

“builders”, beginning with King Herod who tried to kill him, his family who believed he was crazy, the religious leaders who accused him of being Satan himself, all rejected him. Jesus tells the Jewish religious leaders that God is going to do exactly what they said should be done. He is taking away the kingdom of God from them and giving it to a nation that produces its fruit. Their rejection and eventual killing of him is the final evidence that regardless of their religious performance and moral behavior they are refusing to give God what he is due. They are going to be shattered as they stumble over Jesus and they are going to be crushed by him because of their rejection of him.

12. What is the point from the parable that the religious leaders don't “get”?

They don't understand that they are the tenants. They don't understand that they, by rejecting John the Baptist and now Jesus are showing their true condition. Their problem isn't that they don't understand what people who disobey God deserve. Their problem is that they don't see themselves as disobeying God. They presume, because of their knowledge of the Bible and their participation in all kinds of God talk and God actions that they are not guilty. Therefore they reject God's Son and put themselves under God's wrath. They reject the one who is the foundation and pattern of God's kingdom and so they are rejected as stones in that building.

13. Have you ever been sure that someone else deserved hell but not felt how much you deserved hell?

God reveals his fairness to every human being by rejecting those who finally reject his Son.

14. What is the “fruit” that the people to whom God will give his kingdom produce? Consider vv. 28-32, the parable and 1 Peter 2:4-10.

First and foremost, it is accepting Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of all that matters. It is viewing Jesus the way that a builder views the cornerstone. Everything relates to him and is dependent upon him. You have not accepted Christ as God's cornerstone by simply affirming that you believe certain facts about him or telling him you don't want to go to hell. Builders have not accepted a stone as the cornerstone of the

building by simply saying they like it. They must build the building upon it and in relation to it. So, is Jesus Christ the center, foundation, and chief person in your life? Is your entire life arranged around him? Do you regard him the way the Father regards him, as precious to you, as the cornerstone of God's temple? If he is not, then you are going to be justly crushed by him when he comes again. It is then living as his people, offering spiritual sacrifices of praise and obedience to God through Jesus Christ. It is being grateful for his grace and trusting him so that you live in a manner that reveals his greatness.

15. What are some ways that Jesus Christ is the “cornerstone” of your life? What are some of the fruits of the kingdom of God that you are producing?

God reveals his fairness to every human being by accepting those who accept his Son.

7. In vv. 37-39 the landowner sends his son to the tenants to collect what he is due. How do the “tenants” respond to the son and what does this tell us about why humans reject God and his spokespersons? Compare with Genesis 3: 1-9.

The tenants plot against the son and then they seize him, take him outside the vineyard and kill him. They do it so that they can have all the benefits of the vineyard without having to submit to the owner of the vineyard. They want to act as though they are the owners and can do with the vineyard as they please. They want to enjoy the pleasures of God’s good gifts without having to admit their dependence upon him and their obligations to him. They do not want to have to answer for anything they do.

8. What is the primary characteristic of the landowner that is emphasized by his sending so many servants and finally his own son? Consider, how would you have responded if you were the landowner and the first servant you sent was beaten up?

Verses 35-39 are one of the clearest and most tender descriptions of the patience and long suffering love of God in the Bible. God is so patient and bore so much from his chosen people. These verses describe thousands of years of God dealing with his people, pleading with them to turn and to trust in him. The abuse, hatred, and scorn that God endured throughout the OT is astounding. Just think about this story. If you were the landowner and the first servant you sent to collect the rent was beaten up, what would you do? I’ll tell you what you would do. You would call the police and have them evicted. You would prosecute them to the full extent of the law. If you don’t know that about yourself, you don’t know yourself very well. Look how quickly you write people out of your life. For most of us, all it takes is one rude comment, one perceived slight and our hearts are full of wrath and rejection. Yet here is the perfect God who has only acted in kindness towards these people and when he looks for thanks and when he looks for trust in his faithfulness all he gets is cursing and hostility and complaining and indifference and ingratitude. Yet he keeps coming back to get kicked in the face, again and again. As the prophet Hosea so graphically shows, he takes his whoring wife back time after time. Finally, he sends his son to the people who have rejected, mocked, and killed every servant he has sent to get them to turn. He sends his only son to them and do they

respect him and love him? No, they kill him. The unbelieving Jews and the unbelieving Gentiles gathered together and plotted how they would do away with the only Son of God, Jesus Christ. They took him outside the city, which represents all the benefits of being God’s people, and killed him.

9. What are some of the ways you have seen God patiently pursue you through the years in spite of your unwillingness to respond to him in faith?

God reveals his fairness to every human being by patiently pursuing those who reject his kindness.

10. Jesus asks the crowds and religious teachers what they think the landowner should do to the tenants. How do they respond and what does their response tell us about sinful human beings?

The religious leaders respond with a severe and certain judgment. They declare that the landowner should bring “those wretches to a wretched end.” Then they declare that he should rent the vineyard to people who will give him what he is due. We see here what is seen everywhere among human beings. Everyone can recognize when injustice is being done by others what they deserve. God endows humans with what is called, “judicial sentiment”. We have an innate sense of right and wrong and know that those who do wrong deserve punishment. While we disagree over what is right and wrong and our relationship to it, everyone knows that those who do wrong should be punished.

11. What is Jesus doing in vv. 42-44?

In vv. 42-44 Jesus applies the story to these religious leaders. He quotes Psalm 118: 22-23. In the psalm, these verses refer first to David. Nobody thought David would be the great King of Israel, not Samuel, not his dad, not his brothers, not King Saul, not Goliath, not the ten tribes allied with Ephraim. All the “builders” rejected David as king but he came to be the great king of Israel, by the purpose and power of God. However, as Jesus quotes them here, he is applying them to himself. He is David’s greater Son who is the fulfillment of all the promises made to David. He is the cornerstone that the entire building of God’s kingdom is laid upon and yet no one knew who he was. The

son, Joseph. We are to remember his bringing them out of Egypt and his giving the law, the temple worship, the sacrifices, the promises, 40 years of food, water and protection in the wilderness, victory over the Canaanite tribes, possession of the land of Canaan, King David and his heirs, etc. The point of v. 33 is that the Jewish nation and especially these leaders were swimming in grace. God's kindness had been poured out upon the Jewish nation for thousands of years. He was, at the moment Jesus spoke to them, continuing to pour out his undeserved and unmerited favor upon them. The privileges and benefits they were receiving as members of the nation Israel were vast. The whole point of the vineyard metaphor is that the vineyard has been completely prepared to produce maximum fruit. The caretakers do not produce the abundant fruit, they merely get to enjoy it. The vineyard and its fruit are a gift, the result of grace, not works.

3. What does v. 33 along with Isaiah 5 tell us about the nature of reality? Compare Paul's statement in Acts 14: 14-18 to the idol worshippers in Lystra.

It is without question that God gave more gifts to Israel than he did to any other nation. He chose Israel out of all the nations of the world and did for them what he did not do for any other nation. As a result, he holds them to a higher level of accountability. His wrath against their disobedience is greater than against any other nation. However, what is true of Israel is also true of every nation on earth to a lesser extent. Every nation and every human being is swimming in grace. Psalm 145 says, "The Lord has compassion on all he has made." This is Paul's argument when he said to the idol worshippers in the Greek town of Lystra, "In the past, God let all the nations go their own way. Yet he did not leave himself without testimony. He has given you rain from heaven and crops in their season, he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Every human being is the recipient of overwhelming kindness. You did nothing to bring yourself into existence. You do nothing to keep yourself in existence. The world continues to operate in a way that supports your life without your even thinking about it. Last night, while you slept, the air you breathed did not turn to a poisonous gas. Just think about the rain we are now receiving.

4. Take sixty seconds and write down as many evidences of God's grace towards you as you can.

God reveals his fairness to every human being by showering every human being with kindness.

5. To what historical facts is Jesus referring in vv. 34-37?

Jesus, in this simple little story summarizes God's dealings with Israel. God did everything that can be done to make his love plain to these people. However, their history shows that even when human beings are given every opportunity to see the glory of God and to experience the love of God in very tangible ways, they do not respond to him with love. Jesus shows this in the story by telling us that the landowner sent his servants to receive from the tenant farmers the rent they owed him. The history of the OT is God sending his servants: judges, priests, kings and prophets to ask the people of Israel to stop trusting in the gifts God gave and to start trusting in him. Repeatedly the nation Israel rejected these servants and their request to trust and love God. Their history is one of complaining that God is not treating them as they deserve, demanding they be treated better all the while they worship false gods and disobey God's laws. The prophets are ignored, scorned, ridiculed, beaten and sometimes killed, just as Jesus says in the story. John the Baptist stands last in a long line of servants who have come to Israel looking for the "rent" that God is due.

6. What is the "fruit" that God was looking for when he sent the prophets? Consider vv. 28-32.

The "rent" God was looking for was gratitude for his grace and trust in his promises that led to lives lived in devotion to him and love for others. Repeatedly in the OT prophets God calls, not for religious performance but for repentance from sin, gratitude for grace and trust in the promises of God. The disciples, the tax-collectors and prostitutes, the children in the temple, the blind and the lame, all turned from their self-righteousness and their sin and rendered to God what he wants, thanks for his grace and trust in his promises. They stopped depending upon their own goodness, they turned away from demanding a good life on planet earth, and they trusted in Jesus as their only hope.

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD IS COMPLETELY FAIR

Matthew 21: 33-46

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

According to a Harris Poll conducted in February of 2003, 69% of Americans believe in a literal hell and 84% believe in life after death. Of the 84% who believe in life after death 63% believe they personally are going to heaven but only 1% believe they will go to hell. What are some things we can conclude that the majority of Americans believe about themselves, about hell and about who will end up in hell?

The majority of Americans believe that hell would be a just punishment for other people but not a just punishment for themselves. Most know that it would be just for certain other people to go to hell but they are confident that it would not be just for them to go to hell.

The passage we are looking at in this lesson is a continuation of a conversation that Jesus began with the religious leadership in front of the crowds of Jewish people in the temple. Just prior to this passage Jesus told the religious leaders that the tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the kingdom of God and they were not because they believed John the Baptist and the religious leaders refused to believe what John said about the need to repent and to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

How do you think this statement in vv. 31b-32 affected the religious leaders and why? Compare with Luke 18:9-14.

This would be shocking and highly offensive as they were convinced that the people most deserving of hell would be the tax collectors and the prostitutes and the people least deserving of hell would be themselves. They view themselves as members of God's kingdom because of their religious performance, beliefs and behaviors. The tax collectors and prostitutes cannot be permitted into the kingdom of heaven by simply repenting of their sins and trusting in Christ.

What they don't understand, as most Americans don't understand, is that in spite of their religious and moral behavior, they deserve to go to hell. Like most religious Americans, the hundreds of threats and warnings in the Scriptures didn't apply to them but to somebody else. The demand of God to repent of sin and trust in his promised suffering Messiah was not for them. Jesus is in the business of seeking to awaken these men to their true condition and to show how right it will be, if they do not turn around, for God to send them to hell.

STUDY

1. Compare the parable in vv. 33-41 with Isaiah 5: 1-9. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?

In both places the metaphor of a vineyard is used. In both places God is the landowner who plants the vineyard and does all the work to prepare it to produce good fruit. In both places the landowner/God returns to inspect or receive the fruit from the vineyard. In both places the landowner does not find what he expects to find. They are different in that in Jesus' parable the vineyard is rented out to tenants and so the return is not to look for fruit in the vineyard but to receive what is due him from those he rented to. The main difference is that as Isaiah 5: 9 says, the vineyard is the nation Israel while in Matthew 21: 41 & 43 the vineyard is the kingdom of God—all the benefits that come from being God's people. In Isaiah God finds only rotten fruit on the vines he planted and so he destroys the whole vineyard by tearing down the walls and watchtower he set up for its protection. In Matthew the tenants refuse to pay, even after repeated attempts to collect payment and so the landowner finally returns and destroys the tenants and gives the vineyard to others who will pay him what he is due.

2. In both Isaiah and Matthew 21:33 we are told through the metaphor about God's kindness to the vineyard and to the tenants. What kindnesses does the metaphor represent?

We are to think of all that God did to establish Israel as a nation that belongs to him, beginning with choosing the idol worshipping Abram and promising to make him into a great nation. We are to think of all his gracious dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are to remember his kindness to Jacob's eleven sons through the persecuted