

CHAPTER 21

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the two main hinges upon which the door of salvation turns. He came into the world on purpose to give his life a ransom; so he had lately said, Matthew 20, 28. And therefore the history of his sufferings, even unto death, and his rising again, is more particularly recorded by all the evangelists than any other part of his story; and to that this evangelist now hastens apace. For at this chapter begins that which is called the passion-week. He had said to his disciples more than once, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and there the Son of man must be betrayed. A great deal of good work he did by the way, and now at length he is come up to Jerusalem; and here we have,

I. The public entry which he made into Jerusalem, upon the first day of the passion-week (v. 1-11).

II. The authority he exercised there, in cleansing the temple, and driving out of it the buyers and sellers (v. 12-16).

III. The barren fig-tree, and his discourse with his disciples thereupon (v. 17-22).

IV. His justifying his own authority, by appealing to the baptism of John (v. 23-27).

V. His shaming the infidelity and obstinacy of the chief priests and elders, with the repentance of the publicans, illustrated by the parable of the two sons (v. 29-32).

VI. His reading the doom of the Jewish church for its unfruitfulness, in the parable of the vineyard let out to unthankful husbandmen (v. 33-46).

Ⓜ MATTHEW 21:1-11

CHRIST'S ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM

All the four evangelists take notice of this passage of Christ's *riding in triumph into Jerusalem*, five days before his death. The passover was on the fourteenth day of the month, and this was the tenth; on which day the

law appointed that the paschal lamb should be taken up (^{<CIT>}Exodus 12:3), and set apart for that service; on that day therefore Christ our Passover, who was to be sacrificed for us, was publicly showed. So that this was the prelude to his passion. He had lodged at Bethany, a village not far from Jerusalem, for some time; at a supper there the night before Mary had *anointed his feet*, ^{<CIT>}John 12:3. But, as usual with ambassadors, he deferred his public entry till some time after his arrival. Our Lord Jesus travelled much, and his custom was to travel on foot from Galilee to Jerusalem, some scores of miles, which was both humbling and toilsome; many a dirty weary step he had when *he went about doing good*. How ill does it become Christians to be inordinately solicitous about their own ease and state, when their Master had so little of either! Yet once in his life he rode in triumph; and it was now when he went into Jerusalem, to suffer and die, as if that were the pleasure and preferment he courted; and then he thought himself begin to look great.

Now here we have,

I. The provision that was made for this solemnity; and it was very poor and ordinary, and such as bespoke his *kingdom* to be *not of this world*. Here were no heralds at arms provided, no trumpet sounded before him, no chariots of state, no liveries; such things as these were not agreeable to his present state of humiliation, but will be far outdone at his second coming, to which his magnificent appearance is reserved, when the last trumpet shall sound, the glorious angels shall be his heralds and attendants, and the clouds his chariots. But in this public appearance,

1. The preparation was sudden and offhand. for his glory in the other world, and ours with him, preparation was made before the foundation of the world, for that was the glory his heart was upon; his glory in this world he was dead to, and therefore, though he had it in prospect, did not forecast for it, but took what came next. They were come to Bethphage, which was the suburb of Jerusalem, and was accounted (say the Jewish doctors) in all things, as Jerusalem, a long scattering street that lay toward the mount of Olives; when he entered upon that, *he sent two of his disciples*, some think Peter and John, to fetch him an ass, for he had none ready for him.

2. It was very mean. He sent only for an ass and her colt, v. 2. Asses were much used in that country for travel; horses were kept only by great men,

and for war. Christ could have summoned a cherub to carry him (^{<4830>}Psalm 18:10); but though *by his name Jah*, which speaks him God, *he rides upon the heavens*, yet now by his name Jesus, *Immanuel, God with us*, in his state of humiliation, he *rides upon an ass*. Yet some think that he had herein an eye to the custom in Israel for the judges to ride upon white asses (^{<4050>}Judges 5:10), and their sons on ass-colts, (^{<0724>}Judges 12:14. And Christ would thus enter, not as a Conqueror, but as the Judge of Israel, *who for judgment came into this world*.

3. It was not his own, but borrowed. Though he had not a house of his own, yet, one would think, like some wayfaring men that live upon their friends, he might have had an ass of his own, to carry him about; but for our sakes he became in all respects poor, (^{<4789>}2 Corinthians 8:9. It is commonly said, “They that live on borrowing, live on sorrowing;” in this therefore, as in other things, Christ *was a man of sorrows* — that he had nothing of this world's goods but what was given him or lent him.

The disciples who were sent to borrow this ass are directed to say, *The Lord has need of him*. Those that are in need, must not be ashamed to own their need, nor say, as the unjust steward, *To beg I am ashamed*, (^{<2043>}Luke 16:3. On the other hand, none ought to impose upon the kindness of their friends, by going to beg or borrow when they have not need. In the borrowing of this ass,

(1.) We have an instance of Christ's knowledge. Though the thing was altogether contingent, yet Christ could tell his disciples where they should find an ass tied, and a colt with her. His omniscience extends itself to the meanest of his creatures; asses and their colts, and their being bound or loosed. *Doth God take care for oxen?* (^{<4909>}1 Corinthians 9:9.) No doubt he doth, and would not see Balaam's ass abused. He knows all the creatures, so as to make them serve his own purpose.

(2.) We have an instance of his power over the spirits of men. The hearts of the meanest subjects, as well as of kings, *are in the hand of the Lord*. Christ asserts his right to use the ass, in bidding them bring it to him; the fulness of the earth is the Lord Christ's; but he foresees some hindrance which disciples might meet with in this service; they must not take them *clam et secreto* — *privily*, but in the sight of the owner, much less *vi et armis* — *with force and arms*, but with the consent of the owner, which he undertakes they shall have; *If any man say aught to you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of him*. Note, What Christ sets us to do, he will bear us out

in the doing of, and furnish us with answers to the objections we may be assaulted with, and make them prevalent; as here, *Straightway he will send them*. Christ, in commanding the ass into his service, showed that he is Lord of hosts; and, in inclining the owner to send him without further security, showed that he is the *God of the spirits of all flesh*, and can bow men's hearts.

(3.) We have an example of justice and honesty, in not using the ass, though for so small a piece of service as riding the length of a street or two, without the owner's consent. As some read the latter clause, it gives us a further rule of justice; "*You shall say the Lord hath need of them, and he*" (that is, *the Lord*) "*will presently send them back, and take care that they be safely delivered to the owner, as soon as he has done with them.*" Note, What we borrow we must restore in due time and in good order; for *the wicked borrows and pays not again*. Care must be taken of borrowed goods, that they be not damaged. *Alas, Master, for it was borrowed!*

II. The prediction that was fulfilled in this, v. 4, 5. Our Lord Jesus, in all that he did and suffered, had very much his eye upon this, *That the scriptures might be fulfilled*. As the prophets looked forward to him (to him they all bare witness), so he looked upon them, that all things which were written of the Messiah, might be punctually accomplished in him. This particularly which was written of him, ^{<300>}Zechariah 9:9, where it ushers in a large prediction of the kingdom of the Messiah, *Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh*, must be accomplished. Now observe here,

1. How the coming of Christ is foretold; *Tell ye the daughter of Sion*, the church, the holy mountain, *Behold, thy King cometh unto thee*. Note,

(1.) Jesus Christ is the church's King, one of our brethren like unto us, according to the law of the kingdom, ^{<575>}Deuteronomy 17:15. He is appointed King over the church, ^{<306>}Psalms 2:6. He is accepted King by the church; the daughter of Sion swears allegiance to him, ^{<311>}Hosea 1:11.

(2.) Christ, the King of his church, came to his church, even in this lower world; he comes to thee, to rule thee, to rule in thee, to rule for thee; he is *Head over all things to the church*. *He came to Sion* (^{<516>}Romans 11:26), that out of Sion the law might go forth; for the church and its interests were all in all with the Redeemer.

(3.) Notice was given to the church beforehand of the coming of her King; *Tell the daughter of Sion*. Note, Christ will have his coming looked for, and waited for, and his subjects big with expectation of it; *Tell the daughters of Sion, that they may go forth, and behold King Solomon*, ^{<201>}Song of Solomon 3:11. Notices of Christ's coming are usually ushered in with a *Behold!* A note commanding both attention and admiration; *Behold thy King cometh*; behold, and wonder at him, behold, and welcome him. Here is a royal progress truly admirable. Pilate, like Caiaphas, said he knew not what, in that great word (^{<204>}John 19:14), *Behold your King*.

2. How his coming is described. When a king comes, something great and magnificent is expected, especially when he comes to take possession of his kingdom. The King, the Lord of hosts, was seen *upon a throne, high and lifted up* (^{<201>}Isaiah 6:1); but there is nothing of that here; *Behold, he cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass*. When Christ would appear in his glory, it is in his meekness, not in his majesty.

(1.) His temper is very mild. He comes not in wrath to take vengeance, but in mercy to work salvation. He is meek to suffer the greatest injuries and indignities for Sion's cause, meek to bear with the follies and unkindness of Sion's own children. He is easy of access, easy to be entreated. He is meek not only as a Teacher, but as a Ruler; he rules by love. His government is mild and gentle, and his laws not written in the blood of his subjects, but in his own. His yoke is easy.

(2.) As an evidence of this, his appearance is very mean, sitting upon an ass, as creature made not for state, but service, not for battles, but for burthens; slow in its motions, but sure, and safe, and constant. The foretelling of this so long before, and the care taken that it should be exactly fulfilled, intimate it to have a peculiar significancy, for the encouragement of poor souls to apply themselves to Christ. Sion's King comes riding, not on a prancing horse, which the timorous petitioner dares not come near, or a running horse, which the slow-footed petitioner cannot keep pace with, but on a quiet ass, that the poorest of his subjects may not be discouraged in their access to him. Mention is made in the prophecy of *a colt, the foal of an ass*; and *therefore* Christ sent for the colt with the ass, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

III. The procession itself, which was answerable to the preparation, both being destitute of worldly pomp, and yet both accompanied with a spiritual power.

Observe,

1. His equipage; *The disciples did as Jesus commanded them* (v. 6); they went to fetch the ass and the colt, not doubting but to find them, and to find the owner willing to lend them. Note, Christ's commands must not be disputed, but obeyed; and those that sincerely obey them, shall not be balked or baffled in it; *They brought the ass and the colt*. The meanness and contemptibleness of the beast Christ rode on, might have been made up with the richness of the trappings; but those were, like all the rest, such as came next to hand; they had not so much as a saddle for the ass, but the disciples threw some of their clothes upon it, and that must serve for want of better accommodations. Note, We ought not to be nice or curious, or to affect exactness, in outward conveniences. A holy indifference or neglect well becomes us in these things: it will evidence that our heart is not upon them, and that we have learned the apostle's rule (⁴⁵²⁶Romans 12:16, margin), *to be content with mean things*. Any thing will serve travellers; and there is a beauty in some sort of carelessness, a noble negligence; yet the disciples furnished him with the best they had, and did not object the spoiling of their clothes when *the Lord had need of them*. Note, We must not think the clothes on our backs too dear to part with for the service of Christ, for the clothing of his poor destitute and afflicted members. *I was naked, and you clothed me,* ⁴⁵²⁶Matthew 25:36. Christ stripped himself for us.

2. His retinue; there was nothing in this stately or magnificent. Sion's King comes to Sion, and the daughter of Sion was told of his coming long before; yet he is not attended by the gentlemen of the country, nor met by the magistrates of the city in their formalities as one might have expected; he should have had the keys of the city presented to him, and should have been conducted with all possible convenience to *the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David*; but here is nothing of all this; yet he has his attendants, *a very great multitude*; they were only the common people, the mob (the *rabble* we should have been apt to call them), that graced the solemnity of Christ's triumph, and none but such. The chief priests and the elders afterward herded themselves with the multitude that abused him upon the cross; but we find none of them here joining with the multitude

that did him honour. Ye see here your calling, brethren, *not many mighty, or noble*, attend on Christ, but *the foolish things of this world and base things, which are despised*, ⁴¹⁶1 Corinthians 1:26, 28. Note, Christ is honoured by the multitude, more than by the magnificence, of his followers; for he values men by their souls, not by their preferments, names, or titles of honour.

Now, concerning this great multitude, we are here told,

(1.) What they did; according to the best of their capacity, they studied to do honour to Christ.

[1.] *They spread their garments in the way*, that he might ride upon them. When Jehu was proclaimed king, the captains put their garments under him, in token of their subjection to him. Note, Those that take Christ for their King must lay their all under his feet; the clothes, in token of the heart; for when Christ comes, though not when any one else comes, it must be *said to the soul, Bow down, that he may go over*. Some think that these garments were spread, not upon the ground, but on the hedges or walls, to adorn the roads; as, to beautify a cavalcade, the balconies are hung with tapestry. This was but a poor piece of state, yet Christ accepted their good-will; and we are hereby taught to contrive how to make Christ welcome, Christ and his grace, Christ and his gospel, into our hearts and houses. How shall we express our respects to Christ? What honour and what dignity shall be done to him?

[2.] *Others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way*, as they used to do at the feast of tabernacles, in token of liberty, victory, and joy; for the mystery of that feast is particularly spoken of as belonging to gospel times, ³⁸⁴⁶Zechariah 14:16.

(2.) What they said; *They that went before, and they that followed*, were in the same tune; both those that gave notice of his coming, and those that attended him with their applauses, *cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David*, v. 9. When they carried branches about at the feast of tabernacles, they were wont to cry *Hosanna*, and from thence to call their bundles of branches their *hosannas*. *Hosanna* signifies, *Save now, we beseech thee*; referring to ⁴¹⁸⁵Psalm 118:25, 26, where the Messiah is prophesied of as the *Head-stone of the corner*, though *the builders refused him*; and all his loyal subjects are brought in triumphing with him, and attending him with

heartly good wishes to the prosperity of all his enterprises. *Hosanna to the Son of David* is, “This we do in honour of the Son of David.”

The hosannas with which Christ was attended bespeak two things:

[1.] Their welcoming his kingdom. *Hosanna* bespeaks the same with, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. It was foretold concerning this Son of David, that *all nations shall call him blessed* (¹⁹²⁷Psalm 72:17); these here began, and all true believers in all ages concur in it, and call him blessed; it is the genuine language of faith. Note, *First*, *Jesus Christ comes in the name of the Lord*; he is sanctified, and sent into the world, as Mediator; *him hath God the Father sealed*. *Secondly*, The coming of Christ in the name of the Lord, is *worthy of all acceptance*; and we all ought to say, *Blessed is he that cometh*; to praise him, and be pleased in him. Let his coming in the name of the Lord be mentioned with strong affections, to our comfort, and joyful acclamations, to his glory. Well may we say, *Blessed is he*; for it is in him that we are blessed. Well may we follow *him* with our blessings, who meets us with his.

[2.] Their wishing well to his kingdom; intimated in their *Hosanna*; earnestly desiring that prosperity and success may attend it, and that it may be a victorious kingdom; “*Send now prosperity to that kingdom*.” If they understood it of a temporal kingdom, and had their hearts carried out thus toward that, it was their mistake, which a little time would rectify; however, their good-will was accepted. Note, It is our duty earnestly to desire and pray for the prosperity and success of Christ's kingdom in the world. Thus *prayer must be made for him continually* (¹⁹²⁸Psalm 72:15), that all happiness may attend his interest in the world, and that, though he may ride on an ass, yet in his majesty he may *ride prosperously, because of that meekness*, (¹⁹³⁰Psalm 45:4. This we mean when we pray, *Thy kingdom come*. They add, *Hosanna in the highest*: Let prosperity in the highest degree attend him, let him have a name above every name, a throne above every throne; or, Let us praise him in the best manner for his church ascend to heaven, to the highest heavens, and fetch in peace and salvation from thence. See ¹⁹³⁶Psalm 20:6. *The Lord saveth his Anointed, and will hear from his high, his holy heaven*.

3. We have here his entertainment in Jerusalem (v. 10); *When he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved*; every one took notice of him, some were moved with wonder at the novelty of the thing, others

with laughter at the meanness of it; some perhaps were moved with joy, *who waited for the Consolation of Israel*; others, of the Pharisaical class, were moved with envy and indignation. So various are the motions in the minds of men upon the approach of Christ's kingdom!

Upon this commotion we are further told,

(1.) What the citizens said; *Who is this?*

[1.] They were, it seems, ignorant concerning Christ. Though he was *the Glory of his people Israel*, yet *Israel knew him not*; though he had distinguished himself by the many miracles he wrought among them, yet *the daughters of Jerusalem knew him not from another beloved*, ²¹⁸⁹Song of Solomon 5:9. The Holy One unknown in the holy city! In places where the clearest light shines, and the greatest profession of religion is made, there is more ignorance than we are.

[2.] Yet they were inquisitive concerning him. Who is this that is thus cried, and comes with so much observation? *Who is this King of glory*, that demands admission into our hearts? ²¹⁸⁸Psalm 24:8; ²⁶¹¹Isaiah 63:1.

(2.) How the multitude answered them; *This is Jesus*, v. 11. The multitude were better acquainted with Christ than the great ones. *Vox populi — The voice of the people*, is sometimes *Vox Dei — the voice of God*. Now, in the account they give of him,

[1.] They were right in calling him *the Prophet, that great Prophet*. Hitherto he had been known as a Prophet, teaching and working miracles; now they attend him as a King; Christ's priestly office was, of all the three, last discovered.

[2.] Yet they missed it, in saying he was *of Nazareth*; and it helped to confirm some in their prejudices against him. Note, Some that are willing to honour Christ, and bear their testimony to him, yet labour under mistakes concerning him, which would be rectified if they would take pains to inform themselves.

~~4212~~ MATTHEW 21:12-17

THE PROFANERS OF THE TEMPLE PUNISHED

When Christ came into Jerusalem, he did not go up to the court or the palace, though he came in as a King, but *into the temple*; for his kingdom is spiritual, and *not of this world*; it is in holy things that he rules, in the temple of God that he exercises authority. Now, what did he do there?

I. Thence he drove the buyers and sellers. Abuses must first be purged out, and the plants not of God's planting be plucked up, before that which is right can be established. The great Redeemer appear as a great Reformer, that turns away ungodliness, ~~4125~~ Romans 11:26. Here we are told,

1. What he did (v. 12); *He cast out all them that sold and bought*; he had done this once before (~~4124~~ John 2:14, 15), but there was occasion to do it again. Note, Buyers and sellers driven out of the temple, will return and nestle there again, if there be not a continual care and oversight to prevent it, and if the blow be not followed, and often repeated.

(1.) The abuse was, buying and selling, and changing money, in the temple. Note, Lawful things, ill timed and ill placed, may become sinful things. That which was decent enough in another place, and not only lawful, but laudable, on another day, *defiles the sanctuary*, and *profanes the sabbath*. This buying and selling, and changing money, though secular employments, yet had the pretence of being *in ordine ad spiritualia* — *for spiritual purposes*. They sold beasts for sacrifice, for the convenience of those that could more easily bring their money with them than their beast; and they changed money for those that wanted the half shekel, which was their yearly poll, or redemption-money; or, upon the bills of return; so that this might pass for the outward business of the house of God; and yet Christ will not allow of it. Note, Great corruptions and abuses come into the church by the practices of those whose *gain is godliness*, that is, who make worldly gain the end of their godliness, and counterfeit godliness their way to worldly gain (~~5145~~ 1 Timothy 6:5); *from such withdraw thyself*.

(2.) The purging out of this abuse. Christ *cast them out that sold*. He did it before *with a scourge of small cords* (~~4125~~ John 2:15); now he did it with a look, with a frown, with a word of command. Some reckon this none of

the least of Christ's miracles, that he should himself thus clear the temple, and not be opposed in it by them who by this craft got their living, and were backed in it by the priests and elders. It is an instance of his power over the spirits of men, and the hold he has of them by their own consciences. This was the only act of regal authority and coercive power that Christ did in the days of his flesh; he began with it, John 2 and here ended with it. Tradition says, that his face shone, and beams of light darted from his blessed eyes, which astonished these market-people, and compelled them to yield to his command; if so, the scripture was fulfilled, ^{<408>}Proverbs 20:8, *A King that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. He overthrew the tables of the money-changers*; he did not take the money to himself, but scattered it, threw it to the ground, the fittest place for it. The Jews, in Esther's time, *on the spoil laid not their hand*, ^{<490>}Esther 9:10.

2. What he said, to justify himself, and to convict them (v. 13); *It is written*. Note, In the reformation of the church, the eye must be upon the scripture, and that must be adhered to as the rule, the pattern in the mount; and we must go no further than we can justify ourselves with, *It is written*. Reformation is *then* right, when corrupted ordinances are reduced to their primitive institution.

(1.) He shows, from a scripture prophecy, what the temple should be, and was designed to be; *My house shall be called the house of prayer*; which is quoted from ^{<250>}Isaiah 56:7. Note, All the ceremonial institutions were intended to be subservient to moral duties; the house of sacrifices was to be a house of prayer, for that was the substance and soul of all those services; the temple was in a special manner sanctified to be a house of prayer, for it was not only the place of that worship, but the medium of it, so that the prayers made in or toward that house had a particular promise of acceptance (^{<442>}2 Chronicles 6:21), as it was a type of Christ; therefore Daniel looked that way in prayer; and in this sense no house or place is now, or can be, a house of prayer, for Christ is our Temple; yet in some sense the appointed places of our religious assemblies may be so called, as *places where prayer is wont to be made*, ^{<443>}Acts 16:13.

(2.) He shows, from a scripture reproof, how they had abused the temple, and perverted the intention of it; *Ye have made it a den of thieves*. This is quoted from ^{<201>}Jeremiah 7:11, *Is this house become a den of robbers in your eyes?* When dissembled piety is made the cloak and cover of iniquity,

it may be said that *the house of prayer* is become a *den of thieves*, in which they lurk, and shelter themselves. Markets are too often dens of thieves, so many are the corrupt and cheating practices in buying and selling; but markets in the temple are certainly so, for they rob God of his honour, the worst of thieves, ^{<308>}Malachi 3:8. The priests lived, and lived plentifully, upon the altar; but, not content with that, they found other ways and means to squeeze money out of the people; and therefore Christ here calls them *thieves*, for they exacted that which did not belong to them.

II. There, in the temple, *he healed the blind and the lame*, v. 14. When he had driven the buyers and sellers out of the temple, he invited the blind and lame into it; for *he fills the hungry with good things, but the rich he sends empty away*. Christ, in the temple, by his word there preached, and in answer to the prayers there made, heals those that are spiritually blind and lame. It is good coming to the temple, when Christ is there, who, as he shows himself jealous for the honour of his temple, in expelling those who profane it, so he shows himself gracious to those who humbly seek him. *The blind and the lame* were debarred David's palace (^{<408>}2 Samuel 5:8), but were admitted into God's house; for the state and honour of his temple lie not in those things wherein the magnificence of princes' palaces is supposed to consist; from them blind and lame must keep their distance, but from God's temple only the wicked and profane. The temple was profane and abused when it was made a market-place, but it was graced and honoured when it was made an hospital; to be doing good in God's, is more honourable, and better becomes it, than to be getting money there. Christ's healing was a real answer to that question, *Who is this?* His works testified of him more than the *hosannas*; and his healing in the temple was the fulfilling of the promise, that *the glory of the latter house should be greater than the glory of the former*.

There also he silenced the offence which the chief priests and scribes took at the acclamations with which he was attended, v. 15, 16. They that should have been most forward to give him honour, were his worst enemies.

1. They were inwardly vexed at the wonderful things that he did; they could not deny them to be true miracles, and therefore were cut to the heart with indignation at them, as ^{<406>}Acts 4:16; 5:33. The works that Christ did, recommended themselves to every man's conscience. If they

had any sense, they could not but own the miracle of them; and if any good nature, could not but be in love with the mercy of them: yet, because they were resolved to oppose him, for these they envied him, and bore him a grudge.

2. They openly quarrelled at the children's hosannas; they thought that hereby an honour was given him, which did not belong to him, and that it looked like ostentation. Proud men cannot bear that honour should be done to any but to themselves, and are uneasy at nothing more than at the just praises of deserving men. Thus Saul envied David the women's songs; and "Who can stand before envy?" When Christ is most honoured, his enemies are most displeased.

Just now we had Christ preferring the blind and the lame before the buyers and sellers; now here we have him (v. 16), taking part with the children against priests and scribes.

Observe,

(1.) The children were in the temple, perhaps playing there; no wonder, when the rulers make it a *market-place*, that the children make it a place of pastime; but we are willing to hope that many of them were worshipping there. Note, It is good to bring children betimes to the house of prayer, *for of such is the kingdom of heaven*. Let children be taught to keep up the form of godliness, it will help to lead them to the power of it. Christ has a tenderness for the lambs of his flock.

(2.) They were there *crying Hosanna to the Son of David*. This they learned from those that were grown up. Little children say and do as they hear others say, and see others do; so easily do they imitate; and therefore great care must be taken to set them good examples, and no bad ones. *Maxima debetur puero reverentia — Our intercourse with the young should be conducted with the most scrupulous care*. Children will learn of those that are with them, either to curse and swear, or to pray and praise. The Jews did betimes teach their children to carry branches at the feast of tabernacles, and to cry *Hosanna*; but God taught them here to apply it to Christ. Note, *Hosanna to the Son of David* well becomes the mouths of little children, who should learn young the language of Canaan.

(3.) Our Lord Jesus not only allowed it, but was very well pleased with it, and quoted a scripture which was fulfilled in it (~~OLD~~ Psalm 8:2), or, at least,

may be accommodated to it; *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise*; which, some think, refers to the children's joining in the acclamations of the people, and the women's songs with which David was honoured when he returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, and therefore is very fitly applied here to the hosannas with which the Son of David was saluted, now that he was entering upon his conflict with Satan, that Goliath. Note,

[1.] Christ is so far from being ashamed of the services of little children, that he takes particular notice of them (and children love to be taken notice of), and is well pleased with them. If God may be honoured by babes and sucklings, who are made to hope at the best, much more by children who are grown up to maturity and some capacity.

[2.] Praise is perfected out of the mouth of such; it has a peculiar tendency to the honour and glory of God for little children to join in his praises; the praise would be accounted defective and imperfect, if they had not their share in it; which is an encouragement for children to be good betimes, and to parents to teach them to be so; the labour neither of the one nor of the other shall be in vain. In the psalm it is, *Thou hast ordained strength*. Note, God *perfecteth praise*, by *ordaining strength out of the mouths of babes and sucklings*. When great things are brought about by weak and unlikely instruments, God is thereby much honoured, for his *strength is perfected in weakness*, and the infirmities of the babes and sucklings serve for a foil to the divine power. That which follows in the psalm, *That thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger*, was very applicable to the priests and scribes; but Christ did not apply it to them, but left it to them to apply it.

Lastly, Christ, having thus silenced them, forsook them, v. 17. *He left them*, in prudence, lest they should now have seized him before his hour was come; in justice, because they had forfeited the favour of his presence. By repining at Christ's praises we drive him from us. *He left them* as incorrigible, and he *went out of the city to Bethany*, which was a more quiet retired place; not so much that he might *sleep* undisturbed as that he might *pray* undisturbed. *Bethany was but two little miles from Jerusalem*; thither he went on foot, to show that, when he rode, it was only to *fulfil the scripture*. He was not lifted up with the hosannas of the people; but, as having forgot them, soon returned to his mean and toilsome way of travelling.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE CURSED

Observe,

I. Christ *returned in the morning to Jerusalem*, v. 18. Some think that he went out of the city over-night, because none of his friends there durst entertain him, for fear of the great men; yet, having work to do there, he returned. Note, We must never be driven off from our duty either by the malice of our foes, or the unkindness of our friends. Though he knew that in this city *bonds and afflictions did abide him, yet none of these things moved him*. Paul followed him when he *went bound in the spirit to Jerusalem*, Acts 30:22.

II. *As he went, he hungered*. He was a Man, and submitted to the infirmities of nature; he was an active Man, and was so intent upon his work, that he neglected his food, and came out, fasting; for *the zeal of God's house did even eat him up*, and his *meat and drink was to do his Father's will*. He was a poor Man, and had no present supply; he was a Man that pleased not himself, for he would willingly have taken up with green raw figs for his breakfast, when it was fit that he should have had something warm.

Christ *therefore* hungered, that he might have occasion to work this miracle, in cursing and so withering the barren fig-tree, and therein might give us an instance of his justice and his power, and both instructive.

1. See his *justice*, v. 19. He went to it, expecting fruit, because it had leaves; but, finding none, he sentenced it to a perpetual barrenness. The miracle had its significance, as well as others of his miracles. All Christ's miracles hitherto were wrought for the good of men, and proved the power of his grace and blessing (the sending the devils into the herd of swine was but a permission); all he did was for the benefit and comfort of his friends, none for the terror or punishment of his enemies; but now, at last, to show that *all judgment is committed to him*, and that *he is able not only to save, but to destroy*, he would give a specimen of the power of his wrath and curse; yet this not on any man, woman, or child, because *the great day of his wrath is not yet come*, but on an inanimate tree; that is set forth for an

example; *Come, learn a parable of the fig-tree,* ^{<12>}Matthew 24:32. The scope of it is the same with *the parable of the fig-tree,* ^{<13>}Luke 13:6.

(1.) This cursing of the barren fig-tree, represents the state of hypocrites in general; and so it teaches us,

[1.] That the fruit of fig-trees may justly be expected from those that have the leaves. Christ looks for the power of religion from those that make profession of it; the favour of it from those that have the show of it; grapes from the vineyard that is planted in a fruitful hill: he hungers after it, his soul *desires the first ripe fruits.*

[2.] Christ's just expectations from flourishing professors are often frustrated and disappointed; he comes to many, seeking fruit, and finds leaves only, and he discovers it. Many have a name to live, and are not alive indeed; dote on the form of godliness, and yet deny the power of it.

[3.] The sin of barrenness is justly punished with the curse and plague of barrenness; *Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.* As one of the chiefest blessings, and which was the first, is, *Be fruitful;* so one of the saddest curses is, *Be no more fruitful.* Thus the sin of hypocrites is made their punishment; they *would* not do good, and therefore they *shall* do none; he that is fruitless, let him be fruitless still, and lose his honour and comfort.

[4.] A false and hypocritical profession commonly withers in this world, and it is the effect of Christ's curse; the fig-tree that had no fruit, soon lost its leaves. Hypocrites may look plausible for a time, but, having no principle, *no root in themselves,* their profession will soon come to nothing; the gifts wither, common graces decay, the credit of the profession declines and sinks, and the falseness and folly of the pretender are manifested to all men.

(2.) It represents the state of the nation and people of the Jews in particular; they were a fig-tree planted in Christ's way, as a church. Now observe,

[1.] The disappointment they gave to our Lord Jesus. He came among them, expecting to find some fruit, something that would be pleasing to him; he hungered after it; not that he *desired a gift,* he needed it not, *but fruit that might abound to a good account.* But his expectations were frustrated; he found nothing but leaves; they called *Abraham their father,*

but did not do the works of Abraham; they professed themselves expectants of the promised Messiah, but, when he came, they did not receive and entertain him.

[2.] The doom he passed upon them, *that never any fruit should grow upon them* or be gathered from them, as a church or as a people, *from henceforward for ever*. Never any good came from them (except the particular persons among them that believe), after they rejected Christ; they became worse and worse; blindness and hardness happened to them, and grew upon them, till they were unchurched, unpeopled, and undone, and their place and nation rooted up; their beauty was defaced, their privileges and ornaments, their temple, and priesthood, and sacrifices, and festivals, and all the glories of their church and state, fell like leaves in autumn. How soon did their fig-tree wither away, after they said, *His blood be on us, and our children!* And the Lord was righteous in it.

2. See the *power* of Christ; the former is wrapped up in the figure, but this more fully discoursed of; Christ intending thereby to direct his disciples in the use of their powers.

(1.) The disciples admired the effect of Christ's curse (v. 20); *They marvelled;* no power could do it but his, *who spake, and it was done*. They marvelled at the suddenness of the thing; *How soon is the fig-tree withered away!* There was no visible cause of the fig-tree's withering, but it was a secret blast, a worm at the root; it was not only the leaves of it that withered, but the body of the tree; it withered away in an instant and became like a dry stick. Gospel curses are, upon this account, the most dreadful — that they work insensibly and silently, by a fire not blown, but effectually.

(2.) Christ empowered them by faith to do the like (v. 21, 22); as he said (~~John~~ John 14:12), *Greater works than these shall ye do*.

Observe,

[1.] The description of this wonder-working faith; *If ye have faith, and doubt not*. Note, Doubting of the power and promise of God is the great thing that spoils the efficacy and success of faith. “If you have faith, and dispute not” (so some read it), “dispute not with yourselves, dispute not with the promise of God; if you *stagger not at the promise*” (~~Romans~~ Romans

4:20); for, as far as we do so, our faith is deficient; as certain as the promise is, so confident our faith should be.

[2.] The power and prevalence of it expressed figuratively; *If ye shall say to this mountain*, meaning the mount of Olives, *Be thou removed, it shall be done*. There might be a particular reason for his saying so of this mountain, for there was a prophecy, that *the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem, should cleave in the midst, and then remove*, ~~344~~ Zechariah 14:4. Whatever was the intent of that word, the same must be the expectation of faith, how impossible soever it might appear to sense. But this is a proverbial expression; intimating that we are to believe that nothing is impossible with God, and therefore that what he has promised shall certainly be performed, though to us it seem impossible. It was among the Jews a usual commendation of their learned Rabbin, that they were removers of mountains, that is, could solve the greatest difficulties; now this may be done by faith acted on the word of God, which will bring great and strange things to pass.

[3.] The way and means of exercising this faith, and of doing that which is to be done by it; *All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive*. Faith is the soul, prayer is the body; both together make a complete man for any service. Faith, if it be right, will excite prayer; and prayer is not right, if it do not spring from faith. This is the condition of our receiving — we must *ask in prayer, believing*. The requests of prayer shall not be denied; the expectations of faith shall not be frustrated. We have many promises to this purport from the mouth of our Lord Jesus, and all to encourage faith, the principal grace, and prayer, the principal duty, of a Christian. It is but ask and have, believe and receive; and what would we more? Observe, How comprehensive the promise is — *all things whatsoever ye shall ask*; this is like all and every the premises in a conveyance. *All things*, in general; *whatsoever*, brings it to particulars; though generals include particulars, yet such is the folly of our unbelief, that, though we think we assent to promises in the general, yet we fly off when it comes to particulars, and therefore, *that we might have strong consolation*, it is thus copiously expressed, *All things whatsoever*.

~~4223~~ MATTHEW 21:23-27

CHRIST QUESTIONED AS TO HIS AUTHORITY

Our Lord Jesus (like St. Paul after him) preached his gospel *with much contention*; his first appearance was in a dispute with *the doctors in the temple, when he was twelve years old*; and here, just before he died, we have him engaged in controversy. In this sense, he was like Jeremiah, *a man of contention; not striving, but striven with*. The great contenders with him, were, *the chief priests and the elders*, the judges of two distinct courts: the chief priests presided in the ecclesiastical court, in all matters of the Lord, as they are called; the elders of the people were judges of the civil courts, in temporal matters. See an idea of both, ~~4495~~ 2 Chronicles 19:5, 8, 11. These joined to attack Christ thinking they should find or make him obnoxious either to the one or to the other. See how woefully degenerate that generation was, when the governors both in church and state, who should have been the great promoters of the Messiah's kingdom, were the great opposers of it! Here we have them disturbing him when he was preaching, v. 23. They would neither receive his instructions themselves, nor let others receive them. Observe,

I. As soon as he came into Jerusalem, he went to the temple, though he had been affronted there the day before, was there in the midst of enemies and in the mouth of danger; yet thither he went, for there he had a fairer opportunity of doing good to souls than any where else in Jerusalem. Though he came hungry to the city, and was disappointed of a breakfast at the barren fig-tree, yet, for aught that appears, he went straight to the temple, as one that *esteemed the words of God's mouth*, the preaching of them, *more than his necessary food*.

II. In the temple he was teaching; he had called it *a house of prayer* (v. 13), and here we have him preaching there. Note, In the solemn assemblies of Christians, praying and preaching must go together, and neither must encroach upon, or jostle out, the other. To make up communion with God, we must not only speak to him in prayer, but hear what he has to say to us by his word; ministers must *give themselves both to the word and to prayer*, ~~4404~~ Acts 6:4. Now that Christ *taught in the temple*, that scripture was fulfilled (~~2108~~ Isaiah 2:3), *Let us go up to the house of the Lord, and he*

will teach us his ways. The priests of old often taught there *the good knowledge of the Lord*; but they never had such a teacher as this.

III. When Christ was teaching the people, the priests and elders came upon him, and challenged him to produce his orders; the hand of Satan was in this, to hinder him in his work. Note, It cannot but be a trouble to a faithful minister, to be taken off, or diverted from, plain and practical preaching, by an unavoidable necessity of engaging in controversies, yet good was brought out of this evil, for hereby occasion was given to Christ to dispel the objections that were advanced against him, to the greater satisfaction of his followers; and, while his adversaries thought by their power to have silenced him, he by his wisdom silenced them.

Now, in this dispute with them, we may observe,

1. How he was assaulted by their insolent demand; *By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?* Had they duly considered his miracles, and the power by which he wrought them, they needed not to have asked this question; but they must have something to say for the shelter of an obstinate infidelity. “Thou ridest in triumph into Jerusalem, receivest the hosannas of the people, controllest in the temple, drivest out such as had license to be there, from the rulers of the temple, and paid them rent; thou are here preaching a new doctrine; whence hadst thou a commission to do all this? Was it from Caesar, or from the high priest, or from God? Produce thy warrant, thy credentials. Dost not thou take too much upon thee?” Note, It is good for all that take upon them to act with authority, to put this question to themselves, “Who gave us that authority?” For, unless a man be clear in his own conscience concerning that, he cannot act with any comfort or hope of success. They who run before their warrant, run without their blessing, ^{<422>}Jeremiah 23:21, 22.

Christ had often said it, and proved it beyond contradiction, and Nicodemus, a master in Israel, had owned it, that he was *a teacher sent of God* (^{<440>}John 3:2); yet, at this time of day, when that point had been so fully cleared and settled, they come to him with this question.

(1.) In the ostentation of their own power, as chief priests and elders, which they thought authorized them to call him to an account in this manner. How haughtily do they ask, *Who gave thee this authority?* Intimating that he could have no authority, because he had none from them, ^{<1224>}1 Kings 22:24; ^{<240>}Jeremiah 20:1. Note, It is common for the

greatest abusers of their power to be the most rigorous assertors of it, and to take a pride and pleasure in any thing that looks like the exercise of it.

(2.) It was to ensnare and entangle him. Should he refuse to answer this question, they would enter judgment against him upon *Nihil dicit* — *He says nothing*; would condemn him as standing mute; and would insinuate to the people, that his silence was a tacit confessing of himself to be a usurper: should he plead an authority from God, they would, as formerly, demand a sign from heaven, or make his *defence* his *offence*, and accuse him of blasphemy for it.

2. How he answered this demand with another, which would help them to answer it themselves (v. 24, 25); *I also will ask you one thing*. He declined giving them a direct answer, lest they should take advantage against him; but answers them with a question. Those that are *as sheep in the midst of wolves*, have need to be *wise as serpents: the heart of the wise studieth to answer*. We must give a reason of the hope that is in us, not only with meekness, but with fear (☞1 Peter 3:15), with prudent caution, lest truth be damaged, or ourselves endangered.

Now this question is concerning John's baptism, here put for his whole ministry, preaching as well as baptizing; “Was this *from heaven, or of men?* One of the two it must be; either what he did was of his own head, or he was sent of God to do it.” Gamaliel's argument turned upon this hinge (☞Acts 5:38, 39); either *this counsel is of men or of God*. Though that which is manifestly bad cannot be of God, yet that which is seemingly good may be of men, nay of Satan, when *he transforms himself into an angel of light*. This question was not at all shuffling, to evade theirs; but,

(1.) If they answered this question, it would answer theirs: should they say, against their consciences, that John's baptism was of men, yet it would be easy to answer, *John did no miracle* (☞John 10:41), Christ did many; but should they say, as they could not but own, that John's baptism was from heaven (which was supposed in the questions sent him, ☞John 1:21, *Art thou Elias, or that prophet?*) then their demand was answered, for he bare testimony to Christ. Note, Truths appear in the clearest light when they are taken in their due order; the resolving of the *previous* questions will be a key to the *main* question.

(2.) If they refused to answer it, that would be a good reason why he should not offer proofs of his authority to men that were obstinately

prejudiced against the strongest conviction; it was but to cast pearls before swine. Thus *he taketh the wise in their own craftiness* (~~ARE~~ 1 Corinthians 3:19); and those that would not be convinced of the plainest truths, shall be convicted of the vilest malice, against John first, then against Christ, and in both against God.

3. How they were hereby baffled and run aground; they knew the truth, but would not own it, and so were taken in the snare they laid for our Lord Jesus. Observe,

(1.) How *they reasoned with themselves*, not concerning the merits of the cause, what proofs there were of the divine original of John's baptism; no, their care was, how to make their part good against Christ. Two things they considered and consulted, in this reasoning with themselves — their credit, and their safety; the same things which *they* principally aim at, who *seek their own things*.

[1.] They consider their own credit, which they would endanger if they should own John's baptism to be of God; for then Christ would ask them, before all the people. *Why did ye not believe him?* And to acknowledge that a doctrine is from God, and yet not to receive and entertain it, is the greatest absurdity and iniquity that a man can be charged with. Many that will not be kept by the fear of sin from neglecting and opposing that which they know to be true and good are kept by the fear of shame from owning that to be true and good which they neglect and oppose. Thus they *reject the counsel of God against themselves*, in not submitting to John's baptism, and are left without excuse.

[2.] They consider their own safety, that they would expose themselves to the resentments of the people, if they should say that John's baptism was of men; *We fear the people, for all hold John as a prophet*. It seems, then, *First*, That the people had truer sentiments of John than the chief priests and the elders had, or, at least, were more free and faithful in declaring their sentiments. This people, of whom they said in their pride that they *knew not the law, and were cursed* (~~ARE~~ John 7:49), it seems, knew the gospel, and were blessed. *Secondly*, That the chief priests and elders stood in awe of the common people, which is an evidence that things were in disorder among them, and that mutual jealousies were at a great height; that the government was become obnoxious to the hatred and scorn of the people, and the scripture was fulfilled, *I have made you contemptible and base*, ~~ARE~~ Malachi 2:8, 9. If they had kept their integrity, and done their

duty, they had kept up their authority, and needed not to fear the people. We find sometimes that the people feared them, and it served them for a reason why they did not confess Christ, ^{<402>}John 9:22, 12:42. Note, Those could not but fear the people, who studied only how to make the people fear them. *Thirdly*, That it is usually the temper even of common people to be zealous for the honour of that which they account sacred and divine. If they *account John as a prophet*, they will not endure that it should be said, *His baptism was of men*; hence the hottest contests have been about holy things. *Fourthly*, That the chief priests and elders were kept from an open denial of the truth, even against the conviction of their own minds, not by the fear of God, but purely by the fear of the people; as the *fear of man* may *bring good people into a snare* (^{<125>}Proverbs 29:25), so sometimes it may keep bad people from being *overmuch wicked, lest they should die before their time*, ^{<207>}Ecclesiastes 7:17. Many bad people would be much worse than they are, if they durst.

(2.) How they replied to our Saviour, and so dropped the question. They fairly confessed *We cannot tell*; that is, “We will not;” *ouk oi damen* — *We never knew*. The more shame for them, while they pretended to be leaders of the people, and by their office were obliged to take cognizance of such things; when they would not confess their knowledge, they were constrained to confess their ignorance. And observe, by the way, when they said, *We cannot tell*, they told a lie, for they knew that John's baptism was of God. Note, There are many who are more afraid of the *shame* of lying than of the *sin*, and therefore scruple not to speak that which they know to be false concerning their own thoughts and apprehensions, their affections and intentions, or their remembering or forgetting of things, because in those things they know nobody can disprove them.

Thus Christ avoided the snare they laid for him, and justified himself in refusing to gratify them; *Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things*. If they be so wicked and base as either not to believe, or not to confess, that the baptism of John was from heaven (though it obliged to repentance, that great duty, and sealed the kingdom of God at hand, that great promise), they were not fit to be discoursed with concerning Christ's authority; for men of such a disposition could not be convinced of the truth, nay, they could not but be provoked by it, and therefore *he that is thus ignorant, let him be ignorant still*. Note, Those that imprison the truths they know, in unrighteousness (either by not professing them, or by not practising according to them), are justly denied the further truths they

enquire after, ^{<418>}Romans 1:18, 19. Take away the talent from him that buried it; those that *will not see, shall not see.*

^{<428>}MATTHEW 21:28-32

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

As Christ instructed his disciples by parables, which made the instructions the more easy, so sometimes he convinced his adversaries by parables, which bring reproofs more close, and make men, or ever they are aware, to reprove themselves. Thus Nathan convinced David by a parable (^{<421>}2 Samuel 22:1), and the woman of Tekoa surprised him in like manner, ^{<442>}2 Samuel 14:2: Reproving parables are appeals to the offenders themselves, and judge them out of their own mouths. This Christ designs here, as appears by the first words (v. 28), *But what think you?*

In these verses we have the parable of the *two sons* sent to work in the vineyard, the scope of which is to show that they who knew not John's baptism to be of God, were shamed even by the publicans and harlots, who knew it, and owned it. Here is,

I. The parable itself, which represents two sorts of persons; some that prove better than they promise, represented by the first of those sons; others that promise better than they prove represented by the second.

1. They had both one and the same father, which signifies that God is a common Father to all mankind. There are favours which all alike receive from him, and obligations which all alike lie under to him; *Have we not all one Father?* Yes, and yet there is a vast difference between men's characters.

2. They had both the same command given them; *Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.* Parents should not breed up their children in idleness; nothing is more pleasing, and yet nothing more pernicious, to youth than that. ^{<437>}Lamentations 3:27. God sets his children to work, though they are all heirs. This command is given to every one of us. Note,

(1.) The work of religion, which we are called to engage in, is vineyard work, creditable, profitable, and pleasant. By the sin of Adam we were

turned out to work upon the common, and to eat the herb of the field; but by the grace of our Lord Jesus we are called to work again in the vineyard.

(2.) The gospel call to work in the vineyard, requires present obedience; *Son, go work to-day*, while it is called to-day, because *the night comes when no man can work*. We were not sent into the world to be idle, nor had we daylight given us to play by; and therefore, if ever we mean to do any thing for God and our souls, why not now? Why not to-day?

(3.) The exhortation to go *work to-day in the vineyard*, speaketh unto us as unto children (^{HEB} Hebrews 12:5); *Son, go work*. It is the command of a Father, which carries with it both authority and affection, a Father that pities his children, and considers their frame, and will not overtask them (^{PSS} Psalm 103:13, 14), a Father that is very tender of *his Son that serves him*, (^{MAL} Malachi 3:17. If we work in our Father's vineyard, we work for ourselves.

3. Their conduct was very different.

(1.) One of the sons did better than he said, proved better than he promised. His answer was bad, but his actions were good.

[1.] Here is the untoward answer that he gave to his father; he said, flat and plain *I will not*. See to what a degree of impudence the corrupt nature of man rises, to say, *I will not*, to the command of a Father; such a command of such a Father; they are impudent children, and stiff-hearted. Those that will not bend, surely they cannot blush; if they had any degree of modesty left them, they could not say, *We will not*. (^{JER} Jeremiah 2:25. Excuses are bad, but downright denials are worse; yet such peremptory refusals do the calls of the gospel often meet with. *First*, Some love their ease, and will not work; they would live in the world as leviathan in the waters, to play therein (^{PSS} Psalm 104:26); they do not love working. *Secondly*, Their hearts are so much upon their own fields, that they are not for working in God's vineyard. They love the business of the world better than the business of their religion. Thus some by the delights of sense, and others by the employments of the world, are kept from doing that great work which they were sent into the world about, and so *stand all the day idle*.

[2.] Here is the happy change of his mind, and of his way, upon second thought; *Afterward he repented, and went*. Note, There are many who in

the beginning are wicked and wilful, and very unpromising, who afterward repent and mend, and come to something. Some that God hath chosen, are suffered for a great while to run to a great excess of riot; *Such were some of you*, ^{<461>}1 Corinthians 6:11. These are set forth for *patterns of long-suffering*, ^{<5116>}1 Timothy 1:16. *Afterward he repented*. Repentance is *metanoia* — an after-wit: and *metameleia* — an after-care. Better late than never. Observe, When he repented he went; that was the *fruit meet for repentance*. The only evidence of our repentance for our former resistance, is, immediately to comply, and set to work; and then what is past, shall be pardoned, and all shall be well. See what a kind Father God is; he resents not the affront of our refusals, as justly he might. He that told his father to his face, that he *would not* do as he bid him, deserved to be turned out of doors, and disinherited; but our God *waits to be gracious*, and, notwithstanding our former follies, if we repent and mend, will favourably accept of us; blessed be God, we are under a covenant that leaves room for such a repentance.

(2.) The other son said better than he did, promised better than he proved; his answer was good but his actions bad. To him the father *said likewise*, v. 30. The gospel call, though very different, is, in effect, the same to all, and is carried on with an even tenour. We have all the same commands, engagements, encouragements, though to some they are a savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death. Observe,

[1.] How fairly this other son promised; *He said, I go, sir*. He gives his father a title of respect, *sir*. Note, It becomes children to speak respectfully to their parents. It is one branch of that honour which the fifth commandment requires. He professes a ready obedience, *I go*; not, “I will go by and by,” but, “Ready, sir, you may depend upon it, I go just now.” This answer we should give from the heart heartily to all the calls and commands of the word of God. See ^{<4122>}Jeremiah 3:22; ^{<4278>}Psalms 27:8.

[2.] How he failed in the performance; *He went not*. Note, There are many that give good words, and make fair promises, in religion, and those from some good motions for the present, that rest there, and go no further, and so come to nothing. Saying and doing are two things; and many there are that say, and do not; it is particularly charged upon the Pharisees, ^{<4123>}Matthew 23:3. Many with their mouth show much love, but their heart goes another way. They had a good mind to be religious, but they met with something to be done, that was too hard, or something to be parted with,

that was too dear, and so their purposes are to no purpose. Buds and blossoms are not fruit.

II. A general appeal upon the parable; *Whether of them twain did the will of his father?* v. 31. They both had their faults, one was rude and the other was false, such variety of exercises parents sometimes have in the different humours of their children, and they have need of a great deal of wisdom and grace to know what is the best way of managing them. But the question is, Which was the better of the two, and the less faulty? And it was soon resolved; the first, because his actions were better than his words, and his latter end than his beginning. This they had learned from the common sense of mankind, who would much rather deal with one that will be better than his word, than with one that will be false to his word. And, in the intention of it, they had learned from the account God gives of the rule of his judgment (^{<382>}Ezekiel 18:21-24), that if *the sinner turn from his wickedness*, he shall be pardoned; and if *the righteous man turn from his righteousness*, he shall be rejected. The tenour of the whole scripture gives us to understand that those are accepted as doing their Father's will, who, wherein they have missed it, are sorry for it, and do better.

III. A particular application of it to the matter in hand, v. 31, 32. The primary scope of the parable is, to show how the publicans and harlots, who never talked of the Messiah and his kingdom, yet entertained the doctrine, and submitted to the discipline, of John the Baptist, his forerunner, when the priests and elders, who were big with expectations of the Messiah, and seemed very ready to go into his measures, slighted John the Baptist, and ran counter to the designs of his mission. But it has a further reach; the Gentiles were *sometimes disobedient*, had been long so, children of disobedience, like the elder son (^{<313>}Titus 3:3, 4); yet, when the gospel was preached to them, they became obedient to the faith; whereas the Jews who said, *I go, sir, promised fair* (^{<24>}Exodus 24:7; ^{<24>}Joshua 24:24); yet went not; they did but flatter God with their mouth. ^{<36>}Psalms 78:36.

In Christ's application of this parable, observe.

1. How he proves that John's baptism was *from heaven, and not of men*. "If you *cannot* tell," saith Christ, "you *might* tell,"

(1.) By the scope of his ministry; *John came unto you in the way of righteousness*. Would you know whether John had his commission from

heaven, remember the rule of trial, *By their fruits ye shall know them*; the fruits of their doctrines, the fruits of their doings. Observe but their way, and you may trace out both their rise and their tendency. Now it was evident that John came *in the way of righteousness*. In his ministry, he taught people to repent, and to work the works of righteousness. In his conversation, he was a great example of strictness, and seriousness, and contempt of the world, denying himself, and doing good to every body else. Christ *therefore* submitted to the baptism of John, because it *became him to fulfil all righteousness*. Now, if John thus came in the way of righteousness, could they be ignorant that his baptism was from heaven, or make any doubt of it?

(2.) By the success of his ministry; *The publicans and the harlots believed him*; he did abundance of good among the worst sort of people. St. Paul proves his apostleship by the seals of his ministry, ~~410~~1 Corinthians 9:2. If God had not sent John the Baptist, he would not have crowned his labours with such wonderful success, nor have made him so instrumental as he was for the conversion of souls. If publicans and harlots believe his report, surely the arm of the Lord is with him. The people's profiting is the minister's best testimonial.

2. How he reproveth them for their contempt of John's baptism, which yet, for fear of the people, they were not willing to own. To shame them for it, he sets before them the faith, repentance, and obedience, of the publicans and harlots, which aggravated their unbelief and impenitence. As he shows, ~~411~~Matthew 11:21, that the less likely would have repented, so here that the less likely did repent.

(1.) The publicans and harlots were like the first son in the parable, from whom little of religion was expected. They promised little good, and those that knew them promised themselves little good from them. Their disposition was generally rude, and their conversation profligate and debauched; and yet many of them were wrought upon by the ministry of John, who came in the spirit and power of Elias. See ~~412~~Luke 7:29. These fitly represented the Gentile world; for, as Dr. Whitby observes, the Jews generally ranked the publicans with the heathen; nay, and the heathen were represented by the Jews as harlots, and born of harlots, ~~413~~John 8:41.

(2.) The scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and elders, and indeed the Jewish nation in general, were like the other son that gave good words; they made a specious profession of religion, and yet, when the kingdom of

the Messiah was brought among them by the baptism of John, they slighted it, they turned their back upon it, nay they *lifted up the heel against it*. A hypocrite is more hardly convinced and converted than a gross sinner; the form of godliness, if that be rested in, becomes one of Satan's strongholds, by which he opposes the power of godliness. It was an aggravation of their unbelief,

[1.] That John was such an excellent person, that he came, and came to them, in *the way of righteousness*. The better the means are, the greater will the account be, if not improved.

[2.] That, when they saw the publicans and harlots go before them into the kingdom of heaven, they did not afterward repent and believe; were not thereby provoked to a holy emulation, ^{4114} Romans 11:14. Shall publicans and harlots go away with grace and glory; and shall not we put in for a share? Shall our inferiors be more holy and more happy than we? They had not the wit and grace that Esau had, who was moved to take other measures than he had done, by the example of his younger brother, ^{4186} Genesis 28:6. These proud priests, that set up for leaders, scorned to follow, though it were into the kingdom of heaven, especially to follow publicans; through the pride of their countenance, they would not seek after God, after Christ, ^{4104} Psalm 10:4.

^{4233} MATTHEW 21:33-46

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

This parable plainly sets forth the sin and ruin of the Jewish nation; they and their leaders are the husbandmen here; and what is spoken for conviction to them, is spoken for caution to all that enjoy the privileges of the visible church, not to be high-minded, but fear.

I. We have here the privileges of the Jewish church, represented by the letting out of a vineyard to the husbandmen; they were as tenants holding by, from, and under, God the great Householder. Observe,

1. How God established a church for himself in the world. The kingdom of God upon earth is here compared to a vineyard, furnished with all things requisite to an advantageous management and improvement of it.

(1.) He planted this vineyard. The church is *the planting of the Lord*, ^{<260>}Isaiah 61:3. The forming of a church is a work by itself, like the planting of a vineyard, which requires a great deal of cost and care. It is *the vineyard which his right hand has planted* (^{<805>}Psalms 80:15), planted with the *choicest vine* (^{<218>}Isaiah 5:2), *a noble vine*, ^{<412>}Jeremiah 2:21. The earth of itself produces thorns and briars; but vines must be planted. The being of a church is owing to God's distinguishing favour, and his manifesting himself to some, and not to others.

(2.) He hedged it round about. Note, God's church in the world is taken under his special protection. It is *a hedge round about*, like that about Job on every side (^{<810>}Job 1:10), a wall of fire, ^{<305>}Zechariah 2:5. Wherever God has a church, it is, and will always be, his peculiar care. The covenant of circumcision and the ceremonial law were a hedge or a wall of partition about the Jewish church, which is taken down by Christ; who yet has appointed a gospel order and discipline to be the hedge of his church. He will not have his vineyard to lie in common, that those who are without, may thrust in at pleasure; not to lie at large, that those who are within, may lash out at pleasure; but care is taken to set bounds about this holy mountain.

(3.) He *digged a wine-press and built a tower*. The altar of burnt-offerings was the wine-press, to which all the offerings were brought. God instituted ordinances in his church, for the due oversight of it, and for the promoting of its fruitfulness. What could have been done more to make it every way convenient?

2. How he entrusted these visible church-privileges with the nation and people of the Jews, especially their chief priests and elders; he let it out to them as husbandmen, not because he had need of them as landlords have of their tenants, but because he would try them, and be honoured by them. When in Judah God was known, and his name was great, when they were taken to be to God *for a people, and for a name, and for a praise* (^{<2431>}Jeremiah 13:11), when he *revealed his word unto Jacob* (^{<1479>}Psalms 147:19), when the *covenant of life and peace* was made with Levi (^{<304>}Malachi 2:4, 5), then this vineyard was let out. See an abstract of the lease, ^{<2181>}Song of Solomon 8:11, 12. The Lord of the vineyard was to have *a thousand pieces of silver* (compare ^{<2073>}Isaiah 7:13); the main profit was to be his, but the keepers were to have two hundred, a competent and comfortable encouragement. And then he *went into a far country*. When

God had in a visible appearance settled the Jewish church at mount Sinai, he did in a manner withdraw; they had no more such open vision, but were left to the written word. Or, they imagined that he was gone into a far country, as Israel, when they made the calf, fancied that Moses was gone. They put far from them the evil day.

II. God's expectation of rent from these husbandmen, v. 34. It was a reasonable expectation; for *who plants a vineyard, and eats not of the fruit thereof?* Note, From those that enjoy church-privileges, both ministers and people, God looks for fruit accordingly.

1. His expectations were not hasty; he did not demand a fore-rent, though he had been at such expense upon it; but staid *till the time of the fruit drew near*, as it did now that John preached the *kingdom of heaven is at hand*. God waits to be gracious, that he may give us time.

2. They were not high; he did not require them to come at their peril, upon penalty of forfeiting their lease if they ran behind-hand; but he sent his *servants to them*, to remind them of their duty, and of the rent-day, and to help them in gathering in the fruit, and making return of it. These servants were the prophets of the Old Testament, who were sent, and sometimes directly, to the people of the Jews, to reprove and instruct them.

3. They were not hard; it was only to *receive the fruits*. He did not demand more than they could make of it, but some fruit of that which he himself planted — an observance of the laws and statutes he gave them. What could have been done more reasonable? Israel was an empty vine, nay it was become the degenerate plant of a strange vine, and brought forth wild grapes.

III. The husbandmen's baseness in abusing the messengers that were sent to them.

1. When he sent them his servants, they abused them, though they represented the master himself, and spoke in his name. Note, The calls and reproofs of the word, if they do not engage, will but exasperate. See here what hath all along been the lot of God's faithful messengers, more or less;

(1.) To suffer; *so persecuted they the prophets*, who were hated with a cruel hatred. They not only despised and reproached them, but treated them as the worst of malefactors — they beat them, and killed them, and stoned them. They beat Jeremiah, killed Isaiah, stoned Zechariah the son

of Jehoiada in the temple. If they that *live godly in Christ Jesus* themselves shall *suffer persecution*, much more they that press others to it. This was God's old quarrel with the Jews, misusing his prophets, ^{<446>}2 Chronicles 36:16.

(2.) It has been their lot to suffer from their Master's own tenants; they were the husbandmen that treated them thus, the chief priests and elders that *sat in Moses's chair*, that professed religion and relation to God; these were the most bitter enemies of the Lord's prophets, that cast them out, and killed them, and said, *Let the Lord be glorified*, ^{<216>}Isaiah 66:5 See ^{<200>}Jeremiah 20:1, 2; 26:11.

Now see,

[1.] How God persevered in his goodness to them. He sent other servants, more than the first; though the first sped not, but were abused. He had sent them John the Baptist, and him they had beheaded; and yet he sent them his disciples, to prepare his way. O the riches of the patience and forbearance of God, in keeping up in his church a despised, persecuted ministry!

[2.] How they persisted in their wickedness. They *did unto them likewise*. One sin makes way for another of the same kind. They that are drunk with the blood of the saints, add drunkenness to thirst, and still cry, Give, give.

2. At length, he sent them his Son; we have seen God's goodness in sending, and their badness in abusing, the servants; but in the latter instance both these exceed themselves.

(1.) Never did grace appear more gracious than in *sending the Son*. This was done *last of all*. Note, All the prophets were harbingers and forerunners to Christ. He was sent last; for if nothing else would work upon them, surely this would; it was therefore served for the *ratio ultima* — *the last expedient*. *Surely they will reverence my Son*, and therefore I will send him. Note, It might reasonably be expected that the Son of God, when he came to his own, should be revered; and reverence to Christ would be a powerful and effectual principle of fruitfulness and obedience, to the glory of God; if they will but reverence the Son, the point is gained. *Surely they will reverence my Son*, for he comes with more authority than the servants could; judgment is committed to him, that *all men should*

honour him. There is greater danger in refusing him than in despising Moses's law.

(2.) Never did sin appear more sinful than in the abusing of him, which was now to be done in two or three days. Observe,

[1.] How it was plotted (v. 38); *When they saw the Son:* when he came, whom the people owned and followed as the Messiah, who would either have the rent paid, or distraint for it; this touched their copyhold, and they were resolved to make one bold push for it, and to preserve their wealth and grandeur by taking *him* out of the way, who was the only hindrance to it, and rival with them. *This is the heir, come, let us kill him.* Pilate and Herod, the princes of this world, *knew not;* for *if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,* ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 2:8. But the *chief priests and elders* knew that *this was the heir,* at least some of them; and therefore *Come, let us kill him.* Many are killed for what they have. The chief thing they envied him, and for which they hated and feared him, was his interest in the people, and their hosannas, which, if he was taken off, they hope to engross securely to themselves. They pretended that he must die, to save the people from the Romans (~~1~~ John 11:50); but really he must die, to save their hypocrisy and tyranny from that reformation which the expected kingdom of the Messiah would certainly bring along with it. He drives the buyers and sellers out of the temple; and therefore *let us kill him;* and then, as if the premises must of course go to the occupant, *let us seize on his inheritance.* They thought, if they could but get rid of this Jesus, they should carry all before them in the church without control, might impose what traditions, and force the people to what submissions, they pleased. Thus they *take counsel against the Lord and his Anointed;* but he that *sits in heaven,* laughs to see them *outshot in their own bow;* for, while they thought to kill him, and so to seize on his inheritance, he went by his cross to his crown, and they were broken pieces with a rod of iron, and their inheritance seized. ~~2~~ Psalm 2:2, 3, 6, 9.

[2.] How this plot was executed, v. 39. While they were so set upon killing him, in pursuance of their design to secure their own pomp and power, and while he was so set upon dying, in pursuance of his design to subdue Satan, and save his chosen, no wonder if they soon *caught him, and slew him,* when his hour was come. Though the Roman power condemned him, yet it is still charged upon the chief priests and elders; for they were not only the prosecutors, but the principal agents, and had *the greater sin.* *Ye*

have taken, ^{<402>}Acts 2:23. Nay looking upon him to be as unworthy to live, as they were unwilling he should, *they cast him out of the vineyard*, out of the holy church, which they supposed themselves to have the key of, and out of the holy city for he was crucified *without the gate*, ^{<583D>}Hebrews 13:12. As if *He* had been the shame and reproach, who was the greatest glory of his people Israel. Thus they who persecuted the servants, persecuted the Son; as men treat God's ministers, they would treat Christ himself, if he were with them.

IV. Here is their doom read out of their own mouths, v. 40, 41. He puts it to them, *When the Lord of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto these husbandmen?* He puts it to themselves, for their stronger conviction, that *knowing the judgment of God* against them which do such things, they might be the more inexcusable. Note, God's proceedings are so unexceptionable, that there needs but an appeal to sinners themselves concerning the equity of them. God will be *justified when he speaks*. They could readily answer, *He will miserably destroy those wicked men*. Note, Many can easily prognosticate the dismal consequences of other people's sins, that see not what will be the end of their own.

1. Our Saviour, in his question, supposes that *the lord of the vineyard will come*, and reckon with them. God is the Lord of the vineyard; the property is his, and he will make *them* know it, who now *lord it over his heritage*, as if it were all their own. The Lord of the vineyard will come. Persecutors say in their hearts, *He delays his coming, he doth not see, he will not require*; but they shall find, though he bear long with them, he will not bear always. It is comfort to abused saints and ministers, that *the Lord is at hand, the Judge stands before the door*. When he comes, what will he do to carnal professors? What will he do to cruel persecutors? They must be called to account, they have their day now; but he *sees that his day is coming*.

2. They, in their answer, suppose that it will be a terrible reckoning; the crime appearing so very black, you may be sure,

(1.) That he will *miserably destroy those wicked men*; it is destruction that is their doom. *Kakous kakos apolesei* — *Malos male perdet*. Let men never expect to do ill, and fare well. This was fulfilled upon the Jews, in that miserable destruction which was brought upon them by the Romans, and was completed about forty years after this; and unparalleled ruin,

attended with all the most dismal aggravating circumstances. It will be fulfilled upon all that tread in the steps of their wickedness; hell is everlasting destruction, and it will be the most miserable destruction to them of all others, that have enjoyed the greatest share of church privileges, and have not improved them. The hottest place in hell will be the portion of hypocrites and persecutors.

(2.) That he will *let out his vineyard to other husbandmen*. Note, God will have a church in the world, notwithstanding the unworthiness and opposition of many that abuse the privileges of it. The unbelief and frowardness of man shall not make the word of God of no effect. If one will not, another will. The Jews' leavings were the Gentiles' feast. Persecutors may destroy the ministers, but cannot destroy the church. The Jews imagined that no doubt *they were the people*, and wisdom and holiness must *die with them*; and if they were cut off, what would God do for a church in the world? But when God makes use of any to bear up his name, it is not because he needs them, nor is he at all beholden to them. If we were made a desolation and an astonishment, God could build a flourishing church upon our ruins; for he is never at a loss what to do for his great name, whatever becomes of us, and of our place and nation.

V. The further illustration and application of this by Christ himself, telling them, in effect, that they had rightly judged.

1. He illustrates it by referring to a scripture fulfilled in this (v. 42); *Did ye never read in the scriptures?* Yes, no doubt, they had often read and sung it, but had not considered it. We lose the benefit of what we read for want of meditation. The scripture he quotes is ~~1182~~ Psalm 118:22, 23, the same context out of which the children fetched their hosannas. The same word yields matter of praise and comfort to Christ's friends and followers, which speaks conviction and terror to his enemies. Such a two-edged sword is the word of God. That scripture, the *Stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner*, illustrates the preceding parable, especially that part of it which refers to Christ.

(1.) The builders' rejecting of the stone is the same with the husbandmen's abusing of the son that was sent to them. The chief priests and the elders were the builders, had the oversight of the Jewish church, which was God's building: and they would not allow Christ a place in their building, would not admit his doctrine or laws into their constitution; they threw

him aside as a despised broken vessel, a stone that would serve only for a stepping-stone, to be trampled upon.

(2.) The advancing of this stone to be the head of the corner is the same with *letting out the vineyard to other husbandmen*. He who was rejected by the Jews was embraced by the Gentiles; and to that church where there is no difference of circumcision or uncircumcision, *Christ is all, and in all*. His authority over the gospel church, and influence upon it, his ruling it as the Head, and uniting it as the Corner-stone, are the great tokens of his exaltation. Thus, in spite of the malice of the priests and elders, he *divided a portion with the great*, and received *his kingdom*, though they would not have him to reign over them.

(3.) The hand of God was in all this; *This is the Lord's doing*. Even the rejecting of him by the Jewish builders was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; he permitted and overruled it; much more was his advancement to the Head of the corner; his right hand and his holy arm brought it about; it was God himself that *highly exalted him*, and gave him *a name above every name; and it is marvellous in our eyes*. The wickedness of the Jews that rejected him is marvellous; that men should be so prejudiced against their own interest! See ^{<390>}Isaiah 29:9, 10, 14. The honour done him by the Gentile world, notwithstanding the abuses done him by his own people, is marvellous; that he whom men despised and abhorred, should be adored by kings! ^{<391>}Isaiah 49:7. But *it is the Lord's doing*.

2. He applies it to them, and application is the life of preaching.

(1.) He applies the sentence which they had passed (v. 41), and turns it upon themselves; not the former part of it, concerning the miserable destruction of the husbandmen (he could not bear to speak of that), but the latter part, of *letting out the vineyard to others*; because though it looked black upon the Jews, it spoke good to the Gentiles. Know then,

[1.] That the Jews shall be unchurched; *The kingdom of God shall be taken from you*. This turning out of the husbandmen speaks the same doom with that of dismantling the vineyard, and laying it common. ^{<395>}Isaiah 5:5. To the Jews had long pertained *the adoption and the glory* (^{<396>}Romans 9:4); to them were committed the *oracles of God* (^{<397>}Romans 3:2), and the sacred trust of revealed religion, and bearing up of God's name in the world (^{<398>}Psalms 76:1, 2); but now it shall be so no longer. They were not

only unfruitful in the use of their privileges, but, under pretence of them, opposed the gospel of Christ, and so forfeited them, and it was not long ere the forfeiture was taken. Note, It is a righteous thing with God to remove church privileges from those that not only sin against them, but sin with them, ^{<66R>}Revelation 2:4, 5. The kingdom of God was taken from the Jews, not only by the temporal judgments that befel them, but by the spiritual judgments they lay under, their blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and indignation at the gospel, ^{<61B>}Romans 11:8-10; ^{<52P>}1 Thessalonians 2:15.

[2.] That the Gentiles shall be taken in. God needs not ask us leave whether he shall have a church in the world; though his vine be plucked up in one place, he will find another to plant it in. He will give it *ethnei* — *to the Gentile world*, that will *bring forth the fruit of it*. They who had been not a people, and had not obtained mercy, became favourites of Heaven. This is the mystery which blessed Paul was so much affected with (^{<61B>}Romans 11:30, 33), and which the Jews were so much affronted by, ^{<42P>}Acts 22:21, 22. At the first planting of Israel in Canaan, the *fall of the Gentiles was the riches of Israel* (^{<45D>}Psalms 135:10, 11), so, at their extirpation, the fall of Israel was the riches of the Gentiles, ^{<61D>}Romans 11:12. It shall go to *a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*. Note, Christ knows beforehand who will bring forth gospel fruits in the use of gospel means; because our fruitfulness is all the work of his own hands, and *known unto God are all his works*. They shall bring forth the fruits better than the Jews had done; God has had more glory from the New Testament church than from that of the Old Testament; for, when he changes, it shall not be to his loss.

(2.) He applies the scripture which he had quoted (v. 42), to their terror, v. 44. This *Stone*, which the *builders refused*, is *set for the fall of many in Israel*; and we have here the doom of two sorts of people, for whose fall it proves that Christ is set.

[1.] Some, through ignorance, stumble at Christ in his estate of humiliation; when this Stone lies on the earth, where the builders threw it, they, through their blindness and carelessness, fall on it, fall over it, and *they shall be broken*. The offence they take at Christ, will not hurt him, any more than he that stumbles, hurts the stone he stumbles at; but it will hurt themselves; they will fall, and be broken, and snared, ^{<23A>}Isaiah 8:14; ^{<40E>}1 Peter 2:7, 8. The unbelief of sinners will be their ruin.

[2.] Others, through malice, oppose Christ, and bid defiance to him in his estate of exaltation, when this Stone is advanced to the head of the corner; and on them *it shall fall*, for they pull it on their own heads, as the Jews did by that challenge, *His blood be upon us and upon our children*, and *it will grind them to powder*. The former seems to bespeak the sin and ruin of all unbelievers; this is the greater sin, and sorer ruin, of persecutors, that *kick against the pricks*, and persist in it. Christ's kingdom will be a burthensome stone to all those that attempt to overthrow it, or heave it out of its place; see ~~312~~ Zechariah 12:3. This Stone cut out of the mountain without hands, will break in pieces all opposing power, ~~273~~ Daniel 2:34, 35. Some make this an allusion to the manner of stoning to death among the Jews. The malefactors were first thrown down violently from a high scaffold upon a great stone, which would much bruise them; but then they threw another great stone upon them, which would crush them to pieces: one way or other, Christ will utterly destroy all those that fight against him. If they be so stout-hearted, that they are not destroyed by falling on this stone, yet it shall fall on them, and so destroy them. He will *strike through kings*, he will *fill the places with dead bodies*, ~~415~~ Psalm 110:5, 6. None ever hardened his heart against God and prospered.

Lastly, The entertainment which this discourse of Christ met with among the chief priests and elders, that heard his parables.

1. *They perceived that he spake of them* (v. 45), and that in what they said (v. 41) they had but read their own doom. Note, A guilty conscience needs no accuser, and sometimes will save a minister the labour of saying, *Thou art the man*. *Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur* — *Change but the name, the tale is told of thee*. So quick and powerful is the word of God, and such a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, that it is easy for bad men (if conscience be not quite seared) to perceive that it speaks of them.

2. *They sought to lay hands on him*. Note, When those who hear the reproofs of the word, perceive that it speaks of them, if it do not do them a great deal of good, it will certainly do them a great deal of hurt. If they be not pricked to the heart with conviction and contrition, as they were ~~415~~ Acts 2:37, they will be cut to the heart with rage and indignation, as they were ~~415~~ Acts 5:33.

3. *They durst not do it, for fear of the multitude, who took him for a prophet*, though not for the Messiah; this served to keep the Pharisees in

awe. The fear of the people restrained them from speaking ill of John (v. 26), and here from doing ill to Christ. Note, God has many ways of restraining the remainders of wrath, as he has of making that which breaks out redound to his praise, ~~970~~ Psalm 76:10.