

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

Testy Tenants & Timely Truth

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

April 27, 2014



Walter's Isaacson's article in Time magazine titled *Einstein and Faith*, gives us a snapshot of a highly brilliant thinker who can't quite have the kind of faith articulated in the New Testament by Jesus:

Einstein tried to express these feelings clearly, both for himself and all of those who wanted a simple answer from him about his faith. So in the summer of 1930, amid his sailing and ruminations in Caputh [Germany], he composed a credo, "What I Believe," that he recorded for a human-rights group and later published. It concluded with an explanation of what he meant when he called himself religious: "The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I am a devoutly religious man."¹

¹ Walter Isaacson, *Einstein and Faith*, TIME (4-5-07).

Einstein's religion was just a veiled, nice-sounding form of willful, intellectually prideful unbelief. He was not willing to follow the evidences of God purposefully built into the complexity and beauty of the cosmos to the throne of God, opting instead for a religion and/or belief system founded on a "beautiful emotion," something beyond the ability of our minds to grasp.

For Jesus, belief was no emotion, but a firm, inexorable, unshakeable belief in the facts of who He demonstrated himself to be through His lofty and powerful words and His off-the-charts, divine works/miracles. As Jesus told the disbelieving Jews of His day,

³⁷ If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸ but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (John 10).

"Follow the evidence," Jesus says, "... of how my plethora of miracles demonstrate my deity as the long-awaited Messiah, the God/man in the flesh" (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Daniel 7:13-14). Those sinners who embrace the evidence, according to Jesus, move from Satan's family to His family, from being children of darkness to being children of light. His words in John validate this central truth of the gospel:

He was in the world, and the word came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name (John 1).

With eternity hanging in the balance, I must ask you, "Have you come to place your faith in Christ's words and works?" "Have you moved from unbelief to biblical belief?"

Einstein, sadly, represents those who reject the Christ because of their adherence to a religion or a worldview they are convinced is righteous and right. For the good, gifted scientist, science was ultimately his religion and no amount of evidence otherwise would shake him from this worship. For the religious leaders of Jesus's day, they rejected Christ outright because His brand of religion threatened their ecclesiastical power, pride, traditions, and livelihoods. Despite all of His miraculous deeds, many of which they witnessed, performed even on their own Temple grounds during the final week of Christ's life, they opposed Him even more. Talk about blind, inexcusable unbelief.

What happens to those religiously minded people who chose to reject the claims and call of Jesus Christ? How does God respond to those who do not respond to Him but are passionately committed to belief systems which run counter to His belief system? Christ's pitched verbal battle with the Pharisees and Sadducees on a Tuesday, just three days before His crucifixion by their hand, definitively answers the questions in an ominous, spine-stiffening fashion. If you happen to be one who prides yourself in a paradigm of belief which rejects the person and work of Jesus, if you happen to be one who worships a works-based religion and not the grace-based religion of Jesus, if you have a penchant for attacking Christ and Christianity

because your belief system, be what it may, is so superior, you might need to rethink your position. I say that because in Christ's teaching that day on the Temple mount, especially in verses 33 through 46 of Matthew chapter 21. Boiling the Lord's words down here to one thematic statement, it could easily read something like this:

“Righteous” Rejectors Meet With Righteous Rejection (Matthew 21:33-46)

While on the Temple grounds, the religious elites sought to question the authority of Jesus to teach and perform miracles (Matthew 21:23-27), but He put them in their place by showing He didn't have to answer their question because it was erroneous in light of evidence to the contrary. He followed up this scathing rebuke by using a parable about two sons to cause them to condemn themselves as the disobedient son to the will of the father (Matthew 21:28-32). It would be the first of three parables of judgment, basically one for the rejection of the Trinitarian redemption plan by the Sanhedrin.

Beginning in the verses before us, Jesus presented the second and third parables of judgment of the Pharisees and their entire false system of belief. They who thought they were secure before God because they were born Jews and gave themselves faithfully to a perpetual observance of a blinding, seemingly endless array of religious rules, rituals, and regulations ... they were about to discover that they who rejected Jesus based on their own self-righteousness would be ironically and tragically rejected by Him, the Messiah. We can call it the great awakening, or the great reversal and I pray, friend, it will not happen to you.

From what we see in this passage, there are four facets to the divine rejection of “righteous” rejectors.

The Road Of A Rejector (Matthew 21:33-39)

Matthew recounts what happened that day in the Temple precincts with these words:

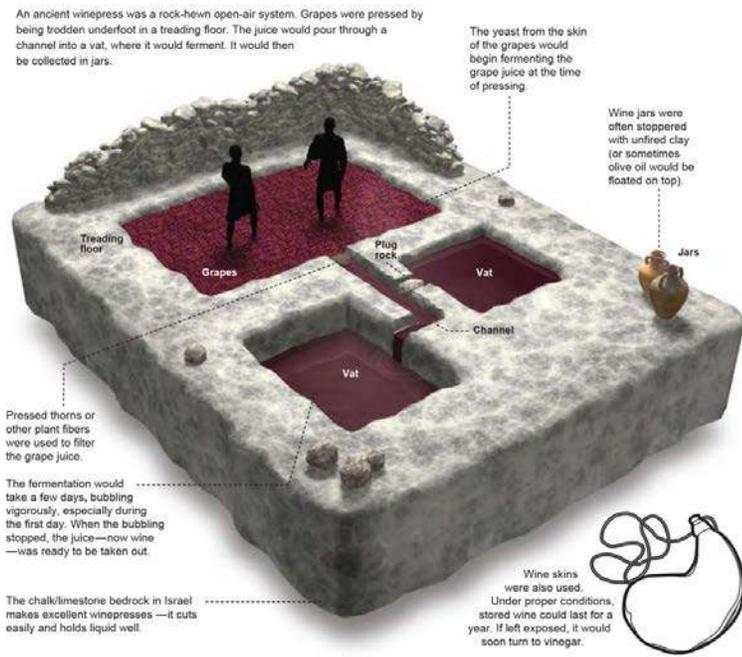
³³ Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. ³⁵ The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. ³⁷ But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ ³⁹ They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

In Greek there are two words for “another:” *heteros*, which means another of a different kind, and *allos* which means another of the same kind. Logically, then, does Luke say that “two others (*heteros*), both criminals, were lead away with him [Jesus] to be executed” (Luke 23:32). Because He was the God/man Messiah, it would have been theologically inaccurate to use the word *allos*. Applying this lexical data to Matthew 21:33, it becomes

readily apparent that Jesus employed an additional parable, like the previous one about the two sons, to bring condemnation down upon the heads of the unbelieving religious leaders. Note this well. He didn't let up in his bid to plough the hard soil of their lives, but in grace and mercy He still went after them in hopes of moving some of them from condemnation to confession.

This second judgment parable, or a metaphorical story based on common life experiences with a divine view of communicating eternal spiritual truths in a vivid, memorable fashion, Jesus tapped into the world of vineyard farming. With vineyards dotting the hillsides everywhere in Israel, everyone understood the foundation of this interesting story. Everyone also knew that vineyard owners did all the necessary preparations in constructing their vineyards so they would be fruitful.

A Winepress in Ancient Israel



This particular wealthy landowner was no exception. He built a wall to protect his crop from animals and thieves, erected a winepress in anticipation of a bountiful crop of grapes, and he even installed an expensive tower to serve as a lookout for those unscrupulous people who'd dare to harvest his grapes when they ripened. Yes, this landowner did everything within his power to build a functioning, highly productive vineyard. He waited for the day when piles of grapes would be crushed by being trampled by the feet of his workers, so that their precious juice could flow the pit for wine production.

What he didn't expect was for his slaves to be mistreated and murdered for simply attempting to collect the wine produced by the fruit which was rightly his. The tenants, who oversaw his land holdings, became his unexpected antagonists by beating one slave, killing another, and stoning yet another ... probably to death. When any other landlord would have responded by sending the authorities to arrest and incarcerate or execute the insurrectionists, this gracious, patient man sent his only son in hopes they would show the inheritor mercy. They didn't. Knowing exactly who the son was, they, in cold, calculated premeditation murdered him. Their goal? To greedily seize his rightful inheritance and throw off the authority and ownership of his father, the owner of the vineyard.

Any Jew listening to this story, especially the religious leaders who were steeped in the Old Testament, would have immediately drawn an almost one to one correspondence of this story with that detailed in Isaiah 5. There God painstakingly and lovingly build a vineyard called Israel with the hopes it would become spiritually productive and fruit-laden. That didn't

happen. They willfully shook off God's authority and leadership, choosing to live lives contrary to His word and way, which, in turn, resulted in them being a wild vineyard overrun with thorns and thistles (Isaiah 5:3-7). Six divine woes then followed from the prophet delineating the sins of the fruitless nation and their impending judgment by the landlord, God (Isaiah 5:8-30). Christ's story sounded all too familiar. I'm sure a whole lot of people were looking down at their dusty, dirty sandals at this point.

By way of parabolic analytics, it's quite easy to identify the major players of this graphic story. God, the Father and Lord of and over Israel, was the wealthy landlord. His tenants were the religious authorities who were in charge of his field until He returned to see how fruitful they all were. His servants, of course, would be the prophets who historically came to God's people and leaders, seeking to see how they were doing in His vineyard.

The track record of the tenants was, however, one of opposition, hatred, dislike and outright rejection of the prophets. Their disdain for the ways of God and love of their selfish, sinful ways, all hidden behind the guise of a works-based religion, started out mild but then increased in severity as time went by. How they treated Jeremiah before the God-rejecting nation fell in 586 B.C. sounded a lot like what Jesus said in the pithy parable:

¹ In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, this message came from the LORD: ² Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the house of the LORD and speak to the people of all the cities of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD; whatever I command you, tell them, and omit nothing. ³ Perhaps they will listen and turn back, each from his evil way, so that I may repent of the evil I have planned to inflict upon them for their evil deeds. ⁴ Say to them: Thus says the LORD: If you disobey me, not living according to the law I placed before you ⁵ and not listening to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I send you constantly though you do not obey them, ⁶ I will treat this house like Shiloh, and make this the city which all the nations of the earth shall refer to when cursing another. ⁷ Now the priests, the prophets, and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸ When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD bade him speak to all the people, the priests and prophets laid hold of him, crying, "You must be put to death!" ⁹ Why do you prophesy in the name of the LORD: 'This house shall be like Shiloh,' and 'This city shall be desolate and deserted?' And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. ¹⁰ When the princes of Judah were informed of these things, they came up from the king's palace to the house of the LORD and held court at the New Gate of the house of the LORD. ¹¹ The priests and prophets said to the princes and to all the people, "This man deserves death; he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." ¹² Jeremiah gave this answer to the princes and all the people: "It was the LORD who sent me to prophesy against this house and city all that you have heard. ¹³ Now, therefore, reform your ways and your deeds; listen to the voice of the LORD your God, so that the LORD will repent of the evil with which he threatens you (Jeremiah 26).

Sounds like what happened to Jesus, the prophet and the Son of God, doesn't it? According to Jesus, His people had been throwing off the rule of His Father for centuries, resulting in lives of

abject fruitlessness. And as the people attacked Jeremiah, they would attack Jesus. By detailing how the landlord's son was cast out of the vineyard and killed outside, we probably have a latent word about Jesus being killed outside the city walls. Jesus prophesied what they would do to Him and they didn't even realize it. Like the prophet Zechariah, who was killed in the Temple (2 Chronicles 24:20-22; Matthew 23:35), Jesus, the actual spiritual temple, would be killed just north of the earthly temple. Years of rejection of God's word and ways, years of unbelief and false piety tied to a religion heavily laden with mind-numbing works to supposedly secure God's favor, would reach their godless, sinful zenith in the murder of the God's only son, Jesus ... the rightful Davidic heir of the vineyard/nation.

Ostensibly, you might see yourself in this parabolic story. For years you have struggled against Christ and Christianity. For years you have done everything in your power to remove every vestige of Him from your life. For years you have verbally gone after His emissaries. For years you have pridefully wrapped yourself up in your false belief system. You, of all people, know the road of a rejector well. You started out with pot shots here and there against Christ and Christians, but now you've progressed to bigger, heavier weapons in your quest to drive Christ out of your world and this world.

If this is you, Christ has a word for you as we consider what He said about ...

The Reality of A Rejector (Matthew 21:40-41)

The rude reality of a self-righteous Christ-rejector can't be missed in the wise words of Jesus:

⁴⁰ Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? ⁴¹ They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons."

The tension in the story pivots on the transitional word "therefore" (οὖν, a typical rhetorical device of Jesus: Matthew 5:19, 23, 48; 6:2, 8, 9, 22, 23, 31, 34; 7:11, 12, 24). In classic and rabbinical fashion, Jesus moves from a story to a provocative, penetrating question. Such should be your method, too, in wedding sound evangelism and apologetics together. There is nothing better than a well-timed, well-aimed question designed to dismantle a false, untenable, logically inconsistent belief system. Interesting. Jesus went on the offensive in an inoffensive manner. How wise.

Greg Koukl, a gifted apologist on the West Coast, one encountered a Jewish attorney at one of his book promotions at a local Barnes & Noble. The man didn't understand why he, a Jew, needed Jesus, after all, he believed in God, led a moral life, and it seemed to him what was important was how he lived, not what or who he believed in.

In a style Jesus would approve, Greg went on the offensive in an inoffensive manner with a question: "Do you think people who commit moral crimes out the be punished?"

"Well, since I'm a prosecuting attorney," he replied, "I guess I do."

"Good," said Greg. "So do I. Now, a second question: Have you ever committed any moral crimes."

He paused because the conversation was now getting highly personal. "Yes," he said, "I guess I have."

“So have I,” Greg responded. Then he added, “But that puts us both in a tight spot, doesn’t it? We both believe people who do bad things should be punished, and we both believe we’re guilty on that score. Do you know what I call that? I call that bad news.”

Without being overtly obnoxious, Greg used some great questions to guide the Christ rejector to see he was, in fact, guilty and in need of a solution to his guilt problem. Within a few seconds he guided the man toward the only One who can pardon a guilty sinner. His name is Jesus, the Messiah.

Greg merely did what Jesus did on the Temple mount that day. He used a question to cause a sinner to see their sin. You can, and should use the same technique in your encounter with those who reject Christ.

For the religious elites, there was only one possible answer to the question. The testy tenants had to be dealt with harshly by facing immediate execution. Jesus had just got them to indict and condemn themselves with their own passionate words. And for these hardened rejectors there would be a day when their wretchedness would be dealt with by the landlord, God. They, who should have produced spiritual fruit, but didn’t, they who should have guided the nation to be fruitful for God, but didn’t, they who fought against the Lord’s anointed, Jesus, would, in due time be dealt with in judgment, and, indeed, they were in 70 A.D. when the Romans invaded and destroyed Jerusalem and razed the glorious Temple.

Once more, all of this sounded all too familiar. The prophet Ezekiel warned of the destruction of Jerusalem and Israel in 586 B.C. because the vineyard, Israel, failed to be fruitful:

² Son of man, how is the wood of the vine *better* than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest? ³ Can wood be taken from it to make ¹anything, or can *men* take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel? ⁴ If it has been put into the ^afire for fuel, *and* the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it *then* useful for anything? ⁵ Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything! ⁶ Therefore, thus says the Lord ¹GOD, 'As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ⁷ and I set My face against them. *Though* they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them. ⁸ 'Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,'" declares the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 15).

The opening question God poses is most logical: Which wood is better and more useful? Wood from a mighty tree or that from a vine? The answer is obvious. Vine wood is inferior to all other woods and is basically worthless if it doesn’t fulfill its role of being a fruit producer. Israel, from God’s perspective, represented the worthless vine wood because they didn’t produce spiritual fruit, historically speaking, which honored and glorified Him, leaving Him with no other option but to bring their nation to the ground by means of foreign invasion.

Jeremiah developed the same judgment motif for lack of spiritual fruitfulness against the religious elites of his day:

² Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown. ³ Israel was holy to the LORD, The first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; Evil came upon them," declares the LORD.'" ⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty? ⁶ "They did not say, 'Where is the LORD Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of deep darkness, through a land that no one crossed and where no man dwelt?' ⁷ "I brought you into the fruitful land to eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, and My inheritance you made an abomination. ⁸ "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal And walked after things that did not profit. ⁹ Therefore I will yet contend with you," declares the LORD, "And with your sons' sons I will contend. ¹⁰ "For cross to the coastlands of Kittim and see, and send to Kedar and observe closely and see if there has been such *a thing* as this! ¹¹ Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. ¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. ¹³ For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2).

The religious leaders, in Jeremiah's day, were guilty of guiding the people into every form of false worship imaginable, coupled with the worship of God. And they opposed godly prophets like Jeremiah. The result of their actions was predictable. God would move to judge them. Just as this Day of Judgment came to their forefathers for a lack of spiritual fruitfulness, Jesus warned of another one coming down the pike to those who would dare kill the Son of the vineyard owner. Mark this well: *judgment always comes to those who reject the Son of the vineyard*. You, likewise, might feel you are getting away with your insurrection, but it is only a feeling which is detached from the divine truth.

Jesus has warned you:

For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light (Mark 4:22).

Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops (Luke 12:3).

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36).

Are you listening? The religious leaders of Christ's day weren't and they ended up before His holy throne with no Savior to protect them.

Jesus spoke in this candid fashion in hopes of moving the rejector to an acceptor status and to also judge those who willfully chose to remain His perpetual opponents. His method is still the same, a perfect balance where you are concerned between grace and judgment. What will you do with Him?

Should you choose to remain a rejector of the Christ what He has just taught logically forms a segue to the third point from this passage:

The Reversal Of A Rejector (Matthew 21:42-44)

Christ's words here drip with sarcasm and irony:

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"

Of course, *they* had read the Scriptures. They were THE teachers of the Old Testament, the men with the Ph.Ds in Torah studies. They are the men who poured over and memorized the texts. They were the ones who could divide the meaning of the most complex passages. Of course, *they* knew Psalm 118:22, and they knew it applied to Israel. Contextually, they took great pride in the fact that God had chosen Israel, the rejected people, the insignificant people, to be the redemptive, spiritually premier people of the entire earth.

In their spiritual pride, however, they failed to see and understand how this prophetic word possessed a double fulfillment, one for Israel and one for the Messiah. Stones abound in Israel. In fact, you can't build with any other stone in Jerusalem today other than what is called the Jerusalem stone, and, believe me, that stone is more plentiful than palm trees in Florida. It is everywhere, and because it is everywhere the Jews, historically, were quite skilled in knowing how to build with it.

Hence, the reference here is either to the key stone used to tie two walls together or the capstone used to hold a massive stone archway in place. If the former was misshapen, then the entire structure would be ultimately compromised. If the latter was removed, then the archway



Two of the entrances to the massive coliseum at Beth-Shean, located just south of the Sea of Galilee and just west of the Jordan River.

would implode immediately. Both types of stones were absolutely pivotal in building structures which would withstand the tests and trails of time.

What the religious elites didn't see, because they were blinded by their willful unbelief and love of religious power and position over love of the Messiah, was the very stone, Jesus, they were convinced was an inferior stone for the messianic role, would, in fact, become, by divine fiat, THE key stone in a temple the Father would build. Talk about irony. The very rabbi they believed was a rabid charlatan was none other than the Lord himself. In light of this, I can't help but ask you, "Have you formed an incorrect, sinful summary of the person and work of Jesus Christ?" This is a significant question because judgment falls quickly and heavily on those who reject Him. As Jesus prophesies:

⁴³ Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

Does this mean that all the unconditional covenantal promises made to Israel in the Old Testament were abrogated by the unbelief of these religious elites and the general Jewish populace of the day? No. Those covenants (viz., Abrahamic, Genesis 12, Davidic, 2 Samuel 7, Palestinian, Deuteronomy 28, and New Covenant, Jeremiah 30-31) will be fulfilled in history because God's character rests upon them. God gave Israel His word He would not forget them as Isaiah reports in His behalf:

Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me (Isaiah 49:15-16).

In Zechariah's prophecy about the end of time when the Messiah's kingdom is erected on earth, God gives this word of comfort to His chosen people:

For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye ... sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD" (Zechariah 2:8, 10).

In the New Testament, Paul, a converted Jew and worshipper of the Messiah, will develop the point in detail in Romans that God would not completely abandon His eschatological plans for Israel (Romans 9-11).

What is Jesus, then, talking about here? His words demonstrate that He would temporarily (from what we see from many other Scriptures) work in and through a people who would produce the spiritual fruits He had wanted to see in Israel. What people did He speak of? First and foremost, He probably (and contextually) meant His disciples who would carry His gospel message to the world, as Israel should have. Realizing that inspired writers like Paul and Peter later applied these words to the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile, we can safely and prudently say that are the secondary reference in Christ's condemnation to the religious elites of His day. Their time had passed. The land owner, God, had been patient with them long enough,

and with their eventually murder of the Messiah, God, the Heavenly Father, would work with new, willing, and trustworthy tenants. Listen to Peter and you can't help but see the validation of the observation:

⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*," ⁸ and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. ⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY (1 Peter 2)

We are now, as believers in the Messiah, whether we are Jew or Gentile, we are the priests, the purveyors of His gospel, and He is, as Paul articulates in Ephesians 2 the chief cornerstone of the Church, His mystical, glorious body.

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of *God's* household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of *God* in the Spirit (Ephesians 2).

We, as Christ followers, have a serious obligation now to be that fruitful vineyard the Lord desired from Israel. Are you spiritually fruitful?

Those, who are not Christ followers, who fit into the camp of Christ rejectors of all shapes and sizes, are now summarily warned:

⁴⁴ And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.

To fight against Christ is to secure your own destruction. To burn down His churches is to burn down your building, spiritually speaking. To persecute His people is to bring persecution down on your head. To reject Him by embracing any and all other belief systems is to find Him one day rejecting you. To seek to erase Him, His name, His teachings, and His gospel from your life and/ or culture is to assure your own ensure in eternity. Once more, Jesus employed tough,

truthful language to not just judge the rejectors but to hopefully wake a few of them up. Joseph of Arimathea, who was in their ranks (Mark 15:43), was spiritually awakened at some time in his exposure to Jesus (Luke 23:50). Could it have been during this parabolic teaching time? Possibly. We'll have to ask him when we see him.

The great, ironic reversal is coming, the day when the last shall be first and first won't even be in the line for the kingdom. Where will you be on that day? Many will cling to their false belief, unfortunately, as we see in the response of the religious leaders to Christ's clear, concise teaching. I call this ...

The Response Of A Rejector (Matthew 21:45-46)

Matthew must have had tears in his eyes when he wrote these words:

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

Sin had so distorted their thinking, as sin does (Proverbs 4:10; 14:12; Philippians 2:15; 1 Timothy 6:5), and their pride in their religion ran so deep, coupled with their love of prestige, power, and wealth, they were inflamed even more by Christ's words instead of being convicted by them. Tragic. In just three short days they would carry out their dastardly deed Christ spoke of by killing the Son of the wealthy Land Lord outside the vineyard. It would prove to be a life decision they would regret for eternity.

What about you? What about your life? How will you respond to Jesus? Andrew Klavan is a popular writer of mysteries who moved from being a rejector of Christ to being an acceptor.

Andrew Klavan is a popular writer of mysteries—some of which have been made into movies (1999's *True Crime* and 2001's *Don't Say a Word*). He was recently interviewed in *World* magazine about how his writing interacts with his Christian faith. In the process, he described his conversion to being a follower of Christ:

"My life has been more like one of those Outward Bound programs where they drop you far from home and you have to make your way back with a piece of string and a matchbook. I was born and raised a Jew and came up in that wonderful secular intellectual tradition that teaches you to analyze everything. God kept coming into my life, and I kept disproving him—I was very good at it! Fortunately, I could also disprove the foundations of my disproof. Eventually I saw that the pillars of the secular consensus—scientism, materialism, rationalism—were all made of sand. Whereas the deeper I went into the experience of God, the more I found...life in abundance."²

² Marvin Olasky, "Too Nice For Vice?," *World*, 2-10-07, 32-33.