthew 7:26; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

Which will you choose?