

## Intro | Rejection of Jesus

Matthew's gospel is an apologetic to Jews to prove that Jesus is the promised Jewish messiah. His gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus presenting him as the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Jesus is Jewish, born in a Jewish town, raised in a Jewish suburb, worshipping in a Jewish synagogue. As he begins his ministry, he reads from the Jewish text and calls Jewish men to follow Him as He ministers to the Jewish people for three years. But the gospel of John says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1.11-13)." The Jewish leaders knew the message, but they failed to recognize God's messenger. In fact, they became so devoted to the **house of God**, that they rejected the **builder of God's house**. As the writer of Hebrews said, "For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself."

## The Story | The Master, the vineyard, and the tenants

Ironically, Jesus teaching about this very thing in chapters 21-23 all take place inside the house of God—the temple. Without apology, Jesus unleashes bold words of condemnation in the presence of all of Israel's religious leaders, the Chief Priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, even the Sadducees. Every time someone questions Jesus authority, he speaks even more authoritatively but always graciously. **Through a series of parables, Jesus reveals God's future rejection of a people who have rejected Him.** Parables are simple stories with difficult meaning, usually revealing the nature of God's Kingdom. The disciples understand these parables through God's grace, while the Jewish leaders misunderstand as a result of God's judgment. This story is about a master, a vineyard, and tenants.

- A Master plants a vineyard in his land—to **represent** his kingdom.
- Constructs a fence around the vineyard—to **protect** the vines.
- Digs a winepress in the vineyard—to **enjoy** the fruit
- Builds a tower in the vineyard—to **protect** the tenants.
- Leases the vineyard to tenants—to **work** the field.
- The Master leaves to a far country.

This parable represents the economic and agricultural landscape of the day. Much of the land in and around Jerusalem would have been owned by foreign landowners. These landowners would hire tenants to live off and on the land as they cultivated the vineyard. **Communication from the landowner would be limited but the contract would have been understood.** The landowner would have provide everything necessary to cultivate the land which, as a new vineyard, would take several years to come to maturity. After four or five years, the landowner or his representatives would return to receive payment for living on the land—often up to 50% of the fruit.

When the season for fruit had arrived, the Master sent servants to get his fruit. When his servants arrived, the tenants beat, killed, and stoned his servants. Though the Master possessed all the necessary power to dispossess the tenants, or even have them tried and executed, **he sends more servants—more than he first sent.** They too are killed. Finally, he sends His Son, believing they will respect Him. Perhaps hoping that the landowner has died, **they kill the Son outside of the vineyard** hoping to make a squatters claim to the "abandoned" land.

## The Meaning | The Wickedness of Israel

Through this parable, Jesus describes the experience of Israel in their perpetual and progressive rejection of God's authority in their lives. This parable echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah 5.1-4:

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes; but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. **What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?**

- **God had planted Israel.** In love, God had set apart this people for his possession. By grace, he had redeemed them from slavery, chose them to represent Him, through whom he would bless the world.
- **God set boundaries for Israel.** Like constructing a fence, God did not His will for his people a mystery. He laid out the boundaries of their relationship in the law. Like a parent that fences their own yard, God desired for his children fully enjoy all that he had given them...safely.
- **God provided Israel with the means to live.** Like the master who dug a winepress in the vineyard, God graciously blessed His children in a land flowing with milk and honey. In the ancient Near East, with its scarcity of water, wine was a necessity rather than a luxury, so it came to symbolize sustenance and life—the sacrificial system. More than that, wine was for feasts, it symbolized joy and blessing.
- **God protected Israel from its enemies.** A watchtower was a small sheltered tower in the middle of the field. It was there as a warning to thieves and as protection for those who lived there. God sheltered his people from storms and guarded Israel from their enemies.
- **God made a covenant with Israel.** Just as the tenants received a contract to work the field, so God's people enjoyed a covenant agreement with their Lord. The covenant was simple. Obey and be blessed. Disobey and be cursed. God's was loving to plant and God's people were responsible to cultivate their land and live as a holy people. In doing so, they not only enjoyed the fruit of their labor, but they made the name of their Master great.

**God's people were called to represent, reflect, and reveal God to the world. They were to farm for God, to produce fruit by serving Him, depending on Him, and sacrificing for Him.**

But like the Master, God lived in a far off country. So, he sent messengers, called prophets, to represent Him to His people. They were responsible to remind people of their gracious Master, teach and re-teach the people His Words, and call the people to **fulfill their covenant agreement**. **Israel hated the message and rejected, or killed, every messenger.** In preaching his one and only sermon, Stephen, the first martyr of the church proclaimed, **"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your father's persecute? (Acts 7.51-52a)."** God's people challenged Moses asking, "Who made you rule and judge over us?" God's people threatened Elijah so badly, he ran off and hid in a cave. God's people attempted to murder Jeremiah. God's people stoned the prophet Zechariah to death as he stood before the temple calling them to repent. And John the Baptist was beheaded for calling out an unlawful and ungodly marriage.

Even though God would be JUST in destroying His people, **He sent messenger after messenger after messenger to warn the people he loved—asking them to "return to me."** God is long suffering in his love. God is ever-patient. Men do not reject God for a lack of knowledge. Men do not reject God for lack of opportunity. Men do not reject God for lack of love. **On the contrary, men reject the love of God because they are defiant, rebellious, and lovers of self.** This is no more evident than the rejection of God's most loving act—the undeserved sending of His one and only Son. In the parable, the men know he

is the son. They kill him because they believe, if they do, they will be owners of the entire vineyard—masters of their own lives. **Men violently reject God's Son because they desperately want to be God.**

### **The Sinfulness of Man | The Rejection of the Son**

The first verses of the book of Hebrews read: **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed to heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (Hebrews 1.1-3).** **If Jesus was truly the only Son of God, then killing Him was the worst thing humanity has ever done or will ever do—nothing compares.**

When Jesus asks them what they believe should be done to those rejecting the Son, they declare that the “wretches” should be put to a “miserable death” and the vineyard let out to good tenants. They rightly declare their own judgement—they **deserve to die**. The leaders do not yet see that Jesus is describing them. Jesus then directly condemns:

1. **You have rejected the most important stone—the cornerstone.** | Jesus says that as you have sacrificed at the temple and fulfilled the law, you have left out the most important part. The entire structure depends on the cornerstone. You have rejected the very one to which everything in the law pointed to. Any form of spirituality that is not founded by Jesus, empowered by Jesus, or shaped by Jesus, is wicked no matter how “Christian” it claims to be.
2. **You have lost God's kingdom—it has been given to another producing its fruit.** | Jesus says that the Kingdom has been taken from Israel and given to a “new nation. The redemptive plan of God has become localized around a new and fruitful people. The tenants were not guilty for being fruitless. The tenants had a very fruitful vineyard. The tenants were guilty of working for their own glory. This new nation will work with a different motivation, means, and model, producing a new kind of fruit
3. **You have fallen—other kingdoms will be crushed.** | Shockingly, Jesus says that the religious who stumble over Jesus' humiliation will be broken by His glorification. Referencing a prophecy from Daniel 2, he also says that the irreligious who reject Jesus will be crush whatever kingdoms they have built for themselves. In other words, **unbelievers and false believers face the same fate** for rejecting Jesus.

### **Gospel | A New Kind of Farmer**

This mysterious nation to whom God gives his kingdom over to is the church. **The rejection by one people results in reconciliation for many.** But gospel reminds us that we are not a “better people”; we are not the “good tenants” who work harder or present better fruit than the “wicked tenants.” We are equally wicked. We are selfish. We are ungrateful. We are defiant. **Through the sin of God's people, God orchestrated salvation came to more sinners.** This is why Paul warns us in Romans 11 to: **“Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.” (Romans 11.22-23).**

**God did not send his son to His death in order to merely reform the attitudes of the workers; He sent His Son to die in order to completely transform our hearts.** Through the death of His Son, God went from boss to Father and I went from worker to family. **God did not send His Son in order to help us become “better” farmers. He sent His Son to die that he produce all of the fruit he rightly requires of us.** We are not farming to produce new fruit as much as we are revealing the fruits that Jesus has already produced in us.

We are planted by God through the **death of Jesus**. We are fenced in by God through the **love of Jesus**. We are blessed by God through the **grace of Jesus**. We are protected by God through the **forgiveness of Jesus**. We are made fruitful by God through the **power of Jesus**. The gospel empowers us to work, but we are a different kind of farmer.

1. **We farm with a different motivation.** | Jesus farms for me. Jesus farmed it all. I do not work out of fear of losing my job. I work out of delight like a child who knows His Father loves everything he does. **FROM DEBT TO DELIGHT. Romans 8.3-4** <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
2. **We farm with a different means.** | Jesus farms with me. We are saved by grace and walk in the works that Jesus has already prepared for us by grace. **FROM WORKING MORE to TRUSTING MORE IN HIS WORK. Matthew 11.28-29** <sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
3. **We farm with different model.** | Jesus farms through me. Jesus wants me to look like Jesus. The more I behold the amazing work He has already done for me; the more what I do will look like Him. **FROM STRIVING FOR FRUITFULNESS to LIVING IN FAITHFULNESS. John 6.27-28** <sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” <sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

We are not farming to produce new fruit; we are revealing the fruits that Jesus has already produced in us and for us. Knowing that love of God then, I compel you to:

1 Peter 2.1-10 ... put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— <sup>3</sup> **if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.** <sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
 a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
 and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”  
<sup>7</sup> **So the honor is for you who believe,** but for those who do not believe,  
 “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”<sup>8</sup> and “A stone of stumbling,  
 and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, **that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.** <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**The greatest fruit we could ever produce are clear proclamations of the awesomeness of Jesus. He is loving.** He is forgiving. He is merciful. He asks you to DO nothing but to believe He is the one who had done everything. Repent, believe, and live who Jesus says you are for His glory and your joy.