



Matthew 21:45–46

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Justin Mof-

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There is a wonderful irony going on in these two verses. An irony that could change the way you look at Jesus. Have another read of these verses:

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Here is the irony: Jesus was acting as a prophet when he was telling the chief priests and the Pharisees the Parable of the Tenants and other parables (see Matthew 21), and yet they couldn't achieve

their desire to arrest Jesus, because they were afraid of the crowd, who held that he was a prophet!

Do you see it? Jesus is prophetic in his stinging attack on the Jewish religious establishment, so much so that they wanted him arrested, and dead. And yet because the crowd held that he was a prophet, their hands were tied. So, instead of listening to the prophetic words just spoken; and pondering those words; and then yielding to those words, removing the cynicism and softening their hard hearts, they simply hardened their hearts.

But they will get him in the end. Jesus will die a horrible death. But they will not get him on their terms, but on Jesus' terms. Jesus is orchestrating his own death. Not

because he has a death wish, but rather for the purposes of bringing eternal life to the dead, forgiveness to sinners, and the kingdom for those who wait. His death is crucial.

In the meantime, the religious establishment is getting 'smashed'. What is the prophetic word they have just heard? Jesus told a parable. He told a few of them. That's Jesus' way of getting at people, and into people and then excluding some and including others. Parables were stories that some people 'got' and others didn't. This time, the chief priests and the Pharisees will 'get it'. They will get it loud and clear.

The parable is about a man who owned a vineyard, but his tenants assumed that the vineyard belonged to them. In fact,

the tenants got so downright entitled that they beat up, bullied and killed the servants that the owner sent. If you've got a Bible look at Matthew 21:35-36:

35 'The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them in the same way.

God is the owner of the vineyard. The vineyard is Israel (and indeed the world, for God owns the lot). The leaders in Jerusalem are the tenants, whose job is the 'take care of the place'. And the servants are the prophets of old, who were treated terribly by anyone who didn't like their message to repent and yield to the love

of God.

37 Last of all, he sent his son to them.
“They will respect my son,” he said.

Surely.

38 ‘But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.” 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

At this, the chief priests and the Pharisees may have been squirming in their seats, since their desire to have him killed remains on their hearts. But then Jesus says that the owner will come, and judge the

entitled tenants, and boot them out, and they will die for their brutal behaviour. Jesus even quotes Scripture:

42 “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes”?

The leaders hated him. But God made Jesus the most important of all. Where everyone thought, this is a little unimportant person; God made him the centrepiece of all humanity. They thought Jesus was a joke, but God raised him as king over all.

‘...the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes”.’

The leaders knew that this was about

them. It was a prophetic word.
It was meant to slice their entitled hearts.
It was meant to shake them up. Instead,
they hearts were hardened.

45 When the chief priests and the
Pharisees heard Jesus' parables,
they knew he was talking about
them. 46 They looked for a way to
arrest him...

But their hands were tied precisely be-
cause the people could pick it: this man is
speaking for God. And they were afraid.

46 They looked for a way to arrest
him, but they were afraid of the
crowd because the people held that
he was a prophet.

They were weak.

Think

It would be good to reflect now and ask: am I entitled? Do I think, deep down, that I am in charge of my own life? Do I think of 'my patch' as my patch? Do I act like I am master of my own destiny? Do I act as though this world isn't God's world? Do I think I owe me something? Or God owes me something.

This world is God's. It's his vineyard. Salvation belongs to him. Jesus is the king, and not me. Am I ready to hear the word of this prophet? This prophetic word?

See, what is going on here? This is not just another prophet speaking into my world.

This is the Son of the Father. Am I ready to yield to his words?

Pray

And yet we need to stop – perhaps now – and thank him that he did, in fact, die. He died for my entitled heart. He died so that I could be forgiven. Thank him for that. Worship him for that.

But at the same time, pray about your heart. It's so important that we do not become like the Pharisees, and are unable to receive bad news when it arrives. Ask God to keep your heart soft. New even!

Dr. Timothy Keller wrote:

“Some say that calling yourself a ‘sin-

ner' is emotionally unhealthy. Oh, no. It is emotionally unhealthy not to call yourself a sinner. To be able to say 'I am capable of terrible things, but I am unconditionally loved,' is the epitome of mental health. It is the gospel that gives us that. The gospel gives us the freedom to admit who we are when the information comes [this prophetic word], to see where we need to change, to know ourselves."

In your prayers, be liberated now, rather than locked into a stubborn path.