



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 21:23-46

Topic

Jesus tells two parables that remind the Jews
God provided all they needed to be His fruitful vineyard

Title

"Because You're Mine, I Tend the Vine"

Introduction

It's the question every parent dreads. Sooner or later, you're going to have to deal with it.

"Are we there yet?"

I remember a promo for the *Simpsons* in which Bart and Maggie keep asking, over-and-over, all across the country, "Are we there yet?", "Are we there yet?", "Are we there yet?"

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Matthew 21:23-46

"Because You're Mine, I Tend the Vine"

Just as Homer can't take it anymore, and he jumps into the back seat to throttle them, Marge grabs the wheel and says, "I think we're there!"

Hard to believe it is only the second most annoying question children repeatedly ask; the first one being, "Why?"

I was thinking about questions because, in our text, Jesus answered a question He was asked by asking a question of His own.

Jesus loved to ask questions. It's been calculated that He asked between two and three hundred questions in the Gospels. Some of those are the same questions being reported by four different writers, but even allowing for that repetition, the sheer number of questions Jesus asked was impressive.

He did not answer questions by asking questions in order to be evasive. Quite the opposite is true, in that the answer to His question would also answer the one He had been asked.

With respect to the ask-a-question format of Jesus, I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 What Has Jesus Told You To Do?, and #2 Are You Going To Do What Jesus Told You To Do?

#1 What Has Jesus Told You To Do?

(v23-27)

It was the last few days for Jesus before His crucifixion. It had been a busy week of ministry thus far.

- He'd made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey, to the shouts of "Hosanna!"
- He had overturned the tables of the money changers, stringing together a couple of prophecies from the Old Testament, saying, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a 'DEN OF THIEVES.'"
- He had spent time healing in the Temple, and now He was back there, teaching.

Apparently, Jesus was doing all that without a permit.

Mat 21:23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"

Do you need a permit if you're the Messiah? Or permission?

Jesus had not gone through the proper channels - or so the religious leaders thought - and so they felt they were on good ground challenging His authority to do the things He was doing.

There *is* such a thing as spiritual authority. Jesus will tell His disciples, after His resurrection, that "all authority has been given to" Him (Matthew 28:18). In Hebrews we are told, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you" (13:17).

God has likewise established authority in the home and family, and in the governments He allows to exist on the earth.

We are not able, spiritually speaking, to ignore authority. We are to submit to it as God has determined it, with the Word as our guide.

The question the religious leaders asked wasn't a bad one, in general, but it was insincere, since they could see that Jesus' authority came from God.

G. Campbell Morgan is a really good Bible expositor. Remember his name, and grab his books at thrift stores. He pointed out that these religious leaders said Jesus was "doing these things."

It was an admission on their part. Jesus was doing things - good things, great things, things that only the Messiah could do. He'd been doing them for the past three and one-half years. Healing all manner of illness and affliction... giving sight to the blind... causing the deaf to hear and the lame to walk... casting out all manner of demons... raising the dead.

Simultaneously He had been teaching in a way no one had ever heard before - with a divine authority, with Heaven's anointing upon each word.

Many lives had been changed, for the better, by this itinerant rabbi.

All of that is admitted, really, when they say, "doing these things."

Jesus has been "doing... things," good things, great things, from that time right up to the present. Changed lives are a powerful testimony of His authority, of the heavenly anointing upon Him.

Jesus wants to "do things" in your life; and through your life. You are both His great work, and one of His workers. You are to be being changed more into the image of Jesus while you simultaneously discover the good works The Lord has for you to accomplish in the power of His Holy Spirit.

Mat 21:24 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

It was not unusual, in Jewish culture, to answer a question with a question. It was, in fact, a preferred method that rabbi's used with their students.

Far from being evasive, or even disrespectful, The Lord was being gracious to these guys - even though they had rudely interrupted Him in the middle of a teaching.

He was treating them as if this was a genuine dialog, even though their hearts were wicked and accusatory.

Mat 21:25 The baptism of John - where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

Mat 21:26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."

This was a lose-lose for them. What is sad is that, here they were - the religious and (supposedly) spiritual leaders - but they were in a place where they could not honestly answer a simple question.

If in your ministry you find you cannot give a straightforward, honest answer, something has gone very wrong. If you are taking evasive action, it's a problem.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't be tactful, or thoughtful. It doesn't mean we should blurt out things people have no business hearing. It doesn't mean we should lack sensitivity.

It just means we shouldn't have a hidden agenda that requires stealth and deception.

Mat 21:27 So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Their answer was a lie told to protect themselves.

It's like the guy who said, "I always lie." Was he telling the truth? How can he be telling the truth about lying if he always lies?

Jesus' question was not just to avoid giving them an answer. If they would have answered Jesus' question, **they would have answered their own question.**

If they admitted that John the Baptist was sent with the authority of Heaven, then they would have admitted Jesus also had heavenly authority. John had introduced Jesus as the one who was "mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry."

He had initially refused to baptize Jesus, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

John made it clear that Jesus would increase, and that he - John - must decrease.

He had declared, plainly and boldly, that Jesus was God's Lamb Who would take away the sins of the world.

Receive John's ministry and you must receive Jesus, since John was the herald, and Jesus was the King he heralded.

Say "No, John the Baptist was not Heaven-sent," and you reject Jesus. But then you are in denial - because it was evident to everyone that John was indeed a prophet sent by God.

People seem to have a lot of questions for God. Some of them are accusatory - like, "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

In most cases, He answers them with a question of His own, like this one: "Who do you say that I am?"

Answer that, and you'll discover answers to everything else.

Jesus is the sinless Son of God, the unique God-man Who died on the cross as your Substitute to take upon Himself your sins and provide for you His righteousness.

There is an important application for us in Jesus' question and question session with the religious leaders. **God wants you to act upon what you already know, and what He has already asked of you, before He gives you further direction.**

Take these religious leaders as an example for us. If they had received the ministry of John the Baptist, they would not be asking Jesus ridiculous questions. Instead, they'd have had their lives changed, and they'd be in the crowd, soaking up the greatest teaching ever heard by men - from the lips of the God-man.

It was useless to answer their questions, since they had refused the revelation God had already given.

Sometimes - not always, but occasionally - when you feel like you're spinning your spiritual wheels, it is because God has already asked you to do something, told you what He wants, but you aren't doing it.

Maybe you disagree with what He's asking... Or, more positively but just as disobediently, you don't feel adequate to accomplish it.

On the adequacy issue, I encountered a quote from J. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary, who said, "All of God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them."

If you think you are adequate for a spiritual task, because of your spiritual discipline or effort, think again. God is in the business of doing what is beyond your abilities.

You might be spinning your wheels because you disagree with God - at least with regard to the approach He wants you to take. He wants us, by His Spirit, to humble ourselves, put ourselves last and others first, return blessing for cursing; things like that.

I don't know what it is, for you, that might have you stuck in a rut. God does, and He wants to show you, and then yoke-up with you to pull you out of the rut and get you to your next spiritual destination.

Jot this down: "God, what do you want me to do for You?" In a little while we will give you time to reflect on today's worship service and, if you need something to think about, that's as good a question as any.

In case the religious leaders didn't fully grasp what Jesus was telling them, He told two parables to illustrate it.

#2 Are You Going To Do What Jesus Told You To Do?

(v28-46)

Facebook seems overrun with questionnaires. The ones I'm thinking of ask you a series of questions to see what state in the United States most suits you. Or what Disney prince or princess you are. Or which character you are most like in *Star Wars*.

Yesterday there was this one: Which classic novel are you?

In the Parable of the Two Sons, you need to figure out which son you are.

Let me give you a hint: You **don't** want to be the second son.

Mat 21:28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.'

Mat 21:29 He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went.

Mat 21:30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go.

This parable, and the next, are set in the vineyard. Every Jew listening to it would recognize Israel as God's vineyard from the famous Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah chapter five.

It's a remarkable passage. In it, The Lord illustrates His love for His people as if He were the owner of a vineyard, and they were His vineyard. One commentator summarized it:

Nothing was left undone to guarantee a bountiful crop. The LORD had great expectations of His vineyard. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower, not a temporary hut, in it and cut out a wine vat as well.

Nevertheless the vineyard did not produce, leading the Owner to exclaim, "What more could have been done for My vineyard than what I have done for it" (v4).

The Song of the Vineyard ends on this ominous note:

Isa 5:6 I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it."

The time of this judgment upon Israel was at hand, and these two parables fill-in some additional details as to why that was so.

Mat 21:31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.

Mat 21:32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

Ouch! That had to sting - especially in front of the crowd that included former tax collectors and harlots.

"Tax collectors and harlots" were the most despised, on the one end, and the most degenerate, on the other end, of sinners; but, really, they represent all those who were not part of the spiritual elite - the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees.

If the first son in the parable represents tax collectors and harlots, in what sense did they initially refuse to enter the kingdom?

Probably in the sense that they continued in their sin, despite knowing the Law of Moses.

We shouldn't give them a pass, but we can lay some blame at the feet of the religious elite. The Pharisees, especially, made it so hard to 'keep' God's Law that the average sinner was overwhelmed. Jesus once described them as heaping huge burdens on people, then refusing to lift a finger to help them carry the load.

He was referring to all the crazy external rules they added to God's Word that a person was expecting to 'keep' in order to be righteous.

Like tithing from your herb garden by, literally, counting out one leaf of oregano for God for every nine you kept for yourself.

When John the Baptist came, the sinners "regretted" their sin, and the word is *repented*. They believed John, were baptized, and were awaiting entrance into the kingdom.

Had the nation received Jesus Christ as their King, these repentant tax collectors and harlots would have been its chief citizens.

The religious elite only acted as though they were obedient to the Law of Moses. They were all about externals, ignoring any internal transformation.

They went out to see John baptizing, but they refused to repent at his preaching, and were rejecting the One John pointed to as their Savior and Lord.

While they were still reeling, Jesus told another parable.

Mat 21:33 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

Mat 21:34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.

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

Mat 21:36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them.

Mat 21:37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Mat 21:38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.'

Mat 21:39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The leaders of Israel are represented by the vinedressers, who were responsible for cultivating, pruning, and tending God's vineyard to produce a bountiful harvest.

The servants who were sent represent the prophets whom God sent over-and-over again throughout Israel's history to call them to repentance and obedience in order to produce fruit.

The leaders of the nation routinely killed God's prophets.

In an amazing display of patience, God continued to send prophets to try to woo His wayward people. It was to no avail.

Graciously, God provided one final opportunity by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to Israel. He, too, would be rejected and killed by Israel's leaders.

Mat 21:40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

Mat 21:41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

They must not have realized that they were passing judgment upon themselves.

People do this, in a different way today. I've had a lot of people tell me, somewhat jokingly but sometimes seriously, that they know they are going to Hell when they die; or, at the very least, they are not going to Heaven.

If you believe that - *you'd better do something about it while there is still time*. Because you are passing judgment on yourself - even though you may not realize it.

Mat 21:42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES' ?

Mat 21:43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

Mat 21:44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

Jesus changed illustrations and began talking about a building. The figure of a stone is found often in Scripture, Jesus being referred to both as the foundation stone and the head of the corner. Jesus is God's "chief cornerstone," upon Whom the Kingdom of God would, and yet will, be built.

The "builders" were the religious leaders, rejecting Him. That they would be "[ground] into powder" anticipates the very real destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by Titus and the Roman legions he commanded.

"Whoever falls on this stone" was Jesus' way of describing a person who would receive Him and be saved by humbling himself or herself.

God is not willing that any should perish. The Lord wept over Jerusalem, knowing they would reject Him and bring destruction and dispersion upon themselves.

Who, or what, is the "nation" that the kingdom will be given to? John Walvoord says, "The word *nation* is without the article in the Greek and probably does not refer to the Gentiles specifically."

In other words it may not refer to a specific "nation" as we know it, but perhaps to a people group.

It might mean anyone, Jew or Gentile from any nation, who brings forth fruit during Jesus' absence, in-between His first and Second Coming. In that sense, we would say the church, throughout the age in which we live, is that nation.

It undoubtedly refers, in the future, to the "nation" of Jews who will survive the Great Tribulation. The kingdom will be offered again, and at the end of the seven years, The Lord will return, and the remnant of Israel will be saved. Then Jesus will establish the Kingdom of God on earth for a thousand years.

Mat 21:45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

Mat 21:46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

Have you ever had someone realize that you are calling them, personally, a sinner? It can be kinda scary, but at least you know that the Word of God is convicting them, and for that you ought to be glad.

It's a little harder to put yourself in this parable, because it's so specific to Israel's leaders at the time Jesus was on the earth. It's clearly and unmistakably a parable of the vineyard - which is Israel.

There are some principles we can glean.

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ; if you're not saved; in a very real sense, you are rejecting God's prophets and, ultimately, you are rejecting His Son.

He is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe. If you do not believe, His death was sufficient for you, but you are left dead in your trespasses and sins.

The good news: You can "Repent!"

In a moment, you'll have the opportunity to do just that, and I'd encourage you to confess your sin and call upon your Savior.

It's harder to put believers into this parable. Here is what we can say. Jesus' initial effort, in the opening fray, was to show these guys they had not done what God had told them to do. They had not repented at the preaching of John the Baptist and, so, they were stuck in a particularly deep spiritual rut.

If **you** have not done something Jesus has told **you** to do, what are you going to do about it?