

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – Jesus in Jerusalem – 28 May-3 June 2016

Christ would have us accept Him as our Redeemer and not reject Him as did those who crucified Him in Jerusalem. “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Matthew 21:42).

Jesus spoke of the chief corner stone after giving a parable, which is recorded in Matthew 21:33-46 (see also Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). The speaking of this parable came after some events. It was the last great day of our Saviour’s teaching in the temple. On Sunday He had ridden into Jerusalem as a conqueror. On Monday He had driven out of the temple the extortionate and covetous who were defiling with their unholy traffic the temple of God. Other events, such as the cursing of the fig tree, the lesson of the prayer of faith, the crafty scheme of the scribes and Pharisees to entrap Jesus with artful questions, and the parable of the two sons, preceded the parable of the vineyard, and can be studied with profit.

This one fact is nearly always prominent in the Lord’s parables, that in His parables He uses as His illustrations things with which the people were familiar. In this parable of the wicked husbandmen, our Lord simply uses that which His Spirit had inspired some hundred years before (see Isaiah 5:1-7). The vineyard represents Israel; the tower, the temple at Jerusalem; the place of resort, the strength and centre of their worship, the place from which the whole vineyard could be overseen. The wine press evidently includes all those means which God gave Israel by which the riches of their vineyard could be developed and used to God’s glory. This vineyard was “hedged about,” separated from other fields. Israel was a separated people. That which separated them was God’s truth – His law, His statutes, His promises to the fathers: “Ye shall therefore keep all My statutes, and all My judgments, and do them; that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spew you not out. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nations, which I cast out before you; for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey; I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people” (Leviticus 20:22-24).

The one who planted the vineyard is the Lord; the husbandmen were those in responsible offices in the Jewish nation. And truly what great things God had done for His people! From the time of His first call to them in Egypt till they were cast off forever, the way was strewn with the mercies of God. Truly the Lord could say: “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4). Surely the Lord could not have done more!

The householder sent his servants to the husbandmen; the lesson here is the Lord sent His prophets to Israel. It was Samuel, and Elijah, and Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, and many others. But as the husbandmen beat the servants of the owner of the vineyard, so Israel abused the prophets of God. The record is very explicit on this point: “And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

God left the Jews without excuse. He sent “betimes” to them, or, as it reads, “rising up continually and carefully and sending.” He could not let them go. The language of God’s heart was: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together” (Hosea 11:8). These are the pleadings of Infinite Love to rebellious and fallen man. He will not yet reject Israel. He has one more evidence of His love; He will bestow that; surely they will yield Him His due then. This is our merciful Lord!

Then the Lord of the vineyard sends His only begotten Son for the love which he bore to the world (John 3:16). Christ “gave Himself” (Titus 2:14). Heaven or the universe could bestow no more; it bestowed its Maker. He who with the Father created all things, laid aside His glory and came to earth, and endured what man must endure, was tempted, tried, and suffered for man’s sake. “He came unto His own,” but, sad to say, “His own received Him not” (John 1:11). The Jews had closed their hearts against Him. They continually read the prophecies which foretold His coming; they continually offered those sacrifices which typified His death, but the antitype they knew not. Their heart was not in harmony with the message of meekness and humility and heart righteousness; therefore they could not receive Him.

But the Jewish leaders said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." And this is just what the Jews did. Strange madness, that such should be the case, and yet it was, after three and one-half years of teaching such as the world never heard. No charge could be brought against it, neither could they bring aught against His life. He could say without boasting, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" He met in Himself all the specifications of the prophecy. He went beyond this. The mighty power of God was manifested by Him wherever He went. The crowning miracle of raising to life him who had been dead four days had but recently been wrought. Lazarus was known to the priests and many about Jerusalem. This miracle, in connection with all the evidences of Christ's divinity which preceded, had led a multitude to believe in Him. In fact, no evidences were wanting.

The priests had confessed that the "world" had "gone after Him." Notwithstanding all this, the Jews cast Him out and crucified Him, after a heathen governor had repeatedly declared, "I find no fault in Him." Sadly, in rejecting Christ, the Jews filled up the cup of their iniquity.

This is the lesson of the parable, from which, according to Matthew's account, the Jews themselves drew the lesson: "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." Then our Lord forced home the lesson of the parable by reference to a well-known scripture: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."

When the temple of Solomon was built, the stones were all prepared in the quarry, so that no sound of tool was heard in the building. It is said that one stone was for a long time rejected by the builders as of no use; but it was finally ascertained that it was the chief corner stone. This stone typified Christ. Rejected of men, but chosen of God and precious, He was the tried upon whom if anyone believed He would not be ashamed or confounded.

"Whosoever shall fall upon this stone shall be broken." Whosoever comes before God with a "broken and contrite spirit" (Psalms 51:17), falling unreservedly upon His mercy, will be received. The brokenness is the brokenness of heart so pleasing to God. He dwells with the humble (Isaiah 57:15); God looks with favour upon the contrite of heart (Isaiah 66:2). But whosoever rejects the mercies of God, will, like the Jews, be rejected of God. If they will not receive Christ as a Redeemer, they must meet Him as Judge, when He dispenses judgment without mercy. The lesson for the Jews is a lesson for us all. Let us heed the lesson.

Christ is "the stone which the builders refused." Christ "is despised and rejected of men;" yet He is exalted above all, King of kings, and Lord of lords. That is the way God works, and it is because of that that we may rejoice. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which me despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). It is our hope. "The desire of the wicked shall perish" (Psalms 112:10); "for yet a little while and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be" (Psalms 37:10). "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (1 John 2:17).

It is marvelous to acknowledge Christ as Lord of all – the One in whom we live! "Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalms 37:3-4). What more could be asked for? Read further: "The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Psalms 114:18-19). "The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted" (Proverbs 10:24).

God is a most indulgent Father! "O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in Him" (Psalms 34:8); "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32); Yea, He gives all His children all things that they desire. Yes, to the wicked, as well as to the just. How is it then, that there is such a difference? – because "the desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is only wrath" (Proverbs 11:23). The wicked desire everything except the Lord; but as nothing can exist without the Lord, it follows that when they get their desire they have only destruction; while they who desire only the Lord have everything in Him. When one's heart and flesh cries out for the living God, – when one says, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee" (Psalms 73:25) – the Lord will "send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;" "grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel" (Psalms 20:2, 4).