

Matthew 21 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

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MATTHEW 21:1-11 THE KING RIDES TRIUMPHANTLY INTO HIS CAPITAL

Matthew 21:1-3. AND when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

The time was come for our Lord to finish his great work on earth, and his going up to Jerusalem was with this intent. He now determines to enter his capital city openly, and there to reveal himself as King. To this end, when he came near to the city, Jesus sent two disciples to bring him the foal of an ass whereon he should ride. His orders to the two disciples whom he come to Bethphage, are worthy of our serious attention. He directed them to the place where they should find the animal: "Go into the village over against you ." The Lord knows where that which he requires is to be found.

Perhaps it is nearer to us than we dream: "over against out" He told them that they would not have to search: "straightway ye shall find. " When the Lord sends us on an errand, he will speed us on our way. He described the condition of the creatures: "an ass tied, and a colt with her. " Our Lord knows the position of every animal in the world, and he counts no circumstance to be beneath his office.

Nor did he leave the disciples without orders how they were to proceed: "loose them, and bring them. " Demur and debate there would be none; they might act at once. To stand questioning is not for the messengers of our King: it is their duty to obey their Lord's orders, and to fear nothing.

The two animals would be willingly yielded up by their owner when the disciples said, "The Lord hath need of them; " nay, he would not only give them up, but "straightway he will send them. " Either the owner was himself a secret disciple, or some awe of the Lord Jesus was on his mind; but he would right joyfully consent to lend the ass and its foal for the purpose for which they were required.

What a singular conjunction of words is here, "the Lord" and "hath need"!

Jesus, without laying aside his sovereignty, had taken a nature full of needs; yet, being in need, he was still the Lord, and could command his subjects, and requisition their property. Whenever we have anything of which the Lord's cause has need, how cheerfully should we hand it over to him! The owner of the ass and her colt regarded it as an honor to furnish Jesus with a creature to ride upon. How great is the power of Jesus over human minds, so that by a word he quietly moves them to do his bidding!

We have here the record of two disciples being sent to fetch an ass: those who do little things for Jesus are honored thereby. Their errand appeared strange, for what they did might seem like robbery; but he who sent them took care to protect them from the least shade of suspicion. The messengers raised no question, offered no objection, and met with no difficulty. It is ours to do what Jesus bids us, just as he bids us, and because he bids us; for his command is our authority.

Matthew 21:4, 5.. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

Matthew is always reminding us of the Old Testament; as well, indeed, he may, for our Lord is always fulfilling it. Every point of detail is according to prophetic model: All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. The Old and New Testaments dovetail into each other. Men have written "Harmonies of the Gospels"; but God has given us a Harmony of the Old and New Testament. The passage referred to is in Zechariah 9:9. It represents Zion's King as meek and lowly even in the hour of his triumphant entrance into his metropolis, riding, not upon a war-horse, but upon a young ass, whereon no man had sat. He had before said of himself, "I am meek and lowly in heart," and now he gives one more proof of the truth of his own words; and, at the same time, of the fulfillment of prophecy: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass. " He did not, like Solomon, fetch horses out of Egypt to minister to his pride; but he who was greater than Solomon was content with a colt the foal of an ass , and even that humble creature was borrowed, for he had none of his own. The tenderness

of Jesus comes out in the fact of his having the ass brought with her foal that they might not be parted. He was, as a King, all gentleness and mercy: his grandeur involved no pain, even for the meanest living thing.

How blessed is it for us to be ruled by such a King!

Matthew 21:6, 7. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

This should be an accurate description of the conduct of all Christians: The disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them. They did not question or criticize their King's commands; they obeyed them, which was much better. What a church should we see on earth if this were universally true!

They carried out their King's bidding in every detail.

The disciples also brought the ass and the colt; in no way deviating from the orders which they had received. They added actions which naturally grew out of their King's orders. There must be fit caparison for the steeds which are to be employed for such a royal procession, so they put on them their clothes. This was done of their own accord. Many are ready to fetch other men's asses, but slow to lend their own clothes; these disciples were willing and eager to bear their share in the triumphal procession of the Lord Jesus. From first to last there was no forced contribution or mercenary service; all was most voluntary: the ass and foal were cheerfully lent, and the garments were spontaneously placed thereon. All was simple and natural, full of truth and heartiness. How different from the artificial ceremonials of ordinary monarchs! They set him thereon. When men previously had tried to take Jesus by force, to make him a king in earthly fashion, he withdrew himself from them; but the hour for his public entry into Jerusalem had arrived, and he therefore allowed his disciples to set him upon the lowly beast that was to carry him into the city. Gladly they put the Lord in the place of honor, and joyfully they walked at his side.

Matthew 21:8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

The people were so numerous that they are described as a very great multitude. Unusual unanimity prevailed amongst the populace: they all gathered to Jesus. The patriarch Jacob had foretold, concerning the Shiloh, "unto him shall the gathering of the people be." This was fulfilled many times during the Savior's earthly ministry; and it is still continually being fulfilled.

The crowd was in a state of great excitement, and came marching along with Jesus in high enthusiasm. Carpeting the road, they spread, their garments in the way; and as if this were not enough, others cut down branches from the trees, and, strawed them in the way. Our first parents, in their shame, made clothes of the leaves of trees; but now both clothes and leaves are at the feet of man's Redeemer. John says that the people "took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him." The long feathery fronds of the palms would be suitable either for waving in the air, or casting upon the ground before the King. The common people, in the simplest but most effective manner, prepared a royal welcome for the Son of David. What an unusual sight! They were on the tiptoe of expectation, looking for a kingly Deliverer, and they vaguely hoped that "Jesus the prophet of Nazareth" might prove to be the Promised One. He had excited their wonder, raised their hopes, and earned their reverence. For the time they held him in high honor. Do we wonder at it when we think how he had healed their sick, and had fed them by thousands when they fainted?

Matthew 21:9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Numbers still flocked together till there was not only a multitude, but multitudes, some that went before, and others that followed. The crowds preceding and following the Lord were of one mind concerning him, and, indeed, they seemed to have but one voice. Scarcely knowing what they did, probably dreaming of an earthly kingdom, they lifted up one and the same loyal shout of "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." They quoted an ancient Psalm 118, and applied it to Jesus; and in every way expressed their delight and expectation. Alas! how soon this gleam of sunlight gave place to black darkness. The day of palms was closely followed by the day of crucifixion. Thus fickle are the sons of men. "Vox populi" is anything but "Vox Dei."

Matthew 21:10. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

He had been there before, but not on this wise. Never had such enthusiastic multitudes surrounded him with acclamations. Quiet citizens, who had not quitted their homes, wondered at the crowd. Great numbers had been moved by some uncontrollable impulse to go out to meet Jesus, and, when he was come into Jerusalem, still greater crowds were attracted, all the city was moved. There is nothing that can "move" mankind like the coming of Christ. Everyone enquired, "Who is this?" It may have been in some an idle curiosity, and in others a fleeting interest; but it was far better than the dull indifference which cares for none of these things. Where Jesus comes he makes a stir, and raises enquiry. "Who is this?" is a proper, profitable, personal, pressing question. Let our reader make this enquiry concerning Jesus, and never rest till he knows the answer.

11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Everyone who had entered the city in the royal procession was prepared to inform inquiring citizens The multitude said; that is to say, the answer was unanimous: "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." The answer was true, but not all the truth. Seldom is a multitude so well informed as in this instance. Christ's name, his office, his early abode, and his lowly race are all indicated. Those who wished to know more about him had in the answer of the multitude the keys of all that it was needful for them to discover. Oh, that our teeming populations knew as much of Jesus as the multitudes of Jerusalem knew! And yet it may be that, if they did, they might act as basely as did these sinners of Jerusalem, when their Hosannas were so soon changed into cruel cries of "Away with him! Crucify him!"

MATTHEW 21:12-14 THE KING CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

Matthew 21:12, 13. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seat, of them, that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Jesus went into the temple of God again, as he did at the beginning of his ministry. Then the reforming Prophet intimated what was needed, and now the King proceeds to carry it out. A temple dedicated to God must not become a place of merchandise and robbery. Jesus.. cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple. The sellers were the more permanently obstructive, the more constantly offensive, so they were driven out first: but as there would have been no sellers if these had not been buyers, they must be cast out also. Those who kept the tables of the moneychangers might have pleaded that they were there for the public convenience, since they supplied shekels and other moneys of the sanctuary in lieu of Roman coin. The seats of them that sold doves seemed licensed, since they dealt in young pigeons and turtle doves for the sacrifices. But these traders were not in this serving God, but making profit for themselves, and therefore our Lord overthrew all their arrangements, and cleared the holy place.

What an awe must have surrounded this one Man, that the whole tribe of traffickers should flee before him while the, endured the overturning of their tables and their seats! Neither the temple guard, nor the Roman soldiers appear to have interfered in any way. When Jesus takes to himself power, opposition ceases. What a prophecy this incident affords of the sense with which, in his Second Advent, he will purge his floor with the fan in his hand!

Our Lord, while he drives out the profaners of the temple, vindicates his holy violence by saying, "It is written." Whether he was contending with the arch-enemy, or with wicked men, he used but one weapon, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." In this, as in everything else, let us follow his example. Isaiah had penned those words (Isaiah 56:7), "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." This prophecy had a special relation to the Court of the Gentiles, which was being so grossly desecrated by these dealers. Our Savior likened his :Father's house, when occupied by these buyers and sellers, to those caves in the mountains where robbers were wont to lurk in his day: "Ye have made it a den of thieves." The words spoken by the King were strong, but not more so than the case before him required. It is a king's business to break up the hiding-places of bandits, and Jesus did so. He could not bear to see his Father's house of prayer made into a haunt of robbers.

Matthew 21:14. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

The coming into the temple of blind mendicants and limping beggars was no defilement to the holy place. The blind and the lame came to him: to whom else should they come? Was he not the good Physician? They come to him in the temple: where else should they come? Was it not the house of mercy? Jesus, in his Father's name, welcomed the motley band, and healed them. Some people seem to think that, if the very poor come into places of worship, they are out of place; but this is the vain notion of a wicked pride.

The poorest and the most sinful may come to Jesus. We, too, came into the assembly of the saints at one time, spiritually blind and lame; but Jesus opened our eyes, and healed us of our lameness. If he sees anything amiss with us now, we are sure he will not drive us away from his courts, but he will heal us at once. Let all the blind and lame come to him now.

MATTHEW 21:15-16 THE KING ACKNOWLEDGES THE CHILDREN'S ACCLAMATIONS

Matthew 21:15, 16. And when the chief priest, and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

Chief priests and scribes are ever on the watch: nothing that glorifies the Lord Jesus will escape their eyes. Expect no less in these days: if the gospel prevails, formalists will be enraged. Praise rendered to Jesus was gall and wormwood to the ecclesiastics whose abuses he rebuked. His doings in the temple, which were self-evidently right, they dared not attack; but they were none the less full of wrath because of the wonderful things that he did. More and more they nursed their indignation. At last the enthusiastic shouts of the children crying in the temple, and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David," gave them an occasion to vent their contempt. How could a real prophet allow boys and girls to be shouting, at his heels at that rate?

Yet their contempt was only assumed: in truth they feared Jesus, and dreaded the effect of the popular enthusiasm, and so they were sore displeased. As soon as they can find an opportunity, they will spit their venom upon the Lord.

They boldly speak to Jesus about this rabblement of juveniles. They said unto him, "Hearest thou what these say?" They salute thee as if thou wert a king. These silly children cry to thee, 'Hosanna.' Why dost thou allow them to say it? Bid the youngsters cease their boisterous noise. How canst thou as a man bear with such childish cries? "Our Savior's answer was complete. In answer to their question, "Hearest thou what these say?" Jesus saith unto them, "Yea; have ye never read? " Ye chief priests and scribes, have ye not read your own Psalter, of which ye profess to be such diligent students? If ye have read it, remember the words of David in Psalm 8:2, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise. " Our Lord gives the sense of the passage rather than the exact words. God's praise is perfected out of children's mouths. In them his glory is seen, and frequently by them it is declared. When others are silent, these shall speak out, and in their simple truthfulness they shall give forth the praise of the Lord more fully than grown-up men and women will.

MATTHEW 21:17-22 THE KING GIVES A TOKEN OF THE JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM, AND OF THE POWER OF PRAYER

Matthew 21:17. And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

Jesus loved not quibbling priests. He left them. He gave them a Scriptural answer to their enquiry, and then, knowing that further argument with them was useless, he left them. A wise example for us to follow. He desired quiet, and so he went out of the city. He loved the villages, and therefore he turned aside from the busy haunts of men, and entered into Bethany. In that place there lived a well-beloved family, always charmed to entertain him; and he lodged there. There he was at home, for he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. A day of excitement was followed by an evening of retirement in a country home. He spent the night of that most eventful day with his faithful friends. What a contrast between his entry into Jerusalem and his visit to

his friends at Bethany! Lord, lodge with me!

Make my house thine abode!

Matthew 21:18. Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

He hungered. Wonderful words! The Lord of heaven hungered! We cannot imagine that his kind hosts had neglected to provide for him; probably he was so absorbed in thought that he forgot to eat bread. It may be that, according to his wont, in the morning, he had risen while all others in the house were still sleeping, that he might hold communion in private with his Father, and receive from heaven strength for the work that lay before him.

At least, this was no unusual thing with him. He returned into the city; he shirked not the work which he had yet to do; but this time the King came hungering to his capital. He was about to begin a long day's work without breaking his fast; yet his hand had fed thousands at one time. Surely all heaven and earth will be eager to wait upon his need.

Matthew 21:19. And when he saw a fig tree, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

Looking for food, a fig tree in full leaf promised him a little refreshment.

This fig tree was, apparently, no one's property; it stood in the way, it was growing in the public highway, all by itself. Its position was conspicuous, and its appearance striking, so that he saw it at once. It was not the time for figs; but the fig tree has this peculiarity, that the fruit comes before the leaves; if, therefore, we see leaves fully developed, we naturally look for figs fit to be eaten. This tree had put forth leaves out of season, when other fig trees were bare, and had not begun to put forth their early figs. It, so to speak, outran its fellows; but its premature growth was all deception. Our Lord, when he came to it, found nothing thereon, but leaves only. It had overleaped the needful first stage of putting forth green figs, and had rushed into a fruitless verdure. It was great at wood and leaf, but worthless for fruit. In this it sadly resembled Jerusalem, which was verdant with religious pretense, and forward with a vain enthusiasm; but it was destitute of repentance, faith, and holiness, which are far more important than pious formalities. The Lord Jesus used this green, but barren, and disappointing, tree as an object-lesson. He came to it as he came to the Jews; he found nothing but leaves; he condemned it to perpetual fruitlessness: "Let so fruit grow on thee henceforward forever;" and he left it under a sentence which was right speedily executed, even as Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. And presently the fig tree withered away. This has been styled the one miracle of judgment wrought by our Lord; but surely that which is done to a tree cannot be called vindictive. To fell a whole forest has never been considered cruel, and to use a single barren tree as an object-lesson, can only seem unkind to those who are sentimental and idiotic. It was kindness to the ages to use a worthless tree to teach a salutary lesson.

Matthew 21:20. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

The Lord's word was so very quickly fulfilled, that the disciples wondered. We marvel that they marveled. By this time they should have grown accustomed to deeds of power, and to the rapidity with which they were performed. Even to this day some doubt a work if it is speedy, and thus imitate the cry, "How soon is the fig tree withered away!" Whatever the Lord does, he does perfectly, completely. The fig tree was "presently" destroyed.

Matthew 21:21. Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

To the first disciples the power of absolutely working miracles was given by our Lord, and given in connection with a simple, unwavering confidence: "If ye have faith, and doubt not." God may not work miracles for us, but he will do all that we need in accordance with our faith; doing it in a way of providence, according to the spirit of the present dispensation.

But here also the faith that we exercise in him must be free from doubt.

Before a living faith, barren systems of religion will wither away; and by the power of undoubting confidence in God, mountains of difficulty shall be removed, and cast into the sea. Have we ever spoken in Christ's name to barren fig trees and obstructing mountains, bidding them depart out of our way? If not, where is our faith? If we have faith and doubt not, we shall know the truth of this promise: it shall be done. Apart from the actual possession of unwavering faith, the words of our Lord will seem fabulous.

Matthew 21:22. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

This gives us a grand cheque-book on the Bank of Faith, which we may use without stint. How wide are the terms: "all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing"! If we are enabled to pray the prayer of faith, we shall gain the blessing, be it whatever it may. This is not possible concerning things unpromised, or things not according to the divine will.

Believing prayer is the shadow of the coming blessing. It is a gift from God, not a fancy of the human will, nor a freak of idle wishing. "Believing, ye shall receive;" but too often the believing is not there.

MATTHEW 21:23-32 THE KING CONFOUNDS AND WARNS HIS ENEMIES

Matthew 21:23. And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching,, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

Jesus returned to his Father's house, and there he was again met by his old antagonists. When he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him; they had rallied their forces, and taken time to recall their courage. They interfered with him as he was teaching, and demanded his authority for what he said and did. He had taken their breath away by his daring purgation of the temple, unarmed and unaided; and only after a night's interval dared they question his right to act as he had done. Now they put him to the question: "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" That he did marvelous things was admitted; but in what official capacity did he act, and who placed him in that office? This was carrying the war home: they struck out fiercely at their assailant. They hoped to wound him in this point, and to overcome him. Poor fools! They were not worthy of an answer from him.

Matthew 21:24. And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, such if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

Yes, Jesus answered. His answers are always complete, but seldom what his foes expect. The quibblers of our day need not be in too great a hurry to call their statements unanswerable: Jesus will answer for himself in due time. He says to these chief priests and elders, "I also will ask you one thing." Their question was met by another question, even as the rods of the Egyptian magicians, when turned into serpents, were met by Aaron's rod, which, as a serpent, swallowed up their rods. Frequently it will be wisdom not to reply to the quibblings of the enemies of the gospel, but to pose them with some mystery too deep for them.

Our Lord's conditions were fair and reasonable: "If ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things." Apparently, the questioners raised no objection, for Jesus at once stated his question to them. 25-27. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

The question our Lord put to the chief priests and elders was simple enough had they been honest men; but as they had a game to play, they could not reply without great difficulty.

Men-pleasers are obliged to be politicians, and see which way the land lies.

Our Lord put his questioners on the horns of a dilemma. If John the Baptist was sent from heaven, why had they rejected him? That

John was of men, they dared not assert; for their fear of the people silenced them. They were in a corner, and saw no way of escape, and therefore they pleaded ignorance: They answered Jesus, and said, "We cannot tell. " Which answer was no answer from them, but supplied him with a just and crushing reply to them: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. " They could have told Jesus whence John's baptism was, but they would not; and he could have told them all about his divine authority, but he knew that no useful end would be answered, and therefore he declined to stay more. It is a solemn thing when love itself grows weary, and refuses further conversation. Our Lord's tone to these questioners is that of one who is dealing with hopeless creatures, who deserve no quarter, since they would make no use of leniency. They could not be won by gentleness; they must be shaken off exposed, and dethroned from the seat of power, before the eyes of those who had been misled by them.

Matthew 21:28, 29. But what think ye ? A certain man had two sons ; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

By two parables the Lord Jesus deals with the religious leaders who had opposed him.

In the first parable, that of the two sons, he exposes their fair but false dealings with God. "A certain man had two sons. " Both were bound to serve upon the family estate, and ought to have felt it a pleasure to do so.

The first son was willful and wayward, but he was truthful, outspoken, and above-board in all that he did. His father said to him, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard; "a command which contains the father's claim, the son's duty, the immediate character of that duty, and the sphere of it. The command was plain enough, and so was the reply: "He answered and said, I will not. " It was rude, rebellious, ungrateful, unfilial; but it was hasty; and when a little interval had elapsed, quiet reflection brought the wayward boy to a better mind. "Afterward He repented, and went. " This was true repentance, for it led to practical obedience. He did not offer a verbal apology, or make a promise of future good behavior; he did far better, for he went about his father's business without more ado. Oh, that many, who have hitherto refused to obey the gospel, might now be changed in mind, hearken to the voice of God, and enter his service!

Matthew 21:30. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

The second was of milder mood, and blander manner. To him the father spoke as to the elder, and the reply was verbally all that he could desire: "I go, sir." As if it were a matter of course, with exemplary politeness he bade his father consider that he was fully at his disposal. He assented and consented; he was orthodox and precise. He had an easy, natural religiousness, which strongly contrasted with the blunt ungodliness of his brother. But note those words: "and went not. " His fine phrases and fair promises were deceit and falsehood. He never went to the vineyard, much less lifted pruning-knife or spade. His father's vineyard might go to ruin for aught he cared; yet all the while he was bowing and scraping, and promising what he never meant to perform.

Matthew 21:31, 32. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus, saith unto them. Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Jesus made the hypocritical ecclesiastics judges in a case which was indeed their own. He asked them, "Whether of them twain did the will of his father? " Only one reply was possible: They say unto him, "The first ." It was clear that the first son, despite his rough refusal when he first heard his father's command, was after all the doer of the father's will. Then Jesus pointed out that the publicans and the harlots were like the first son; while the chief priests and elders of the people, with all their pretty professions, were deceitful and disobedient like the second son. They had professed great reverence for the divine Word; but when it came by John, they did not repent that they might believe him.. Open sinners, who had seemed to refuse the voice of God, did actually believe him, and so, by heeding John's ministry of righteousness , went into the kingdom of God before the more likely classes. What must these self-satisfied priests and elders have thought when they heard publicans and harlots placed before them?

Gnashing a their teeth, they planned murder in their hearts.

MATTHEW 21:33-44 THE KING MAKES HIS ENEMIES JUDGE THEMSELVES

Matthew 21:33. Hear another parable: there was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.

In this parable a certain householder did all that could be done for his vineyard: it was well planted, and hedged round about, provided with a wine-press digged in the rock, and guarded by a tower built for the purpose. Even so the Jewish Church had been created, trained, guarded, and fully furnished by the Lord; "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant" (Isaiah 5:7). Everything was in good order for the production of fruit, so that the Lord was able to say, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (Isaiah 5:4.) The owner went into a far country and committed the estate to husbandmen who were to take care of it for him and yield to him a certain share of the produce as the rent. Thus the great Lord of Israel left the nation under the care of priests, and kings, and men of learning, who should have cultivated this heritage of Jehovah for him, and yielded up to him the fruit of this choice vineyard. God for a while seemed gone from his chosen people, for miracles had ceased; but this should have made the scribes and priests the more watchful, even as good servants are the more awake to guard the estate of their master when he is away.

Matthew 21:34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

The householder waited till near the full time in which he could expect a return. The time of the fruit drew near; and as the husbandmen sent him none of the produce of the vineyard, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of it, and bring them to him. These servants, as the lord's representatives, ought to have been received with due honor; but they were not. The leaders of the Jewish nation for a long time rendered to the Lord no homage, love, or service. Prophets were sent of God to Israel, but their message was refused by the rulers of the people.

Matthew 21:35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

The husbandman, the persons in charge and authority, kings, priests, and teachers; these united in doing evil to the owner's servants. They were not themselves his "servants"; they deserved not so honorable a title. Beating, killing, and stoning, are put for various forms of maltreatment, which the Lord's prophets received at the hands of Israel's husbandmen, the religious rulers of the nation. Those to whom the vineyard was leased were traitors to the chief landlord, and did violence to his messengers; for in heart they desired to keep the vineyard to themselves.

Matthew 21:36. Again he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

The lord of the vineyard was patient, and gave them further opportunities to mend their ways: Again, he sent other servants. Failure to bring back the fruit was not the fault of the first messengers, for other servants were rejected even as they had been. The householder was very anxious to win the husbandmen to a better state of mind, for he increased the number of his representatives, sending more than the first, trusting that the evil men would yield to repeated calls. No good came of this effort of kindness; for the badly-disposed husbandmen only continued their murderous cruelty: they did unto them likewise. It was evidently a bad case. The Jewish people would not hearken to the voices of the Lord's servants, and their rulers not them the example of persecuting the men whom God had sent to them.

Matthew 21:37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

The sending of his son was the householder's last resort. Luke represents him as saying, "What shall I do?" He might

have resolved at once to punish the evil-doers; but his action proved that mercy had triumphed over wrath:

Last of all he sent unto them his son. The sending of Jesus to Jerusalem was God's ultimatum. If he should be rejected, judgment must fall upon the guilty, city. It seemed impossible that his mission could fail. In sending his beloved Son, the Father seemed to say, "Surely, 'they will reverence my son.' Can they go the length of doing despite to the Heir of all things? Will not his own beauty and majesty overawe them? Heaven adores him; hell trembles at him; surely, they will reverence my Son."

Matthew 21:38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

Things turned not out as a loving heart might have hoped. Evil worked itself to its consummation. When the husbandmen saw the son; that is to say, as soon as the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that the true Messiah was come, they said among themselves what they dared not say openly. The very sight of the heir of all things fired them with malice. In their hearts they hated Jesus, because they knew that he really was the Messiah. They feared that he would dismiss them, and assume possession of his own inheritance, and therefore they would make an end of him: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him ." Once get him out of the way, they hoped to keep the nation in their own hands, and use it for their own purposes: therefore they inwardly said, "Let us seize on his inheritance. " They knew that he was "the heir", and that it was "his inheritance"; but their knowledge did not prevent them from seeking to snatch the vineyard away from its rightful owner. Our Lord pictured to the life what was passing in the minds of the proud ecclesiastics around him, and he did not hesitate to do this to their faces. No names were mentioned, but this was personal preaching of the best kind.

Matthew 21:39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

The Lord Jesus becomes prophetic, as by the parable he foretells the success of their malice. The husbandmen were hasty in carrying out their wicked plot. No sooner said than done. Three acts were in that drama, and they followed quickly upon each other. We will drop the figures, and unveil the facts. They caught him in the garden of Gethsemane; they cast him out in their Council in the hall of Caiaphas, and when he was led without the gate of Jerusalem; they slew him at Calvary; for theirs was the crime, though the Romans did the deed. Thus the Heir was slain, but the murderers did not long retain the vineyard; swift justice overtook them.

Matthew 21:40. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do to those husbandmen?

Jesus puts the matter before them. Out of their own mouths shall the verdict proceed. There is a time when the lord of the vineyard cometh. To those chief priests that hour was drawing very near: the question for them to think of was, "What will he do unto those husbandmen? " As a class, the religious leaders of the Jews were guilty of the blood of a long line of prophets, and they were about to crown their long career of crime by the murder of the Son of God himself: in the destruction of Jerusalem the God of heaven visited them, and dealt out just punishment to them. The siege of the city and the massacre of the inhabitants was a terrible avenging of the innocent blood which the people and their rulers had shed.

Matthew 21:41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

Their reply was probably made complete, and full of details, that they might hide their own shame by a parade of justice in a case which they would have men think was no concern of theirs. In very deed, they pronounced upon themselves the sentence of being wicked men , to be miserably destroyed , and to have their offices given to better men: "he will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen ." They could not or would not give an opinion as to the mission of John the Baptist; but it seems that they could form a judgment as to themselves. The Lord's vineyard passed over to other husbandmen; and the apostles and the first preachers of the gospel were found faithful to their trust.

Just now there are many professed ministers of Christ who are quitting, the truth which he has committed to his stewards, as a sacred trust, and setting up a doctrine of their own. Oh, that the Lord may raise up a race of men "who shall render him the fruits in

their seasons !” The hall-mark of a faithful minister is his giving to God all the glory of any work that he is enabled to do. That which does not magnify the Lord will not bless men.

Matthew 21:42, 43. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and a given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Our Lord reminds them of David’s language in <19B822> Psalm 118:22,23. They were professedly the builders, and they had rejected him who was the chief corner-stone. Yet the Lord God had made the despised one to be the head of the corner. He was the most conspicuous and honored stone in Israel’s building. Against the will of scribe and priest this had been accomplished: for it was the Lord’s doing. They might rage, but holy minds adored, and said, “It is marvelous in our eyes. ” The sufferings and glory of Christ are the wonder of the universe:” which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). All that relates to him is marvelous in the eyes of his people.

The doom of the unfaithful religious builders was the result of their sin: “Therefore say I unto you. ” They were to love the blessings of the gospel: “The kingdom of God shall be arisen from you.” All share in the honors and offices of that kingdom would be refused them. That loss would be aggravated by their seeing it “given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. ” What a warning is this to our own country! We, too, are seeing the sacrifice and deity of our Lord questioned, and his sacred Word assailed by those who should have been its advocates. Unless there is a speedy amendment, the Lord may take away the candlestick out of its place, and find another race which will prove more faithful to him and to his gospel than our own has been.

Matthew 21:44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Those who stumble over Christ, the chief corner-stone of the Church, are injured: they suffer grievous bruising and breathing, but he remains unhurt.

Opposition to Jesus is injury to ourselves. Those upon whom he falls in wrath are ground to powder; for the results of his anger are overwhelming, fatal, irretrievable. Oppose him, and you suffer but when he arises in his might, and opposes you, destruction has already come to you.

MATTHEW 21:45-46 THE KING’S ENEMIES PLOT AGAINST HIM

Matthew 21:45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

They had tried to turn aside the point of his parables; but they had tried in vain: the likenesses were striking, the parallels were perfect, they could not help knowing that he spake of them. Such parables; so true, so cutting, so pertinent, how could they escape them, or endure them?

Matthew 21:46. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for prophet.

Since they could not answer him, they would apprehend him. Happily, the multitude thought too well of Jesus to allow of their laying hands on him, though they sought to do so. These great religionists were as cowardly as they were cruel: they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

They dared not tell the truth concerning John because they feared the people, and that feat restrained their anger against John’s Lord. It was arranged, in the order of providence, that ecclesiastical malice should be held in check by popular feeling. This was an instance of the way in which full often the earth has helped the woman (Revelation 12:16), and the will of the masses has screened the servants of God from priestly cruelty.

He who rules all things sets in motion a high order of politics in the affairs of men in reference to his church. At times, princes have saved men of God from priestly rancor, and anon the multitude has preserved them from aristocratic hate. One way or another, Jehovah knows how to preserve his son, and all those who are with him, until the hour comes when by their deaths they can glorify his name, and enter into glory themselves.