

Matthew 21:42-46

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the LORD's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"
43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.
44 The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."
45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.
46 They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

The Scripture takes place during Passion Week. Jesus had cleansed the temple by driving out commercialism. The people that were taking advantage of others got mad because Jesus hit them where it hurts – in their pocket books. When Jesus healed people in the temple and children praised him, the chief priests and the scribes got angry. The children were praising him for being the Messiah. They understood Jesus when the religious leaders did not. Jesus treated the children like people should be treated instead of as a nuisance. The children were not hindered by pride, greed, or entitlement. The chief priests and scribes consider their praise as blasphemy and think that Jesus should silence the children. The rebuke coming from Jesus is right on target. They have prepared praise for the self. Jesus uses scripture that they know and should be following. The chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees grow increasingly furious. Jesus does not run away from their challenge or their threats. Jesus returns to the temple and the religious leaders continue to challenge him.

There are several lessons from Jesus at this particular moment including three parables about disobedience; the two sons, the wicked tenants, and the wedding banquet. It's like this. I'm going to tell you a story about God's relationship with Israel. There was a landlord that carefully prepared a vineyard. He put up a fence, built a wine press, and a watchtower. All the pieces fell in place for a successful business. The tenants were selected and entrusted by the landlord to care for the vineyard and be responsible for the harvest. However, they did not obey. So, some servants of the landlord were sent with instructions from the landlord. But the wicked tenants rejected them and abused them when they called for faithfulness. So, due to the seriousness of the offense, the owners own son was sent with instructions but he was thrown out and killed.

The story is a response to the religious leaders challenging Jesus about his authority. Jesus points out their rebellion against God and tells the story which is obviously about them and how they treat God, the prophets, and the Son of God. They are to be faithful stewards and produce repentance. However, instead of doing the will of God, they mistreated the prophets of God and they prepared to kill Jesus. They fear the crowds because the crowds see Jesus as a prophet. One thing that Jesus specifically pointed out by using scriptures is that they knew better - they knew the word of God. They reject the very corner stone. The corner stone is the most solid piece of the foundation. It has to be sound in order to support two walls. Rejecting Jesus is the ultimate rebellion against God.

The challenge of status takes place in the wild when a younger lion challenges the older lion in a winner take all challenge for control of the pride. The challenge of status takes place in the working world when two people are up for the same promotion and one sabotages the other. Jesus is a champion of the people against the corrupt high priestly group. The challenge of status

takes place in the public arena between Jesus and the religious leaders. The challenge is a claim of righteousness for the rightful ownership of control over God's religion. In the scriptures we know that the people see Jesus as a prophet. The status of a prophet is much higher than the status of High Priest. The religious leaders do not want to lose their status. Their fear is losing control over people, which would diminish their power and wealth. We also know from scriptures that people also see Jesus as the Messiah. This would be the highest possible status for a human to achieve. The story is a clear rebuke of the disobedience of the religious leaders. This causes them to want to put Jesus under arrest. However, political instinct prevents them from arresting Jesus because he is too popular.

The contemporary lesson for us is to understand how the Scripture applies to us and our degree of faithfulness to God within the framework of contemporary society. The church is responsible to God for the harvest. The church is challenged to be people that produce fruits of the kingdom. To be the church, you have to follow the word of Jesus. Sometimes I will challenge people in public when they are glued to self righteous doctrine that focuses on doctrine that caters to their own ambitions and ignore the lessons on love. Why do you worry about your favorite biblical vice when you are not following the commandments of Jesus: love your enemies, love your neighbor as yourself, and many others that we frequently neglect? Churches split over divisive issues instead staying true to Jesus' command to remain united. I repeat for emphasis, to be the church, you have to follow the word of Jesus. First, get right with Lord. Follow Jesus and everything else will come together.