



## **Matthew 21:33–41**

33 “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. 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 the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. 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. 40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

## Reflection

The scene is the temple courts in Jerusalem. The vast Court of the Gentiles is filling up with crowds of religious pilgrims who've come to offer sacrifices at the temple and to listen to some of the greatest teachers of their faith preach in the temple courts. Jesus has attracted the biggest crowd and is currently in a heated debate with the teachers of the law and the elders. They represent an official delegation from the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, who've been sent to try and sway the court of public opinion that seems to be right behind this rebel prophet from Galilee. He's set all of Jerusalem on fire by the way he entered the city, with the fiasco he caused in the temple markets yesterday, and here he

is, teaching in the temple courts and he's not even a trained Rabbi. So they've come to publically denounce Jesus, to trap him, and to re-establish their authority over the temple and over the Jewish faith in a public showdown that may well lead to Jesus' arrest.

Only it hasn't begun so well for them. Their combined wisdom has come to nothing against this man. They'd interrupted his teaching with their official delegation, come all puffed up and demanding by what authority he was doing all these things. He'd silenced them with one simple question. And with that question not only did all the crowds rally even more strongly behind Jesus but they'd come out of the exchange looking like fools. Outplayed, outmatched and embarrassed for some reason they

stayed, hoping perhaps to regain face. Only Jesus then pressed his advantage. They'd refused to acknowledge the ministry of John the Baptist, a crowd favourite, and so Jesus compared them unfavourably to the tax collectors and prostitutes who'd responded in repentance and faith to John's ministry. In effectively elevating some of the worst sinners of the land above them, in the middle of the temple in Jerusalem, in the lead-up up to one of the holiest weeks of the year, and in front of vast and growing crowds of religious pilgrims Jesus had levelled at their proud hearts just about the strongest insult possible – even though he was simply speaking the blunt truth.

Deep scarlet and outraged, it's a wonder that they continue to play along in today's

passage. Perhaps they've passed the point of no return and are hoping to regain some shred of credibility in the eyes of the crowds. Perhaps they're looking desperately for any opening his words might offer them to arrest him on the spot. Or maybe, just maybe, Jesus' shocking words had hit some of them in their very core. Some of these men did end up following Jesus. Perhaps by the power of the Holy Spirit and the shocking force of Jesus' words some amongst them began to finally feel in their hearts the authority of the Israel's saviour, the Messiah, the son of God – who was standing right there in front of them.

In picture language Jesus perhaps goes for these hearts; all the while hardening others, and teaching the crowds and his

disciples about not only Israel's history but about his identity and his imminent death. Jesus continues where he began in yesterday's passage with vineyards and workers at harvest time. Only this vineyard is tenanted, entrusted into the care of others, to bring in the fruit of the harvest on behalf of the landowner. Yet when the landowner sends to claim what is his, his tenants have rebelled, claiming what is rightfully his as their own. They're abusing their authority and in pride and delusion have come to think that the vineyard is theirs. And so they kill their master's servants when they come to collect his fruit. One after the other until finally the master sends his own son to claim what is his. Surely they will listen to his son. But they don't, in a heartbeat they are plotting to kill him. And they succeed, they kill him, and throw him out

of the vineyard.

After telling this story Jesus asks a third question of the Jewish religious leaders. And with their answer they heap condemnation on their own heads.

40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

The vineyard is the kingdom of God. The servants sent to the vineyard are the prophets. The wicked tenants are the Jewish religious leaders who’ve become dis-



connected with God, preferring the glory and esteem for themselves. They've become so blind and deluded in their pride and self-importance that they even fail to recognise the son of God standing right there in front of them. He's come right into the vineyard, right up to the watch tower, come to the temple in Jerusalem itself to claim what is his own and the Jewish religious leaders are not only questioning his authority to do so they are plotting to kill him. What will happen to them?

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,”

And with their own words they are condemned, unless they turn and repent of their sin just like the tax collectors and prostitutes have turned from theirs to fol-

low Jesus. But pride can be even more dangerous than prostitution. And they had prostituted themselves out to pride, and been unfaithful to their God. They'd taken the glory owing to him and claimed it for their own. And they were leading his people astray, and plotting right now to put his son to death. Soon their authority would be taken away and given to others, to these Gentiles who surround them right now in the Court of Gentiles; tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners saved by grace, not by pompous religion long ago cut off from its source.

## **Think & Pray**

With what time remains for you today why not consider your own personal pride? There are so many words today we use

to disguise it. Sometimes it's personal ambition, or self-esteem, or realizing our full potential, or getting ahead. There's much good in these words but also much danger. Consider your pride, the importance you place in the way you present to others. How hard you are working at improving the way your person, your possessions and your lifestyle presents to others? Could these things be blinding you to what is really important in life? Have these things somehow become more important to you than the pursuits of God? Have you somehow begun to value them more than him, to worship them in place of him, to worship yourself and your lifestyle over him? If not intellectually, then how about practically, in terms of how you spend your money and your time? In terms of what your mind turns to in the moments when you dream

dreams? What do you dream about? Pride is a slippery slope that proved the downfall for many of the most holy and devout leaders of the Jewish people in Jesus' day. Pride proves the downfall for many a Christian as well. Pray today that God would keep you from pride. The opposite is humility. Pray for deep humility to overcome your pride. I'd appreciate your prayers in this area as well.