

Prayer

Gracious Lord, You poured out the Holy Spirit on the disciples so that the church might be born in power. Release Your Spirit in my life so that I may be effective in the special tasks of ministry You have given to me. Strengthen me for this work, and make me an effective witness to the amazing love of God. Praise You Lord God, giver of all good things! Your Spirit brings light to my life: Alleluia!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Broken Families

Pray for those parents who have been through troubled times and are seeking to rebuild a stable family life for their children. Pray for the church to be sensitive to their needs.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the housebound and chronically sick who live near you*
- *Give thanks for the many acts of kindness shown to you*
- *Pray for those who are troubled and consider suicide*

Meditation

What have I done to deserve Your attention?

yet You are always with me, guarding my soul with compassion.

Nothing I say is worthy of Your ear;

yet You listen, You hear, and You pay attention to all my words.

Nothing I achieve is worthy of Your praise;

yet You support and strengthen me in the work of Your Kingdom.

Nothing I learn compares with Your wisdom;

yet You have developed my intelligence and emotional strength.

Nothing I give matches Your sacrificial love

yet You gladly receive my praise, and the whole offering of my life.

I do not deserve this great love of Yours,

but You have given it, and through it my life finds meaning

Bible Study - Matthew 21:42-46

⁴² Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Review

Our passage today is only loosely termed a parable. It is a series of quotes from the Old Testament surrounding a saying of Jesus which is unique to Matthew (21:43), and it concludes this confrontation between Jesus and the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem. It was a 'no holds barred' verbal confrontation in which Jesus clearly emerged the victor, probably to the delight of the crowds who had come to hear Jesus teach, and who eagerly listened to the daring and challenging words of this 'prophet from Galilee'.

The first quote (21:42) Jesus challenged His antagonists with a quote from Psalm 118:22,23. However, it will escape us today there is a word play in this verse between the Hebrew words for 'son' and 'stone'. The Hebrew for 'son' is 'ben'; and for 'stone' is 'eben'. When spoken quickly, there is little to distinguish the words at all! It may have sounded as if Jesus said 'The son that the builders rejected ...' In other word, it could have sounded as if Jesus was talking about Himself as the Messiah who had been rejected!

Psalm 118 was a famous passage of scripture. It referred to the time when God's people had to build a new Temple in Jerusalem because everything had been destroyed in the Babylonian invasion (587 BC). The people had to use anything they could find amongst the fallen masonry and rubble of the old buildings, to form a foundation upon which to build a new Temple. As Nehemiah records, the people managed to build a new Temple from the ruined (rejected) pieces of the old, and it was important that the new Temple was founded upon the old. Psalm 118 celebrates this achievement.

The capstone or the cornerstone? In Jesus' quote, the important word 'cornerstone' is used, but what this means is uncertain because it could also be read 'capstone'; the one being the first stone laid, and the other being the last. Which one is referred to? It is not clear, but I suspect that in ancient architecture there was a perceived connection between the two. A properly laid foundation (first stone) meant that if everything went to plan, the last stone would fit exactly in place; and equally, the correct fitting of the last stone verified that a correct foundation had been laid. This reminds us of the well known description of the Messiah as the 'Alpha and Omega', the beginning and the end of God's work on earth!

This was clearly what Peter thought this meant when He included the same quote from Psalm 118 in one of his great sermons (Acts 4:11). It is also used by Peter (1 Peter 2:4-8) where he describes Christ as the foundation and goal of the church of God in a famous passage which goes on to talk of the Church as a 'holy priesthood' offering 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'.

A prophecy In verse 43, Jesus prophesied about what would happen as a result of the rejection of the Messiah.; if the foundation was not correctly laid, then the building could not be finished! With astonishing audacity, Jesus told the chief priests and scribes that the Kingdom of God would be removed from them, and this would happen because of His own rejection and death, something they were trying to engineer! Looking beyond His own death, Jesus said 'the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit' (21:43). The work of God amongst the faithful would produce the fruit that He required, the fruit of repentance and the testimony of salvation to the whole world. It is worth noting that the word for 'people' in verse 43 is not the word normally used for 'Gentiles' in scripture; it means anyone, both Jews and Gentiles alike. God was prepared to include everyone in His Kingdom who would respond to Him. This is the true constitution of the Church of God.

The second quote Our passage concludes with Jesus using two further quotes from strangely different sources (21:44). The first is from Isaiah 8:14. In this difficult passage, the prophet had been grappling with the problem of the people of Israel following an unworthy leader, King Ahaz, who would not listen to God. Having prophesied the coming of Immanuel 'God with us' (Is. 7:14), he spoke about Immanuel again in the next chapter

(Is. 8:8) with these words 'He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against ... a rock one stumbles over, a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem'. Jesus clearly regarded this as a prophecy of His rejection, and the stumbling of God's people over all He said and did and was (as Paul also observed in Romans 9:33, as does Peter (1 Peter 2:8).

Sufficient for an arrest? The second half of verse 44 is about the Kingdom crushing people comes from the prophet Daniel (2:34,35; 44,45), where God's Kingdom finally overcomes all kingdoms of the world (of iron, bronze, clay, silver and gold). In effect, Jesus was saying that the Judean religious system had become like an earthly kingdom (such as those described by Daniel) and would be destroyed by God! Our passage says that the chief priests and Pharisees knew what Jesus was saying, and it is not surprising that the they responded with anger and frustration. They had heard enough. Jesus claimed with increasing strength and by direct quotation from scripture that He was God's Son, and that He would establish a new Israel. This was sufficient for them to seek an arrest on charges of blasphemy (21:46). They hoped that the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, would have little time for such religious sensibilities and have Jesus killed on that charge alone, as a threat to the peace of the region.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you feel you understand the scriptural references in this passage? Look them up and discuss in your group what they mean.
2. What are God's purposes for the 'old vine' of the Israelite people, now the 'new vine' of the church has been created?
3. Discuss why the chief priests and authorities felt justified in wanting to arrest Jesus. What danger did He represent to them?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There is something of a sharp message about our passage today, and it is about accepting Jesus or stumbling upon Him. It is easy to think of these issues as something we can address at church or discuss with friends, but the decision to accept Christ is fundamental. It lies at the heart of Christian discipleship, because without Jesus Christ, nothing we do for the Kingdom of God makes sense. Discipleship is about walking a path with our Saviour, not stumbling around because we don't know what to make of Him!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Ask yourself whether there are any 'stumbling blocks' in your life which prevent you from being effective in faith, and prayer, and witness. If possible, speak to a friend about this, and pray with them.*
- *Pray for those you know who do not know how to take the step of faith that will bring them closer to God. Pray that they will not prevaricate, but decide and act, so that they will come to know their Lord.*

Final Prayer

Keep us close Lord Jesus, in our families; and through You way we may be close to each other. Save us from the dangers of a world that seeks to draw people apart, and grant us the grace to be loving in all our words to each other and our deeds to each other. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord: AMEN