

LIFEPOINT CHURCH // WORD TO LIFE

THE WAY



MATTHEW 21:12 - 46

WEEKS 13-16



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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WORD TO LIFE

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Week 13: Matthew 21:12-22

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 21:12-22

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 21:12-22 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: What do you believe is the root cause of Jesus' reaction upon entering the Temple?

Question: Do you think there is any significance in Jesus driving out the seats of those who sold pigeons specifically?

Activity: Write down all the places where Jesus healed the blind and the lame and where it was prophesied for Him to do so.

Question: Why do you think Jesus responded to their question in verse 16 in the way that He did?

Question: Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

Question: What do you think the significance of fruit is in this passage and in the broader scope of Scripture generally?

Question: Why don't we receive everything we ask for whenever we pray for it?

Activity: Write down what you believe you need from God in this moment.

Week 13: Matthew 21:12-22

Day 2: Righteous Anger

READ: Matthew 21:12-22

EXPLORE:

A quick show of hands or maybe just “like” this page if you get a little fired up when you hear about people charging exorbitant prices for gas or ice after a hurricane. Is anger over this type of injustice a sin, or are only certain types of anger a sin?

As we read our passage today, we first have to ask ourselves, “Was Jesus angry, or are we just projecting that on Him?” Matthew does not specifically say that Jesus was angry nor does he report that Jesus even raised His voice. I know our cultures are different, but I don’t think Jesus’ message would have landed the same if He had just been sneaking around or calmly knocking over chairs and tables. Also, in the passage that Jesus quotes from Jeremiah 7:11, God’s anger toward the Israelites is referenced several times. Therefore, I believe we are safe to assume if Jesus was quoting a text where God was angry, then He was probably doing so with a pretty angry tone Himself.

Secondly, who was Jesus angry with? Many of us will project our sense of justice into the situation and assume Jesus was only angry with those profiting off of this practical need for purchasing animals for sacrifice, but Jesus drove out and chastised both those “who sold and **bought.**”

Lastly, for us, what sort of anger is appropriate and when does it become a sin? God’s anger is recorded numerous times throughout the Bible, so obviously not all expressions of anger are a sin. If God can be angry, then some expressions of anger must be justified and appropriate. So, how do we determine when our expression of anger is righteous like God or sin?

There are a lot of troubling tragedies portrayed in the Bible, but the one I (Michael) was processing through recently was the story in Numbers 20 that caused God to ban Moses from entering the promised land with the Israelites. Moses, while not sinless by any means, faithfully led a faithless, quarrelsome people out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years. Then in one moment of frustration and anger at yet another instance of faithless complaining of the people, he disobeyed God and struck the rock out of anger when God had commanded him to ask the rock for water. That one act of anger-fueled disobedience sealed Moses' fate and prevented him from leading his people into the promised land despite how faithfully he served all of those years.

Ask yourself, is the source of my anger because someone is not loving God or loving their neighbor, for those are the two most important commandments in Jesus' kingdom according to Matthew 22:37-40? If yes, this is more likely to be righteous anger. If no, then it's likely sinful anger. Jesus was angry at both the buyers and sellers because they all had turned the Lord's Temple into a marketplace for animal sacrifice instead of a place that honored and worshiped God. When you hear about business owners taking advantage of people in a time of crisis, then you should be upset because if you truly love your neighbor you care about them being abused. If you are angry and lash out merely because you have to pay too much for gas or pigeons, then that's sin.

BIG IDEA: The source of your anger determines whether it is righteous or sin.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Recall the last time you were sinfully angry. Repent.

Week 13: Matthew 21:12-22

Day 3: The Depth of Jesus' Words

READ: Matt 21:12-22; Isaiah 56:7-8; Jeremiah 7:3-11; Psalm 8:2-4

EXPLORE:

The depth and unity of the Bible is truly incredible. It is a book you could read every day of your life and still have more to learn from! In this week's passage, Jesus quotes passages from the Old Testament that tell us more about His heart and who God is. Something to keep in mind while reading these is that the all-knowing Jesus referenced these snippets of Scripture, knowing the full context of the Scripture surrounding the text!

When Jesus quotes, "my house will be called a house of prayer," He is quoting from Isaiah 56. This chapter talks about God bringing people who have joined themselves to the LORD together to His "house of prayer for all nations." God used the people of Israel to help bring other nations to Himself. I love how this highlights God's ultimate plan to bring people of every nation, tribe, and tongue to Himself—through the sacrifice of Jesus. He ultimately desires for His people to spend time in His presence.

Jesus also quotes Jeremiah 7 when He says, "but you are making it a den of thieves!" This chapter of Jeremiah references people who say they are rescued by God, but have not actually surrendered their lives to Him. They may chant about the Temple of the LORD, but their hearts are far from God. Remembering this context adds a layer of depth when we consider why Jesus overturned the tables in the Temple—the moneychangers and sellers were physically in the Temple, but their hearts were not towards following God. They were actively preventing people from meeting with God in prayer in the Temple by making a ruckus buying and selling for a profit!

When Jesus references, “You have prepared praise from the mouths of infants and nursing babies,” He is referring to Psalm 8. This Psalm talks about how these babies’ praise can silence God’s enemies—the weakest of us are strong in Christ. This Psalm also reminds us of the ways God displays His glory and beauty in the earth, whether through His awesome creation or through the preciousness of sweet babies. In our Matthew passage, the children in the Temple were shouting praise to Jesus, proclaiming who He is, much to the anger of the mighty chief priests and scribes. But Jesus reminds them of this Scripture, displaying His love for children and the ways God uses children of all ages to display who He is and to teach others about Him! He desires for us all to come to Him with childlike faith.

Jesus brought a LOT of depth to His statements with these three references to the Old Testament. Diving into His references to the Old Testament can be so fruitful in deepening our understanding of God’s Word. God is the same God from Genesis to Revelation, and throughout history He has weaved His plan of redemption and desires to reconcile us to Himself.

BIG IDEA: Studying the Scriptures that Jesus references can deepen our understanding of God’s Word in AWESOME ways!

APPLY:

- **Question:** Which of Jesus’ Old Testament references make you feel most in awe of God and how He moves? Why?
- **Challenge:** This week, read the whole chapters of the Old Testament that Jesus references.

Week 13: Matthew 21:12-22

Day 4: The Fig Tree

READ: Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-24

EXPLORE:

By any standards, this passage stands out as one of the strangest episodes in the life of Jesus. Many may think: what did that poor fig tree do to Jesus to warrant such a harsh reaction? Was Jesus just 'hangry' and taking it out on the poor fig tree?

Mark, in his account, gives us a bit more detail. In fact, Mark 'sandwiches' this account with Jesus' cursing of the Temple when He sees the commerce taking place in the Temple courts. What is going on here is that Jesus is using the fig tree as a lived-out parable. The Old Testament prophets frequently were called to act out what God was trying to communicate – think Hosea and Gomer. Here too, Jesus, as the ultimate Prophet, was illustrating in 'real life' what was happening and going to happen in the spiritual plane and would soon happen in the physical realm when the entire nation (and the religious system) would be destroyed.

Fig trees were common in first-century Israel. In fact, in the Old Testament, fig trees (and their fruit) were symbols of joy and peace and thus the gracious provision of God. The fig tree, in this context, represents the nation of Israel, that has the appearance of life and fruitfulness. At that time of the year, during the Passover, the appearance of lush foliage on fig trees indicated that there would be early signs of figs. These 'early figs' indicated that there would be an abundance of figs in due course. However, when Jesus went to the tree to assuage His hunger there were no figs to be found. Mark tells us that Jesus then goes to the Temple to inspect it and finds nothing but empty religion masquerading as pious worship. There is no fruit that issues from true faith in God.

On their way out, the disciples remark that the fig tree had withered, an indication that the Temple and the entire religious establishment would soon be destroyed, never to be brought back to life. This is not the only time Jesus will be calling down 'curses' on the religious system. In the next few days, He will be doing that with increased frequency.

The point ought to be clear to them (and to us). Going through the motions of religion, though it looks good, can never substitute for genuine, authentic, Spirit-filled, cross-centered faith in the Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures. We might be fooled but God cannot and will not be fooled. He and He alone can judge the heart.

So, what is the mark of true faith? It is bearing fruit, the fruit of the gospel that results in true repentance over our sin, a desire for genuine obedience, a love for His Word, and a love for our brothers and sisters. All of this is to be clothed with humility and gratefulness for His goodness and for His provision of a wonderful Savior who was sent by the Father to do what we couldn't do: pay for our sins.

The Apostle John, who was there during this episode, eventually (in 1 John) lays out three tests for genuine faith: the doctrine test (is our faith in the Jesus of the Bible?), the obedience test (are we growing in obedience?), and the love test (are we growing in love for our brothers and sisters?).

BIG IDEA: Genuine faith always results in changed lives and a passion for growing in Christlikeness.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How are we doing in becoming more Christ-like? How are we doing in our obedience to Christ and His Word?

Week 13: Matthew 21:12-22

Day 5: The Most Impossible Prayer

READ: Matthew 21:20-22; Jude 1:20-23; James 1:5-8

EXPLORE:

What's the most impossible prayer that you have ever prayed? Impossible from a human standpoint, that is. Something that could not be explained from an atheistic worldview. Now, did it come true? Did you lose a little faith in the power of prayer if it did not? Jesus says in Matthew 21:22, "whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." Can a strong enough faith really destroy mountains?

The power of faith really is amazing. Faith provides hope in the worst of circumstances. It gives courage in the most terrifying circumstances. And yet, it is meaningless if it is placed in the wrong object. Biggest question: What is the greatest prayer anyone can bring to God? Wait until the end to see the answer.

Jesus gives a caveat in verse 21 about the answer to great prayers. He says, "if you have faith and do not doubt." What does that mean, "do not doubt?" All doubt in prayer relates back to God in some way. It could be doubting God's willingness to grant a request. It could be doubting God's power to fulfill a request. It could be doubting God's goodness to not grant a request that deserves to be granted. It could also be doubting God's presence at all. The most difficult doubt for Christians to cope with is generally God's willingness to grant a request. This is partially because of difficult passages such as this one. Truths in Scripture that are written as broadly as verse 21 are often the hardest for us to understand. A similar problem comes up in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." This statement is not a guarantee but one that is generally true barring mitigating circumstances. But there is a notable difference

between a Proverb and a teaching about God from Christ Himself. However, the similarity is that both are broad, general statements that are not meant to speak to every individual situation. Here's an example that shows what Jesus is saying here can't apply to every universal situation: What happens when two Christians pray who have opposite requests? One Christian prays for rain for their farm, while another prays for sunshine so they can preach to a big audience on the street. Both cannot have their requests met. So, ultimately the Christians' job is to trust that God's will is better than their own. But, while that statement is true and should be affirmed by all Christians, it seems to take the force out of Jesus' statement. Should we not be able to move mountains?

Back to the question about the greatest prayer. The greatest prayer anyone has ever given or could give was told by the tax collector in Luke 18:13, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" It's the prayer we all desperately need answered. The biggest mountain that needs to be moved for each of us is that mountain of sin that can now be moved because of the blood of Christ. When we pray the big, "impossible" prayers, we do so knowing as believers in Christ that the most impossible prayer has been answered by Jesus on the cross: "It is finished."

BIG IDEA: God answers prayer in His wisdom, but He always answers the greatest prayer asked by true believers.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Speak to God about the difficulties you have in prayer. Ask Him why some of your prayers have not been answered and think about why God in His wisdom may have a greater plan than what you can see.

Week 14: Matthew 21:23-27

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 21:23-27

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 21:23-27 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: Why do you think Jesus did not directly answer the chief priests and elders' question?

Question: What did the Pharisees' deliberation tell you about them?

Question: What does this interaction tell us about John the Baptist's legacy in Israel even after he was killed?

Question: What gave the chief priests and elders confidence to approach Jesus the way that they did?

Activity: Write down all of the different kinds of people who have approached Jesus thus far in the Gospel of Matthew. Then write down why they approached Jesus and the differences. Finally, write down what you can learn from those people.

Question: What was the baptism of John and why might Jesus have brought that up at this moment?

Question: What can you learn by the way in which Jesus finally answers their question?

Week 14: Matthew 21:23-27

Day 2: Who is in Charge?

READ: Matthew 21:23-27

EXPLORE:

By whose authority? The first question for all who attempt to do what is restricted. The question a kid gets asked if he tries to leave in the middle of class. The question a man gets asked if he tries to bypass TSA at the airport. The question anyone gets asked if they walk up to the White House. The same question Jesus is asked in the passage this week. An aggressive one raised by the chief priests and elders. Why would they ask such a question and where does their authority come from?

The first authority was God who created everything and then ordered Adam to work the garden and keep it. After the fall you see God create unique relationships with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Joseph, and then Moses. The Lord saves the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt not for pure liberty but for their service to Him. A theocracy is created and Moses speaks for God. Moses then delegates other elders to help lead the people. Then Aaron and a few others were made priests who had sole authority to go into the Tabernacle. You then have a distinction between the one who speaks for God and the one who is allowed to offer sacrifices in the Tabernacle. When Moses dies much of his authority (designated as prophetic) dies with him, but Joshua is given the spirit of wisdom and ordered to lead the people to the promised land. Joshua leads the people to the promised land, but they fail to drive out many of the inhabitants and start following other gods. God then uses a series of Judges to lead the people once they fall under the oppression. These Judges are not laid hands on in terms of succession like Moses to Joshua but are raised up intentionally by God at specific times. Israel then wants a king to replace God as king and Samuel, the only obedient priest who hears from God, anoints Saul. God-given authority then becomes

sparse. The king's role is not absolute because God can use a prophet to denounce a king and the High Priest still is the only one allowed in the Temple. But then Israel splits and eventually is completely destroyed and has no legitimate authority while under judgment. No king, no high priest, no prophet in Israel until the days of Ezra and Nehemiah where Jerusalem is rebuilt. Then a new high priest is called and prophets prophecy what will come next. But after Malachi no prophet arises, and no king can claim the throne while under Roman authority. The only office that remains is the high priest and priestly line that becomes extremely corrupt during Jesus' time. Remember that as far back as the days of the Judges the priests were corrupt and idolatrous. They were a normative authority that almost never actually heard from God. Hanging their hat on this authority they challenge Jesus. Were they right to?

Jerusalem at this point had not heard from God in 400 years through a prophet, priest, or king. This fact alone proves God's judgment towards them as a people still under the oppression of a foreign power. Jesus came to the Temple hearing from and speaking for God as a Prophet. He came to the Temple as the long awaited King on a donkey. He came to the Temple holy in essence as the High Priest who normally only became holy through ritual and sacrifice. And He also came to the Temple as the Son of God Himself who owns the Temple. His authority far outweighed theirs, but He chose to not tell them yet because He knew they would kill him for it and it was not the appointed time.

BIG IDEA: Jesus as a Prophet, Priest, King, and the Son of God is The Authority.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Jesus also has authority over those who house the Holy Spirit. In what way today can you better submit to His authority?

Week 14: Matthew 21:23-27

Day 3: The Pleasing Aroma of Sincerity

READ: Matthew 21:23-27; John 16:7-11

EXPLORE:

There is nothing in this world that can reach into an unbeliever's heart like the Holy Spirit and the means He uses. One crucial means that He uses is the sincerity and boldness of a believer. Evangelizing the world can seem pointless when they do not listen, but it is not. The effects of being a sincere and bold follower of Christ will bear fruit in ways you cannot possibly know. The ministry of John the Baptist is a powerful example of this.

John the Baptist's role in salvation history was to prepare the way of Jesus. He spoke with boldness and called for repentance among the people of Israel. Did they listen? Some of them did, but the leaders in large part rejected John. They did not want his baptism, and they did not like his affirmation of Jesus. And yet, John convicted the people. People got baptized because they were convicted of their sin. They still needed Jesus to be forgiven, but John began the heart change among them. A genuine prophet of God who talked the talk and most certainly walked the walk. John didn't just say the right things, but he lived a hard life. He couldn't have known the impact he would have long term.

Toward the end of his life, John doubted his purpose. He doubted if even Jesus was the Christ. He was faithful to prepare the way, he was faithful to live a sincere life, and he was faithful to be bold, but he was discouraged in the end. He couldn't see people accept Christ later that he had prepared. He couldn't see that Jesus would use his ministry to silence the chief priests and elders from their accusations. He didn't realize the impact of a sincere and bold follower.

There's just something so different about sincerity to the world. As Christians, our conduct and life should look different from the world. It should be marked by love that goes above and beyond. It should be marked by righteousness in an unrighteous world. It should be marked by a boldness defined as speaking the truth in love. Jesus used the baptism of John because the people believed John the Baptist was a true prophet of God. They didn't need God speaking from heaven to confirm John. They didn't need John to perform miracles and wonders that no one else could. They didn't even need their own religious authorities to give John a stamp of approval. His sincere and bold life was evidence enough to confirm he was from the Lord. Jesus used John's ministry because the people knew he was from God and Jesus also knew those accusing Him could not tie John's sandals in the people's eyes. Even though they wore the robes, they had the money, they knew the law, they had no sincerity. Jesus embarrassed them constantly because they were frauds. Even the world can spot fraudulence eventually which is why sincerity is so attractive. Sincerity is a pleasing aroma to the Lord and the world and fraudulence stinks. Fraudulence sends the world running.

Like John, we are called to be bold and sincere. We won't know what fruits will come from it and we might even end up with our head on the chopping block, but a difference will be made. The Holy Spirit will change hearts and minds and bring those who are dead to life.

BIG IDEA: Be bold and sincere like John the Baptist so the Holy Spirit can use you.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what way today can you choose to be bold and sincere?

Week 14: Matthew 21:23-27

Day 4: Uno Reverse Card

READ: Matthew 21:23-27

EXPLORE:

Jesus' question was not a dodge from the question posed to Him. Jesus' question gave an opportunity for the chief priests and elders to both answer their own question and be confronted with their own unbelief. The chief priests and elders asked a question, that was not necessarily a bad question, but it revealed that their heart posture was one of refusing to believe regardless of Jesus' answer. Jesus had given them all the evidence they needed to believe in Him, but they had already made up their minds.

The elders hoped to publicly entrap Jesus, but Jesus played an epic UNO reverse card and put them in such a bind that if they answered His question, *they* would have been publicly disgraced, if not stoned. Jesus recognized that their question was rooted in self-preservation and pride, not faith. Jesus' discerning question redirects the conversation from dishonest debate to self-examination.

We would be wise to apply some of this discernment to our own lives. Matthew 10:16 says, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Not every question posed to us is worth an immediate answer, a full response, or an intellectual debate. It is important that we maintain attunement to the Holy Spirit so that we can discern when questions posed to us by either unbelievers or believers with corrupted faith should not be answered directly. When questions are asked from a place of pride, assumption, or maliciousness, no clearly articulated truth will persuade them. We

need to listen to the heart of the question, rather than just the question itself. When we see the heart, we can expose assumptions, invite self-examination, remain steadfast in truth in the face of manipulation, and refuse to argue with someone who is not open to an alternative perspective. Proverbs 26:4-5 says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." So, here we see that engaging in someone's dishonesty or hard heart does not do any good.

We must be prepared to defend our faith (1 Peter 3:15), but we must, also, use discernment to not be ensnared in debates that benefit no one. Additionally, we must realize that we are often like the chief priests and elders ourselves. We ask spiritual questions, not seeking to learn or obtain truth, but to protect our own position. We ask for guidance only to those whom we know will back us up. We confront God through a self-centered lens. *God, let us be a people who are open to Your truth regardless of how it "hurts" our egotistical position and may we listen for intentions behind the questions of others so that we may be wise in our response to lead them to You and holy obedience.*

BIG IDEA: Addressing the heart of questions, even our own, is far more important than the question itself.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you struggle to discern the heart motives of others? Why or why not? Ask God for awareness of spiritual realities for those you interact with.
- **Question:** In what areas of your life do you have blinders on in order to avoid confronting your own sin? Ask God to tear these down and give you His eyes.

Week 14: Matthew 21:23-27

Day 5: Focus on Truth, Not the Fear of Man

READ: Matthew 21:23-27

EXPLORE:

This passage in Matthew reveals something about the Pharisees' character. These are the righteous elites. The ones who had it all together and who supposedly loved God more than anyone else, and they made sure to show their piety to everyone else too. However, when it comes to answering Jesus' question, we see that their piety and fear of God is merely a sham.

The chief priests and elders are given a single question from Jesus, "where did the baptism of John come from?" They are then caught and try to figure out what to do. The Pharisee's response mimics a debate in modern politics. In an attempt to please as many people as possible, they simply say that they don't know and dodge the question. Their first thought is not "What do the Scriptures say?" instead it is "What will the people think?" A common theme that is seen all throughout the Bible by those that are truly righteous and love the Lord is a fear of God. This right priority of fearing God over man is what marks the truly righteous.

We often find ourselves in a similar situation as the chief priests and elders. Our lives are filled with moments where we are forced to choose who we follow. However, the crowds we usually follow are not in line with God. As Christians, we are called to love others and care for them well, but who we ultimately follow should always be God. The fear of God is what should drive us, not the fear of the crowds.

When we choose to follow the crowd, the reward is immediate and visible. In today's technology age, we can get trapped into seeking that immediate feedback and approval. However, our hearts shouldn't be positioned towards what we can see

immediately. We should be focused on the truth, not pleasing as many people as possible. The first question in our mind shouldn't be "what do the crowds think" but instead "how can I seek God?" The Pharisees gave every appearance of righteousness, yet when it came to what matters they failed. A love of truth is what should control us not a fear of man.

BIG IDEA: Our hearts should be positioned towards the truth and a fear of God, rather than trying to please the crowds.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways are you tempted to follow others when you should be following God?
- **Question:** How do you think through choices? Is it focused on Scripture or pleasing others?

Week 15: Matthew 21:28-32

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 21:28-32

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 21:28-32 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: Why do you believe that Jesus regularly uses examples of family dynamics to provide illustrations?

Question: What do you think prevents us practically from accepting God's calling over our lives?

Activity: Come up with another illustration that makes the same point as Jesus makes here.

Question: What causes someone to say they will obey God's calling over their life but later decide not to?

Question: Why do you think Jesus mentions tax collectors and prostitutes here as opposed to mentioning Gentiles?

Question: Why do you think that the leaders of the people rejected John and did not believe him?

Question: Why do you think that the tax collectors and prostitutes believed John?

Question: How do you think the leaders of the people responded and how should they have responded?

Week 15: Matthew 21:28-32

Day 2: Seek Repentant Action Over Self-Righteous Inaction

READ: Matthew 21:23-32; Matthew 3

EXPLORE:

Today we will discuss the Parable of the Two Sons. This parable is presented to us in Matthew's Gospel account after the chief priests and elders questioned Jesus' authority. In response to their questioning, he asked them, "The baptism of John, from where did it come, heaven or man?" When they answered they did not know, he refused to answer them and told the parable we will focus on this week.

The parable centers around a vineyard owner with two sons, he asks both sons to go and work in the vineyard. The first says he will not go but then repents and goes into the vineyard to work and the second answers that he will go but does not go. One way we can interpret this parable is as an allegory with the vineyard owner being God, the vineyard being the Kingdom of God, the first son who repents as the outcasts (tax collectors and prostitutes), and the second son as the chief priests. Jesus' words after relaying the parable seem to support this interpretation. He tells the chief priests in Matthew 21:31-32, *"Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."* In His explanation of the parable He is giving them the correct answer to His previous question as He rebukes them for their unrepentance.

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist preaches a simple message, *"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."* In truth, we would all like to be a son or daughter in the parable who is not presented. One who says yes to doing the will of the Father and follows

through on their word to go into the vineyard and do the will of the Father. This is often beyond us however, Romans 3:23-25 says, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received in faith.”* The sinless life is beyond all of us, and at times we will all struggle, and the only way to do the will of the Father is through repentance. This is the path of the first son. It is better to say no and then go and work in the vineyard than to take the path of the self-righteous person who gives good answers but does not have good fruit. James writes in James 2:15-17, *“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*

BIG IDEA: Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you do in your daily life that prepares you to be ready to answer God’s call?
- **Question:** What are some examples of times where you have found yourself in the position of the first or second son in your own life?

Week 15: Matthew 21:28-32

Day 3: Illustrations Open the Heart

READ: Matthew 21:28-32

EXPLORE:

I (Brayden) have just stepped into a full-time preaching role and now write sermons weekly. One of the biggest parts about sermon prep is seeking to explain God's Word in a way that is not only easier to understand but in a way in which it will speak to the hearts and minds of those who hear it. One effective way to do that is to use illustrations. Illustrations are a great way to explain concepts because they speak to a different part of our heads. They engage the mind in a way that propositions and facts do not. It allows the audience to enter into a world that they never have before, to see something in a new light, while at the same time giving them something they can grab onto and see themselves in. This is what Jesus was the master at doing and it's a skill that not just pastors but all people should develop. Why? Because they can help us show Christ to others in a way that pricks their hearts in a way they had not experienced before. This is what Jesus did in the passage for this week.

Jesus uses a man that had two sons as the beginning opening line. He immediately brings in a relatable example of a family dynamic. This brings to mind the audience's own thoughts and understanding of their own family and how siblings can be rivalrous and how they can tend to be disobedient toward their father.

Jesus then goes to the concept of work that is relatable. We all work and know the difficulties that go along with it. Jesus then says that the first son refused to obey his father. Immediately the audience is left to believe that the son is the bad guy of the story, but Jesus then flips it and says the son actually did obey just not right away. The audience is then left on the edge of their seat

wondering where Jesus is going with this. A son said he wouldn't go but did. Wait, what about the other son? Jesus says this other son does the opposite. But this son is doubly at fault because he neither worked nor kept his word. This son is the worst! Jesus then asks a question to make sure His audience is paying attention. And they answer Jesus correctly by saying the first son truly did the will of his father obviously. But then Jesus personalizes the illustration that drew everyone in provocatively. He says you so-called leaders of the people are the first son who doesn't do the Father's will. The one you rightly would condemn in the story brings condemnation upon your own head.

Jesus draws in the crowd and the leaders to amaze everyone in the end. My guess is that no one ever fell asleep during a Jesus sermon. Jesus was not playing around. He used the power of rhetoric, imagination, and emotion to prove His points. We should follow His direction. Some people need to hear a gospel they've never heard, others need to be convicted of their sin, others need to be corrected of their false beliefs. We need to think deeply about how we can convey the truth as Jesus did.

BIG IDEA: Jesus used powerful illustrations to convey truth and so should we.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Spend some time thinking of an illustration that you can use to bring conviction to yourself and someone else.

Week 15: Matthew 21:28-32

Day 4: The Dynamics of Defiance

READ: Matthew 21:28-32

EXPLORE:

Have you ever had someone make a good point, but you opposed them anyway? Perhaps in a discussion, disagreement, or just in dialogue with others, you have seen one person dig their proverbial feet in the ground when they should have ceded some ground.

Have you ever wondered why we do that? Why are we tempted to stubbornly refuse what is simply true?

Well, perhaps we don't realize how we are wrong. Perhaps, an opponent is someone we don't like. Perhaps, the ramifications of the argument and its surprising truthfulness have negative impacts upon us. In the case of Matthew 21:31-32, all three of the aforementioned "perhaps" statements were true.

Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote, *"For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."*

If you remember our study from God's Word last week, you will keep fresh in your mind the religious leaders' unwillingness to answer Jesus' question about the nature of John's baptism. We need to remember that their refusal to answer was not just a comprehension issue, it was an issue of the disposition of the heart. If the chief priests and elders would have answered it would have revealed that they not only were inconsistent, but also that they were utterly fearful of the crowd. They were not willing to follow truth where it would lead because it would have

left them exposed. It would have convicted them of sinful inconsistency, and it would have convicted them of a sinful fear of others.

That theme of being sinfully unwilling to follow the truth and truthful conclusions where they logically lead them kept them from responding rightly to the ministry and message of John, who came in the way of righteousness. The religious leaders should have received the words of John, but their pride rose to the surface and choked any potential life out of a repentant response. They should have responded repentantly, even especially as it revealed their idolization of others. They did neither and found themselves opposed to the forerunner of Christ and to Christ Himself.

We have seen last week and this week that it is a wonderfully uncomfortable and yet good thing to be brought to a point of decision regarding Christ. Stubbornness and pride were immediately and explicitly visible in the actions of Jesus' opposition. If we are not humbled to repentance, the same will be true of us as well. The text alludes to a deep question. How is it that tax collectors and prostitutes enter before teachers and priests? Jesus' response is clear. Unlike the last and the least who turned and believed, some who were pridefully defiant refused to believe even after they had seen.

BIG IDEA: Sinful defiance refuses to believe even after seeing. We ought to be humble in repentance and faith.

APPLY:

- **Question:** When are you tempted to not follow what is true because it would make you uncomfortable in its ramifications?

Week 15: Matthew 21:28-32

Day 5: A Day to Share

READ: Matthew 21:28-32; Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:8-10

EXPLORE:

The Pharisees were like a pristine mansion with a termite-riddled frame – beautiful on the outside but structurally doomed within. Their outward obedience impressed people, but their hearts lacked the righteousness God desires. There is a vast and meaningful difference between an external appearance of obedience and having a heart transformed by the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ (Phil 3:9).

In the parable of the two sons, Jesus corrects the idea that righteousness comes through religious formalism or outward obedience to a moral code. The first son initially rebels against the father but later changes his mind, while the second son promises obedience but never follows through. Jesus uses their examples to demonstrate the difference between empty profession and genuine repentance. The tax collectors and prostitutes lived in open rebellion but later believed and repented, while the religious leaders appeared obedient yet rejected the call to repentance. The difference between them is not the works they performed, but whether they responded to God in faith.

The two sons of the parable show us everyone belongs to one of two groups: believers or unbelievers. Believers are those who hear the gospel, understand they have no claim to any righteousness of their own, and realize that they are desperately in need of grace. They believe the message of John the Baptist and Jesus – repent and receive the kingdom of God. Their repentance and changed lives demonstrate the authenticity of their faith. In contrast, unbelievers hear the message but reject it because of their hardened hearts. They rely on their own righteousness, but they don't understand that their righteousness

is nothing more than filthy rags. They will be excluded from the kingdom of God.

This parable points us to the heart of the gospel – no one earns the kingdom of God through their own works. Our sin creates a chasm between us and God that no amount of good works can bridge. Not even the strictest religious zealots can produce the kind of righteousness that pleases God. God requires faith and repentance. When we turn from our sin and trust Him, He places us in Christ, who possesses the righteousness we could never achieve by our own works. The gospel is not “be good enough.” The gospel is to trust the only righteous One.

God is patient and merciful, so He gives us time to believe and repent. But His patience will not last forever. As the next parable will show, there comes a day when the opportunity to repent ends and judgement arrives.

BIG IDEA: Merely appearing religious does not save. Both the religious insider and the sinful outsider must repent and trust Christ to enter the kingdom.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Who in your life believes they are “good enough” for God because of their religious devotion or good works? Pray for an opportunity to lovingly share the gospel with them.

Week 16: Matthew 21:33-46

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 21:33-46

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 21:33-46 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: Why do you think Jesus tells this parable right after the previous one?

Question: What is the significance of Jesus using a vineyard as an illustration?

Question: What do you think Jesus is referring to when He says, “the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit”?

Activity: Search the Old Testament and try and find which prophets were persecuted by the Israelites and why.

Activity: Read all of Isaiah 5 and write down thoughts that arise.

Question: What does this parable teach you about the patience of God?

Question: In what ways is Jesus like a cornerstone?

Question: What do you think the crowds response to the parable would be?

Week 16: Matthew 21:33-46

Day 2: Understanding the Parable of the Tenants

READ: Matthew 21:33-46; Isaiah 5:1-7

EXPLORE:

The parable that Jesus is delivering here is the second of three parables being taught to the crowd around Him in the Temple, but importantly here, to the chief priests and the elders, who are seeking to arrest Jesus. In the Temple, the one in which he just drove out the sellers and money-changers, He is challenged by the chief priests and elders who ask, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you the authority?" In which begins a slew of parables, all to target their ill-motives and hardened hearts. To understand the Parable of the Tenants, we need not overcomplicate things. Some parables have many symbolic objects in them, and it can feel like in order to understand it we need to put together some kind of complex evidence board. However, in this parable, the fence, winepress, the tower, are all meant to be seen as functional things to fully equip a proper vineyard. What needs to be examined further is *who* are the tenants, the servants, the owner, the owner's son, and the *other* tenants. Once we understand these components, then we can discover the meaning of the parable as a whole.

To put it simply, the owner of the vineyard is God, the vineyard is representative of Israel, the tenants it was leased to are the chief priests and the elders (Jewish religious leadership), the servants are Jesus's followers and would as well represent the prophets we have read about in the Old Testament, including John the Baptist (2 Chronicles 11:36-38; Hebrews 11:37). The owner's Son is Jesus Christ Himself, and the new tenants (Matthew 21:41) are Jesus's Apostles and the future leaders of the Gentile and Jewish Churches after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

If it is not quite clear by reading this parable, just as the tenants cast out the owners son, even killing him, it foretells of how God would send His own son, Jesus, down to earth to minister to His people (Israel) and announce the Kingdom of Heaven, but was killed by the hands of Jewish leadership. Just as the tenants were futile in their thinking that they could claim the vineyard as their own after killing the heir, though the chief priests and elders response is a correct and sincere answer when Jesus asks what the owner would do with the tenants, they as well are futile in their motives to arrest and kill Jesus.

What is the consequence that we are to understand at the end of this parable? There is judgment from God to be cast on those who inflict suffering on God's people. Jesus was always warning the crowds about God's judgement and punishment and wrath, and He does not make it a secret in this parable either. The Kingdom of God will be taken from those who refuse the invitation, and given to those who will submit to God. Those that do not submit to Jesus as the cornerstone (Isaiah 8:13-15) will be crushed by it. There is no other way, there is no middle ground. The gift of faith is eternal life with Jesus, the consequence of rejection is separation and undergoing the wrath of God (John 3:36).

BIG IDEA: There is judgment for those who are against God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you see yourself as a faithful tenant, actively producing fruit for the places around you, whether it's work, the household, the neighborhood or on mission?
- **Challenge:** Spend time giving thanks to God that His wrath was not poured out on you because of Jesus so that you could easily come and accept His free gift of eternal life.

Week 16: Matthew 21:33-46

Day 3: A Vineyard and its Fruit

READ: Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:33-46

EXPLORE:

The imagery of vineyards is found throughout the Bible. Vineyards would have resonated with the original audience because it was where many of them earned a living. They understood the process of cultivating a vineyard and the amount of work required. Jesus used this common knowledge and their understanding of the Old Testament's use of vineyard imagery to aid in His teaching. Isaiah 5:1-7 is the primary passage Jesus was drawing from. This passage in Isaiah is referred to as "The Song of the Vineyard." The opening verses reveal that this vineyard, Israel, has been well cared for by God, but instead of producing good fruit as expected it is producing bad fruit. Isaiah proceeds to say that because of Israel's current condition, God is justified in removing His protection. Isaiah 5:5 says that God would "take away its hedge and it will be devoured" as Isaiah makes his case that if a vineyard does not produce good fruit, then it is worthless and should be left to grow as it wants without protection from the vineyard owner. When Isaiah 5:1-7 is read alongside Matthew 21:33-46, the parallels between the two passages are evident. Jesus opens His parable in Matthew 21 with a vineyard owner, who is God the Father. Verse 33 echoes Isaiah 5:1-2 as Jesus describes how the owner set up a fence and a tower to aid in protecting the vineyard. Once the fruit was ready to be harvested, the owner sent servants to get the fruit from the tenants. Each of the three servants faced a brutal welcome from the tenants. One of the servants was beaten, one was killed, and then one was stoned. Matthew records that the same events happened again when the owner sent more servants to get the fruit. At this point in the parable, Jesus reaches the heart of His message when the son of the vineyard owner comes to collect the fruit. Instead of recognizing the authority of the son, the tenants devise a plan and

kill the son to steal his inheritance. Almost immediately, the people listening to the parable believe the vineyard owner will come and kill the tenants in response to the death of his son. Instead, Jesus uses Psalm 118:22 to illustrate that one day the son would be vindicated and would be exalted above the current leadership. To close His parable, Jesus tells the people that the kingdom of God will be given to those whose fruit is aligned with the kingdom and that those who stumble and fall on the stone because of their continued and willful unbelief will eventually be crushed by the cornerstone. Jesus uses vineyards to teach on the importance of what fruit people of the kingdom of heaven produce. In Isaiah, Israel is portrayed as a well taken care of vineyard that ends up producing bad fruit that is useless. In Matthew 21, Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard owner who carefully tends his vineyard so that it produces good fruit when harvest comes. However, after his servants are harmed by the tenants, the vineyard owner's son goes to retrieve the harvested fruit and is also killed. Jesus concludes by warning that whoever enters the kingdom of God will have fruit that aligns with its values and those who do not will be crushed. When reading this parable, Christians today should be struck with how God takes seriously the fruit of those who claim to be His followers and that the consequences for willful unbelief are to not be taken lightly.

BIG IDEA: God cares about the fruit His followers produce.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does the passage in Isaiah impact your understanding of the Parable of the Tenants?
- **Challenge:** Consider how the different outcomes in both passages reflect how God views those who will enter His kingdom.

Week 16: Matthew 21:33-46

Day 4: Functional and Beautiful

READ: Matthew 21:33-46

EXPLORE:

If you've ever walked a college campus you know that they are not all created equal. Some colleges are architecturally beautiful; some colleges are just not! For the sake of multi-church unity, I (Stephen) will make no specific allusions to universities in our great state.

We all seem to intuitively know that some buildings are beautiful and some buildings are functional. Some things are pretty but not usable. Some things are usable and ugly. On rare occasions, however, there are some things which are wondrously both! This is the case with Jesus' reference to the rejected block which has become the chief cornerstone.

Quoting from the Scriptures, Jesus challenged 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 marvelous in our eyes.'"* In His rebuke and with His life, Jesus quite literally lays the foundation for an incredible structure that is both beautiful and functional. In a very real sense, the allusion to the cornerstone's placement being a marvelous work of God means that it is profoundly beautiful in its function. This is a masterful and Scripture-saturated image.

In Jesus' day, a cornerstone, rendered literally "the head of the corner" was not only seen as architecturally necessary, but it was also seen as essentially beautiful. It was not just a block that was needed for the building to be joined together. It would've been given special attention as it was placed after the structure was complete. This is significant. The fact that the cornerstone (who is Christ) was overlooked as a rejected stone by humanity did not

denigrate the value of the stone. Just as a diamond doesn't lose its value when it is overlooked, so too did the marvelous beauty of Christ remain even though He was overlooked. The Apostle Peter picked this up for the persecuted church and the Apostle Paul picked this theme up for the divided church.

After highlighting how God's Word endures when other things fade, 1 Peter 2:4-7 expanded the idea of what it means for us to be built together with Christ as the cornerstone who was formerly rejected. It means, *as living stones being built together*, we share a foundation, frame, and focal point of emphasis. Simply, the cornerstone imagery grounds church unity. Paul, in writing to the church in Ephesus used language like, "being joined together" and "being built together" as essential responses which follow directly from the cornerstone who is Christ. As a result, it follows that the rejected, but *precious and chosen nature* of the cornerstone ought to reframe our own perception of hostility and opposition according to God's good will for His people. Combined together, the New Testament speaks about the Church being built together as a functional, beautiful, and enduring structure centered upon Christ alone.

BIG IDEA: The idea of Christ as the cornerstone has massive structural implications on His Church.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Commit Ephesians 2:20 to memory this week.

Week 16: Matthew 21:33-46

Day 5: Where's Your Confidence?

READ: Matthew 21:33-46

EXPLORE:

In the online space of Christian apologetics and polemics there has become a trend toward traditionalism. This is most likely present because of many years of churches especially in America becoming more and more non-traditional. As history ebbs and flows in terms of what is popular, the church likewise ebbs and flows in terms of what is popular. It used to be the case that new, different, and liberty from traditions was en vogue but the tide is now turning. More and more "serious" Christians have been flocking to the more traditional churches because they provide stability in an ever-changing world. This is a concerning trend because it has led many to cling to institutions for their salvation. There is little question that true followers of Christ can be found in any church with a correct doctrine of God but as Christians collectively we are called to create the least amount of barriers for those to see Christ and all His beauty. One way in which we do this is by seeking humility like the Jews in this passage should have.

The Jews thought that their flesh was good enough to keep the favor of God. They thought that since they were circumcised and committed to practicing the Torah that they were indestructible. Jesus informed them here that they were incorrect. Jesus says that the Jews who are rejecting Him now, namely the Pharisees, elders, and high priests stand in solidarity with those Jews in the past that rejected the prophets.

They stand with King Joash who killed Zechariah. They stand with Queen Jezebel and King Ahab who killed the prophets and tried to kill Elijah. They stand with King Jehoiakim who killed the prophet Uriah. They stand with the people who would not listen to Ezekiel, to Jeremiah, to Isaiah, to Amos, to Hosea. And now they stand

condemned thinking they were untouchable and deserved their inheritance from God. So they cared not about producing the fruit, but clung to their pride.

There are churches in danger of the same kind of pride as the Pharisees. Churches that claim that they are the one true church in which there is no salvation outside of them. Churches that claim this are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and many cults. Many members of these churches claim exclusive rights to their people receiving salvation purely because they are a part of the institution that Christ established. They claim they are Noah's Ark and everyone else is in the water. In this way they don't put their faith in the cornerstone that is Jesus. The only one who provides eternal life. Let none of us fall into the same trap. Let us keep our eyes on the cornerstone and seek to produce fruits as He has called us to. Everything that we have is by His mercy and He shows no favoritism. He does not focus on what we present on the outside but He looks at the heart.

BIG IDEA: Trust in Christ for salvation and be weary of pride and the effects it can have on your soul.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways today can you devote yourself to good works and humility?



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