

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem and is teaching in the temple. After being challenged by the chief priests, scribes and elders to declare His authority for His teaching, Jesus presented a parable that illustrated the rebellious nature of the Jewish leaders and the judgment that God would pour out on them. The only thing that prevented them from arresting Jesus on the spot was their fear of the people.

**Verses 1-8:** As Jesus was teaching in the temple, the chief priests, scribes and elders did not approve of what He was saying and challenged Him to declare where He got the authority for His deeds and teachings. Jesus refused to tell them because they declined to say where John the Baptist's authority came from, a prophet who had testified that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:29-34).

---

9 Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.

**“Then began he to speak to the people this parable”** – Jesus returns to teaching the people and presents a parable. The chief priests, scribes and elders that confronted Him in vs. 1-8 are still standing nearby and are hearing everything that Jesus is saying.

**“A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen”** – Most commentators believe that Jesus was alluding to Isa. 5:2, from a passage where Israel is described as vineyard planted by God. In Jesus' parable, the vineyard represents Israel and the husbandmen represent the Jewish leaders responsible to God for the spiritual welfare of Israel.

**“and went into a far country for a long time”** – This may represent the time between the giving of the law through Moses and their day, during which God had left Israel's leaders as being responsible for the spiritual welfare of the people. The leaders of Jesus' day may have thought that they were obeying the law of Moses but the parable will accuse them of rebellion against God.

---

10 And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent *him* away empty.

**“And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard”** – “The season” is the harvest season. Sharecropping was a common arrangement between a vineyard owner and the husbandmen that had leased the vineyard. Here the owner sent his servant to collect his share of the harvest. As we will see, the servants in this parable represent the prophets sent by God to the Jewish leaders, calling for repentance and obedience, a harvest to which God was entitled.

**“but the husbandmen beat him, and sent *him* away empty”** – The husbandmen show their disdain for the vineyard owner by physically abusing the servant that was sent to represent him and then sending the servant back empty handed.

---

11 And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated *him* shamefully, and sent *him* away empty.

12 And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast *him* out.

**“And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated *him* shamefully [to insult; to dishonor], and sent *him* away empty”** – The owner sends another servant and the husbandmen seem to treat this one worse than the first, humiliating him before sending him away empty handed.

**“And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast *him* out”** – The third servant fares no better and even suffers injuries before he is sent back. These servants represent the OT prophets that God had sent to call the people of Israel to repentance. Most of them also suffered at the hands of Israel's rebellious leaders.

---

13 Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence *him* when they see him.

**“Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do?”** – The vineyard owner is expressing his frustration because no matter how many servants he sends, these husbandmen will not yield to him as the owner. This mirrors God's frustration because of Israel's sin and rebellion.

**“I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence *him* when they see him”** – The husbandmen had not respected the servants that the owner sent. The vineyard owner finally hopes that if they see his son coming to them then they would respect and respect his son and finally submit to the owner. This mirrors God sending His Son Jesus Christ to Israel under the premise that they would honor the Son of God.

---

14 But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.

The husbandmen do not reverence the vineyard owner's son. On the contrary, they believe that killing him would allow them to take ownership of the vineyard since the owner would no longer have an heir. The attitude of the husbandmen mirrors the attitude of the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They did not respect the fact that Jesus was the Son of God and will later have Him killed. Thus they would be disposing of the last challenger to their power over Israel, at least in their minds.

---

15 So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed *him*. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?

**“So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed *him*”** – The husbandmen carry out their plan and kill the owner's son in a final act of rebellion against the vineyard owner. The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees will eventually do the same to Jesus, God's Son.

**“What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?”** – Jesus now asks a rhetorical question about what the next logical step would be for the vineyard's owner. The point of the question is to allow the listeners to think for themselves so that they understand the reason for what Jesus says the vineyard owner will do next.

16 He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard *it*, they said, God forbid.

**“He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others”** – Jesus answers the rhetorical question Himself and says what many in the listening crowd were thinking. The owner will gather enough armed men to go to the vineyard and kill these rebellious husbandmen who have added murder to their list of crimes. Once these husbandmen are gone, the owner will allow others to work the vineyard and produce a harvest for him. This decision on the part of the owner mirrors God’s decision to set Israel aside for a period of time and turn to the Gentiles as the recipients of His blessings. We can see the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as what Jesus meant by “destroy these husbandmen.”

**“And when they heard it, they said, God forbid”** – Jesus’ listeners understood that this parable was more than just a clever story. They recognized that Jesus was talking about the rejection by God of the Jewish nation and its leaders (v. 19), which is why they responded “God forbid.” They could not believe that God would do such a thing to His chosen people and potentially violate (in their eyes) His promises to Abraham. Of course, there was precedent already when God orchestrated the Babylonian captivity in which Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed but a remnant of the people were preserved.

17 And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? 18 Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

**“And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written”** – These listeners do not believe Jesus’ assertion that God would reject them, so Jesus looks them in the eye and quotes a scripture illustrating that God often does the opposite of what men think He should do.

**“The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?”** – The quotation is Psalm 118:22 and states that the very stone that the human builders consider to be unfit for construction, God has chosen to use it as the most important stone of the building. Jesus applies this verse to Himself as the cornerstone on which the Church would be built. He is the stone that was being rejected by the Jewish leaders.

**“Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder”** – Those who actively seek to attack the Stone (Christ) in an attempt to remove it (“falling upon”) and those who passively succumb to the Stone in judgment (“on whomsoever it shall fall”) shall suffer similar fates. Their rejection of the Stone will cause them to be destroyed.

19 And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.

**“And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him”** – The Jewish leaders became angry and were wanting to arrest Jesus at that time.

**“and they feared the people”** – The only thing preventing them from immediately calling their soldiers to arrest Jesus on the spot was the fact that they feared the people. Most of the public believed that Jesus was a prophet sent by God and would have rioted if Jesus were to be arrested.

**“for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them”** – They were angry because they knew that His parable was a statement of condemnation against them. They wanted to arrest Jesus but could not find a way to do so that would be acceptable to the people.

20 And they watched *him*, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor.

**“And they watched him”** – They began monitoring everything that Jesus said and did in public.

**“and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men”** – Believing that Jesus would be careful about what He said when He knew that the chief priests and scribes were listening, they also sent spies to pretend to be sincere followers of God to monitor Jesus when He wasn’t aware (or so they thought) that He was being watched.

**“that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor”** – They hoped that by watching Him and sending spies they could catch Him saying something that they could use against Him. They loved asking Him questions that they believed had no safe answer without offending either the Jewish people or the Roman government. They particularly wanted to catch Him saying something against the Roman authorities so that the Romans would arrest Him. Then the people would blame the Romans for Jesus’ demise instead of the Jewish leaders.