

• *The religious leaders of Israel hate Jesus; so Jesus now tells a parable to explain what is happening*

• *The parable of the vineyard tenants*

• *The last week of Jesus' life – 7 points*

• *This message pressed home*

**1. Men and women have a tendency to misuse the church of Jesus Christ**

• *Instead of serving God's purposes they use it for their own ends*

**2. It is dangerous to ill-treat the Son of God for personal earthly ambitions**

• *The prophets were always ill-treated*

The religious leaders of Israel hate Jesus; so Jesus now tells a parable that explains what is happening. A man plants a vineyard and rents it out to tenants<sup>□1</sup>. Many farms in first-century Israel were rented out by absentee landlords. Sometimes the tenants might try to seize the property for themselves. In the parable, the owner of the farm sends servants to see what is happening but each of his servants is ill-treated<sup>□2</sup>. Then he sends his son<sup>□3</sup>, but the tenants plan to kill him<sup>□4</sup>. The owner of the vineyard is likely soon to destroy the tenants and rent out the vineyard to others<sup>□5</sup>.

Seven points in the parable represent what was happening in the last week of Jesus' life. (i) The one who plants and owns the vineyard is God the Father. (ii) The vineyard is the people of God, 'Israel'. (iii) The servants are the various prophets and wise men who were sent to Israel. (iv) The son represents Jesus, the Son of God. (v) Ill-treatment of the son represents the murder of Jesus by the leaders of Israel. (vi) The destruction of the tenants represents the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. (vii) The giving of the vineyard to others represents the progress of the gospel among gentiles.

After the parable Jesus presses home His message by using the words of Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:14, 16<sup>□1</sup>.

**1. Men and women have a tendency to misuse the church of Jesus Christ.** These leaders of Israel are like 'tenants' occupying someone else's property. God 'rented out' His business to the leaders of Israel but the tenants misuse it and want to use it to get profit for themselves. It is God's church, God's Israel, and yet men and women like to use the church for their own ends. Perhaps the church, the people of God, might be called in to provide suitable ceremonies and pageantry on state occasions! And 'church leaders' take part in these great occasions but show no interest in preaching the gospel. Or in times of national emergency the churches will be asked to pray for the success of the government's policies! It is simply continuing what happened in ancient Israel. The high priests and elders of Israel had grabbed the use of the nation for themselves. They were in residence at the temple headquarters. They got profit from the various pigeon-selling businesses that were occupying the courts of the temple. The 'tenants' were misusing the Landlord's property.

**2. It is a dangerous thing to ill-treat the Son of God because of personal earthly ambitions.** God sent servants to His 'vineyard': people like Obadiah, Joel, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. They spoke of the coming Son of David and the coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They predicted the day when God would send salvation to Israel. But the prophets were always ill-treated. Jeremiah was imprisoned. Some prophets were killed.

But it is one thing to treat a prophet badly; it is yet more serious to ill-treat the Son of God. In the parable the owner of the vineyard sends servants, and then he sends his son. Similarly God sent various prophets and teachers to Israel, but now He is sending His

□1 20:9

□2 20:10-12

□3 20:13

□4 20:14-15a

□5 20:15b-16

□1 20:17-19

• *It is yet more serious to ill-treat the Son of God*

• *Jesus warns that Jerusalem will soon be severely judged for its rejection of the Son of God*

**3. Jesus is a stone for building, or a stone for stumbling over**

• *Unrecognised by religious experts*

• *Recognised by humble people*

• *The stone that the builders reject becomes the most prominent*

• *For those who reject 'the Stone' it becomes a means of judgement*

• *But for those whose eyes are opened He is the rock upon which their life is built*

beloved Son. These chief priests, scribes and elders are dealing with the Son of God Himself whom they are seeking to trap and get into trouble.

Just as ancient 'Israel' was very precious to God, so is God's re-structured 'Israel', the church of Jesus Christ. So Jesus warns – through His parable – that Jerusalem will soon be severely judged for its rejection of the Son of God. Jerusalem will be destroyed. God will re-arrange His 'Israel', pouring out the Spirit upon a few Jews and enlarging His church by adding gentiles, and will give His 'vineyard' to a new people for a long time.

**3. Jesus is a stone for building, or a stone for stumbling over.** Some builders go looking for a stone. They want a 'cornerstone', a large stone to be the main support in the foundation of the building. **Jesus is unrecognised by religious experts.** Jesus is like a 'cornerstone'. You build your life upon Him. But these builders could not see a good stone when it was in front of their very eyes! Jesus, the Son of God, was walking around the courtyards of the temple but these religious experts could not see Him when He stood in front of them.

**Jesus is recognised by humble people.** There are a few ordinary people who see who Jesus is and build their lives upon Him.

**The stone that the builders reject becomes the most prominent stone in the entire building.** Soon Jesus will be crucified and then raised from the dead. The One the leaders of Israel rejected will become the Head of the people of God and the King of the universe.

**For those who reject 'the Stone', it becomes a means of judgement.** Like a heavy stone that falls out of a building and kills someone, soon this rejected stone will judge and destroy Jerusalem. Jesus is either a foundation stone or a stone that falls upon us in judgement. He is either received as a Saviour or faced as a Judge. The human race rejected Jesus; God exalted Him. The Christian sees now what everyone will see one day, that Jesus is the One chosen by God to be King of the universe and Saviour of all who trust Him. Religious leaders are strangely blind to Him, but for those whose eyes are opened He is the rock upon which their life is built.



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