

Rejection of Zion's King

Can you believe we are already starting our fourth week of homework? We're not quite halfway yet. The passages of Jesus' life that we have been studying are dramatic. Can you feel the tension as we are propelled ever closer to the Cross with Jesus and his Disciples? It is my hope that you are experiencing these events anew as if you were there with the crowds following and hanging on Jesus' every word. I pray that the Lord is revealing new truths and details you have not previously considered. I know that he has done so for me.

This week we will be with Jesus as he confronts the Religious Leadership in Jerusalem. We will hear the mind boggling defiance of the religious leaders who refuse to believe even what their eyes witness and their ears hear. In their obstinacy they cling to the figments of their reputation and position blocking out the voice of the God who placed them in their positions of authority. Jesus' words, instead of leading them to repentance, provoke them to making good their threats against him. I am glad you with me as we delve into God's Word together this week, we'll need each other's support and company.

Unbelief of the Jews

"...for they loved praise from men more than praise from God." (v. 43)

Our first passage this week is one having to do with unbelief. Isaiah foretold long ago that when Messiah came he would be rejected by many, including those representing Israel as a nation. This is a difficult concept to consider, but we must because it explains how Jesus could have such a large following that it caused the Sanhedrin to fear him. Yet, at the same time, John can say in all truth that Israel did not know their Messiah, *"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."* (John 1:11). Before we tackle this seeming paradox, let's take a few minutes to pray over our lesson today. *Heavenly Father, so often your words can confuse us. But with your guidance we can overcome that confusion and discover the truth hidden within the paradox. Father, give us the insight to understand your word today and reveal to us your unchanging truth –Amen.*



Read John 12:37-43 and answer the following questions.

Lesson 4 Homework

Verse 40 was originally prophesied by Isaiah. Initially it was directed at the Jews of the Northern kingdom for their constant failure to obey God in their pursuit of idolatry. It came to such a point that judgment against Israel was met in the form of Assyria conquering the Northern Kingdom and carrying the Jews off to permanent exile. The words of Isaiah come true a second time in this prophecy of how Messiah would be received by Israel.

Who is “He” of verse 40?

What do you think it means when Isaiah says *“He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them”*?

What do the following verses say that pertain to Isaiah’s words?

- Exodus 9:12
- Romans 1:24, 28

✝ Explain the meaning of verses 42-43. What did those believers love more? What does this say to Christians today about their belief in Jesus? Have things changed since the time of Jesus?

We are told in the beginning of the passage that despite Jesus’ miraculous signs “they” would still not believe him. The word “they” refers to members of the religious leaders of Israel – the Pharisees, scribes, teachers of the Law, Priests, members of the Sanhedrin. It refers to those whom the Lord had placed over the people of Israel to teach and guide the people of Israel in the ways of the Lord. They were responsible for the spiritual teaching and awareness of God’s people. They were the religious authority, appointed to their position by God. Many of these people were more concerned with the position and privileges than with their responsibilities to God. Jesus’ teachings, supported by miraculous events pointing to his divine authority, were a threat to the religious authorities. This explains why the religious authorities refused to accept Jesus.

The leadership, so entrenched in their thinking, first *would not* believe Jesus, as a matter of sheer willfulness. In their persistence, their hearts hardened to the movement and leading of God; God allowed them to persist in their thinking. He gave them over to their own devices. Eventually they came to a point of no return where they *could not* change their thinking. Because of their refusal to serve God and accept the One he sent, they would not and could not fulfill their responsibility in watching over and leading the people of Israel. Worse yet, by their own actions and words they turned many away from Jesus and God. Because of the ungodly leadership of Israel, the people of Israel were led astray as well.

Israel as a nation has a history of going astray from God. The judgments that come against Israel, for example the Babylonian Exile, were brought upon Israel for their failure to seek God, and be a nation obedient to God. In their exile in Babylon, a remnant of Jews returned to faith in and obedience to God. He allowed them to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Again Israel's unbelief would lead to a devastating judgment. A remnant again would be preserved in the beginnings of the Christian church as described in the book of Acts.

Verses 42-43 refer to a number who did come to believe in Jesus among the ranks of the powerful religious elite. But because of their fear of the Sanhedrin and their love of their position they could not openly express faith in Jesus. They, too, would come to face judgment for putting something else ahead of Jesus. Jesus must be our first and only true passion in life. Anything that comes ahead of him is an idol. It points to a lack of faith. A hole in our faith that indicates we don't think Jesus is enough. Jesus wants our whole heart and nothing less.

The Parable of the Evil Farmers

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." (Matthew 21:43)

During the days Jesus was in Jerusalem before the Passover began, he could be found in the temple courts teaching and speaking to all who would listen. This in fact was one of the reasons he was questioned by the religious authorities as mentioned in our previous passage this week. Jesus did not follow the traditional path of being a Rabbi, so the religious leaders questioned his authority. Jesus had not attached himself to a Rabbi for his schooling. He did not cite known and esteemed rabbis as his authority. The disciples that followed him were a rough uneducated lot, not young academics. Yet his teaching was beyond anything heard in the temple courts by the religious elite. Jesus did not fit the mold of the other religious leaders. He was different, he excluded none, was known to fraternize with women and outcasts, and he was immensely popular amongst the general public.

Lesson 4 Homework

Our next passage of scripture to study this week is a parable Jesus spoke before various rabbis and religious leaders present in the temple courts. In the days leading up to Passover there would have been crowds in Jerusalem, and many people seeking out Jesus because they had heard about the things he had done.

Let's say a prayer before we start our study today. *Lord Jesus, you reveal so much to us in your parables if we only take the time to understand their meaning. This parable reveals so much about peoples' reaction to you, the Son of the Living God. Help us to understand the truth you were revealing to those in Jerusalem, as well as the spiritual truth still relevant for us today. Bless us with understanding and the willingness to take to heart what you teach us -Amen.*



Read Matthew 21:33-46 and answer the following questions.

Who is the Landowner?

What did he plant, what does it represent, how is it described?

Who did he place to oversee the vineyard and who do they represent?

What did the landowner expect to receive from the vineyard and farmers?

Read Isaiah 5:1-2. What does Isaiah reveal that is significant to our passage?

Who were the servants – who did they represent?

What did the farmers do to the landowner's son? What does this prophesy?

What does the inheritance signify and how do you think the farmers were going to use this inheritance?

Who are the "other tenants" (v. 41)?

The stone that becomes the capstone is what, and how is a capstone significant? Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23. Who has placed Jesus as the Capstone?

What are the people who inherit the vineyard to produce?

✕ Who was this parable addressed to, and why did it incite their anger so much? What does this parable imply that so angered them?

What prevented the religious authorities from arresting Jesus immediately and openly?

Through this parable we see that God built, cared for, and protected the kingdom he established. He gave authority to a religious elite to shepherd and instruct his people. When those religious leaders chose to do as they pleased with the power and authority given them by God rather than serve God, they led the people of Israel astray. He sent godly men (prophets) to exhort his people to return back to him when they strayed. The religious leaders mistreated and even killed God's prophets. At this point in the parable Jesus identifies himself as the son of the Landowner, or more to the point, indirectly claims to be the son of God. Jesus prophesies that these "evil tenants", the men standing before him, will kill him, and in so doing bring judgment upon themselves from God. God will take his kingdom away from them and give it to others who will produce its fruit. Interestingly the Pharisees themselves paint the grim picture of the judgment to come upon those evil tenants, saying, "*He (God/the Landowner) will bring those wretches (evil tenants) to a wretched end.*" In fact, as Jesus has said elsewhere, this wicked generation will not see the kingdom of God. They will be denied entrance to the kingdom of God on earth as well as in Heaven (Matt 5:20; 12:39-42; 23:13). They have forfeited eternal security for immediate power and prestige. As Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23 and Isaiah 8:14-15, their part in the parable became clear. As the New American Commentary puts it:

"Those who have rejected Jesus, for whom the cornerstone has become a stumbling stone, will be broken by him. And even if one does not actively oppose Jesus, anything less than genuine discipleship will lead to judgment—the stone will "fall" on and "crush" such a person."

The response of the religious leaders is one of utter outrage and a deeper conviction to pursue their evil plans. Their hearts are as hard as stone and no illustration of their selfish and evil ways will correct their thinking and draw them back to God in repentance. God turns them over to their evil intent and permits them to fall deeper into sin by their own evil actions. They reveal their true colors by the evil and corrupt measures they would take in arresting, trying, and condemning Jesus.

Jesus Condemns the Religious Leaders

*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matt 23:12*

I'll just be honest here, our passage of scripture for today is long and difficult. It is even daunting as I'm trying to break it down into manageable bites for each of us to chew on. It is important for us to understand why Jesus was condemning the religious leaders of Jerusalem because the very things they were doing can be found in our church communities today. Just as they were reprehensible to God then, so they are today. These behaviors on the part of the religious leaders of Jesus' day brought an astounding judgment against them. They missed entirely the coming of the kingdom of God among them, they led the people of Israel astray, and the nation suffered greatly when it fell under the iron fist of Rome. Judgment still awaits those who gratify and elevate themselves above God. Jesus' words in this passage are harsh and condemning. His discourse is not directed at the religious leaders, but at the general public in Jerusalem, a population of would be followers, as an illustration of behavior abhorrent to God. Undoubtedly the religious leaders came to hear Jesus' condemning words.

Before we begin today's scripture lesson, let's take a few minutes to come before Jesus in prayer. *Jesus, you are our teacher. Teach our hearts to bend to your ways in humility and convict us when our behavior reveals a heart not intent on serving you, but exalting ourselves. Help us to understand our lesson today and engrave it deeply in our minds and hearts –Amen.*



Read Matthew 23:1-37 and answer the following questions.

"Moses' seat" referred to an actual chair in the synagogues and stood for the teaching authority of Moses' successors as interpreters of Torah.¹ What do you think it means that the "teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat?" From where does their authority come?

Why are the people of Israel told to do what they say, but don't do what they do?

In verse 5 Jesus criticizes them for "*everything they do is done for men to see*". What are they doing to seek the praise of men? What are some contemporary parallels?

¹ New American Commentary

In verses 8-10 Jesus appears to be criticizing the titles “Rabbi”², “Father”³ and “Teacher”⁴. More likely he is criticizing the *use*, or even *abuse* of titles. How can titles be misused? Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17. To whom is glory ascribed when teachers and authorities become the focus?

Jesus is particularly condemning of an attitude of condescension and pride among the religious leaders, especially the elite. A prevalent attitude of the Pharisees was that they saw themselves as better than the ordinary people of Israel, the *am-ha-aretz* (literally, “people of the land”), because they were not as law-abiding. The *am-ha-aretz* did not adhere strictly to the hundreds of pharisaic traditions esteemed by the Pharisees. The Pharisees wore their observances of these oral traditions as badges glorifying how “righteous” they were compared to the rest of society. They held themselves separate and above the *am-ha-aretz*, despite the fact as a nation they are all descendants of Abraham, children of God.

Obedience to traditions or rituals quickly degenerates into legalism when the focus is no longer on God, but on personal reputation. What are some examples of this in churches today?

How do you think the religious leaders of Jesus’ time, as well as today, “*shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces*”? (v.13)

What is Jesus condemning in verses 23-24? How is this seen in Christians today?

² “Rabbi” etymologically meant *my great one*.—New American Commentary

³ “Father” was apparently reserved for the patriarchs and revered teachers from the past —New American Commentary

⁴ “Teacher” (*kathēgētēs*) referred especially to a *tutor*.—New American Commentary

Lesson 4 Homework

✂ In verse 25 Jesus is mixing a figurative metaphor with literal language. He is not condemning the washing of utensils for the sake of physical cleanliness, but is pointing out that while the Pharisees are so consumed with ritual cleanliness (the metaphor viewed in the proper ritual cleansing of utensils according to pharisaic tradition) compared with failing to address inner purity. They make themselves appear clean and pure on the outside while in their hearts they are filled with greed and rapaciousness (a better translation of the NIV's "self-indulgence"⁵). If the Pharisees are filled with greed, rapaciousness, and self-indulgence, how does this translate into the church we know? Consider the behavior of Christians when in church and in the world during the week. Sadly at one time or another all of us can have fallen into this judgment. Give a few examples.

In this passage Verses 29 through 32 are probably the most relevant to the upcoming Passion Week. Jesus charges the religious leaders for condemning their forefathers in their abuses towards God's prophets while at the same time working out their evil plans against God's Anointed. The NIV's translation of verse 32 is a visual representation of the religious leaders filling their cup of sin to the same measure as their forefathers. The Good News Bible translation says, "*Go on, then, and finish up what your ancestors started!*" They are just as depraved as the ones they condemn in order to *appear* righteous.

Jesus calls the religious leaders of this generation "*you snakes! You brood of vipers!*" How do the actions and plans of the religious leaders reflect the names assigned them by Jesus? Genesis 3:13 reveals the identity of the original snake by its action. Eve says "*the serpent deceived me...*" John 8:44 assigns a parentage to this generation based on their actions. How do these verses come together in Jesus' condemnation of the religious leaders?

⁵ New American Commentary. Definition of *rapacious*:

1. Having or showing a strong or excessive desire to acquire money or possess things; greedy
2. Living by killing prey, especially in large numbers
3. Taking things by force; plundering

Jesus then prophesies in verse 34 that he will send Israel "prophets and wise men and teachers".

- Who do you think these prophets, wise men and teachers are?
- What will the religious leaders do to them?
- Can you name a few from scripture and church history that fit this prophecy?

The final two verses bring to a culmination the sins of the religious leadership from the beginning of Israel's history to the present (in Jesus' day), referenced in the murder of Abel up through the murder of Zechariah the Prophet (not Elizabeth's husband, John the Baptist's father) during the inter-testamental times. As the evil that pervaded religious leaders from the beginning found its culmination in "this generation" with the plot to destroy Jesus and his followers, it would all come to an end with this generation, pointing to a final judgment with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Along with the destruction of the temple came the destruction of not only the nation of Israel, but also the entire religious system of the Jews. Nothing would be left of the corrupt system. Is it any wonder that the enmity of Jesus, the Son of God and the religious leaders, the sons of hell was so bitter?

The Plot to Kill Jesus

"...they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him." (Matt 26:4)

Dear ones, we have just one passage left this week in our homework. As difficult and lengthy (not to mention, not very uplifting) as our last passage was, I can at least say the opposite on two accounts will be true of our next passage. As hard as it is to study the vitriolic hatred directed at Jesus by the religious leaders, we must understand it in order to come to terms with the harsh judgment received by Israel as a nation for their rejection of Messiah. As harsh as that judgment was, it was *not* undeserved.

Today's lesson is short, but not sweet. In it we see the coming together of the religious leaders' diabolical plan. As Jesus made clear in our previous passage, the sons of hell are about their father's business. *Heavenly Father, as we ponder and turn over and over in our minds Jesus' harsh indictment of the religious leaders in his day, and work through today's lesson plotting his arrest and death, help us to come to terms with your judgment. We know you are GOOD and JUST. Help us to accept your actions as such when we don't have the benefit of your complete and absolute insight into these matters –Amen.*

Lesson 4 Homework



Read Matthew 26: 1-5, 14-16 and answer the following questions.

What does Jesus say will happen in two days?

According to verse 3, who assembled and where did they assemble?

What does this indicate?

What was their plan?

Who approached the chief priests with the offer to “*hand him over*”?

Read Luke 22:1-6. What details are provided by Luke in verses 5-6 concerning Judas?

In this brief passage we see the Sanhedrin convened by Caiaphas the high priest. They plan Jesus’ arrest and subsequent death. The fact that the Sanhedrin and the High Priest plot this together reveals that this plan has the support of and is sanctioned by Israel’s religious leadership. It has the stamp of approval by Israel’s ultimate authority. They would still have to convince the Roman governor to go along with their plan, but for the Jewish ruling council, it’s virtually a done deal. They just need a way to get their hands on Jesus apart from crowds in Jerusalem.

The description of taking Jesus “*in some sly way*” indicates treachery. The word translated “sly” from the Greek word *dolos* means “a *trick*, i.e. *wile* :- craft, deceit, guile, subtlety.”⁶ Since they cannot arrest Jesus for any real offense, they must resort to deceit. Ultimately the cover of darkness will conceal their dark deeds from public view. A public arrest might lead to a riot drawing the attention of Roman authorities. How ironic that they would trade Rome’s wrath for God’s wrath, saving their lives but losing their souls. In the end their actions would still bring down Roman wrath as God’s agent of judgment 40 years later.

⁶ Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Personal Reflection:

Going back to our study of The Parable of the Evil Farmers (pg 5-6), the New American Commentary suggest that "even if one does not actively oppose Jesus, anything less than genuine discipleship will lead to judgment—the stone will "fall" on and "crush" such a person." What is "genuine discipleship"? Is this pursued and emphasized in churches today? What does this say of the fate of those we know who claim to be Christian, but don't actively live their faith? What does your church need to do to encourage genuine discipleship? What can you do to help make this a priority in your church if it isn't already?