

## Matthew: 21:33–46

### From Catena Aurea:

33. Hear another parable: There was a certain housholder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

40. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

43. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you. and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. lxxviii.) The design of this further parable is to shew that their guilt was heinous, and unworthy to be forgiven.

**ORIGEN.** The householder is God, who in some parables is represented as a man. As it were a father condescending to the infant lisp of his little child, in order to instruct him.

**JEROME.** He hath planted a vine of which Isaiah speaks, The vine of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel. (Isa. 5:7.) And hedged it round about; i. e. either the wall of the city, or the guardianship of Angels.

**ORIGEN.** Or, the hedge which God set round his people was His own Providence; and the winepress was the place of offerings.

**JEROME.** A winepress, that is to say, An altar; or those winepresses after which the three Psalms, the 8th, the 80th, and the 83d are entitled, that is to say, the martyrs.

**HILARY.** Or, He set forth the Prophets as it were winepresses, into which an abundant measure of the Holy Spirit, as of new wine, might flow in a teeming stream.

**JEROME.** And built a tower therein, that is, the Temple, of which it is said by Micah, And thou, O cloudy tower of the daughter of Zion. (Mic. 4:8.)

**HILARY.** Or, The tower is the eminence of the Law, which ascended from earth to heaven, and from which, as from a watch-tower, the coming of Christ might be spied. And let it out to husbandmen.

**JEROME.** Not a change of place, for God, by whom all things are filled, cannot be absent from any place; but He seems to be absent from the vineyard, that He may leave the vine-dressers a freedom of acting.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Or, it applies to His long-suffering, in that He did not always bring down immediate punishment on their sins.

**ORIGEN.** Or, because God who had been with them in the cloud by day, and in the pillar of fire by night, (Exod. 13:21.) never after shewed Himself to them in like manner. In Isaiah (Is. 5:7.) the people of the Jews is called the vineyard, and the threats of the householder are against the vineyard; but in the Gospel not the vineyard but the husbandmen are blamed. For perchance in the Gospel the vineyard is the kingdom of God, that is, the doctrine which is contained in holy Scripture; and a man's blameless life is the fruit of the vineyard. And the letter of Scripture is the hedge set round the vineyard, that the fruits which are hid in it should not be seen by those who are without. The depth of the oracles of God is the winepress of the

vineyard, into which such as have profited in the oracles of God pour out their studies like fruit. The tower built therein is the word concerning God Himself, and concerning Christ's dispensations. This vineyard He committed to husbandmen, that is, to the people that was before us, both priests and laity, and went into a far country, by His departure giving opportunity to the husbandmen. The time of the vintage drawing near may be taken of individuals, and of nations. The first season of life is in infancy, when the vineyard has nought to shew, but that it has in it the vital power. As soon as it comes to be able to speak, then is the time of putting forth buds. And as the child's soul progresses, so also does the vineyard, that is, the word of God; and after such progress the vineyard brings forth the ripe fruit of love, joy, peace, and the like. Moreover to the nation who received the Law by Moses, the time of fruit draweth near.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (non occ. ap. Chrys.) He calls the Prophets servants, who as the Lord's Priests offer the fruits of the people, and the proofs of their obedience in their works. But they shewed their wickedness not only in refusing the fruits, but in having indignation against those that come to them, as it follows, And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

**JEROME.** Beat them, as Jeremiah, killed them, as Isaiah, stoned them, as Naboth and Zacharias, whom they slew between the temple and the altar.

**HILARY.** These more than the first who were sent, denote that time, when, after the preaching of single Prophets, a great number was sent forth together.

**HILARY.** By the Son sent at last, is denoted the advent of our Lord.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Wherefore then did He not send Him immediately? That from what they had done to the others they might accuse themselves, and putting away their madness they might reverence His Son when He came.

**JEROME.** But when He says, They will reverence my Son, He does not speak as in ignorance. For what is there that this householder (by whom in this place God is intended) knows not? But God is thus spoken of as being uncertain, in order that free-will may be reserved for man.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Or He speaks as declaring what ought to be; they ought to reverence Him; thus shewing that their sin was great, and void of all excuse.

**ORIGEN.** Or we may suppose this fulfilled in the case of those Jews who, knowing Christ, believed in Him. But what follows, But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir,

come let us kill him, and let us seize on the inheritance, was fulfilled in those who saw Christ, and knew Him to be the Son of God, yet crucified Him.

**JEROME.** Let us enquire of Arrius and Eunomius. See here the Father is said not to know somewhat. Whatever answer they make for the Father, let them understand the same of the Son, when He says that He knows not the day of the consummation of all things. (Mat. 22:36.)

**HILARY.** Christ was cast out of Jerusalem, as out of the vineyard, to His sentence of punishment.

**ORIGEN.** Or, what He says, And cast him out of the vineyard, seems to me to be this; As far as they were concerned they judged Him a stranger both to the vineyard, and the husbandmen. When therefore the Lord of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

**JEROME.** The Lord asks them not as though He did not know what they would answer, but that they might be condemned by their own answer.

**ORIGEN.** Like Caiaphas (John 11:49) so did they, not from themselves, prophesy against themselves, that the oracles of God were to be taken from them, and given to the Gentiles, who could bring forth fruit in due season.

**GLOSS.** (ord.) Or, the Lord whom they killed, came immediately rising from the dead, and brought to an evil end those wicked husbandmen, and gave up His vineyard to other husbandmen, that is, to the Apostles.

**AUGUSTINE.** (de Cons. Ev. ii. 70.) Mark does not give this as their answer, but relates that the Lord after His question put to them, made this answer to Himself. But it may be easily explained, that their words are subjoined in such a way as to shew that they spoke them, without putting in 'And they answered.' Or this answer is attributed to the Lord, because, what they said being true, might well be said to have been spoken by Him who is truth.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Or there is no contradiction, because both are right; they first made answer in these words, and then the Lord repeated them.

**AUGUSTINE.** (ubi sup.) This troubles us more, how it is that Luke not only does not relate this to have been their answer, but attributes to them a contrary answer. His words are, And when they heard it they said, God forbid. (Luke 20:16.) The only way that remains for understanding this is, therefore, that of the listening multitudes some answered as Matthew relates, and some as Luke. And let it perplex no one that

Matthew says that the Chief Priests and elders of the people came to the Lord, and that he connects the whole of this discourse in one down to this parable of the vineyard, without interposing any other speaker. For it may be supposed that He spoke all these things with the Chief Priests, but that Matthew for brevity's sake omitted what Luke mentions, namely, that this parable was spoken not to those only who asked Him concerning His authority, but to the populace, among whom were some who said, He shall destroy them, and give the vineyard to others. And at the same time this saying is rightly thought to have been the Lord's, either for its truth, or for the unity of His members with their head. And there were also those who said, God forbid, those namely, who perceived that He spoke this parable against them.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Or otherwise: the Lord proposed this parable to them with this intent, that not understanding it they should give sentence against themselves; as was done by Nathan to David. Again, when they perceived the meaning of the things that had been said against them, they said, God forbid.

**JEROME.** The same things are treated under various figures; whom above He called labourers and husbandmen, He now calls builders.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Christ is the stone, the builders are the Jewish teachers who rejected Christ, saying, This man is not of God. (John 9:16.)

**HILARY.** He is become the head of the corner, because He is the union of both sides between the Law and the Gentiles.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** And that they might know that nothing that had been done was against God's will, He adds, It is the Lord's doing.

**ORIGEN.** That is, the stone is the gift of God to the whole building, and is wonderful in our eyes, who can discern it with the eyes of the mind.

**ORIGEN.** By the kingdom of God, He means the mysteries of the kingdom of God, that is, the divine Scriptures, which the Lord committed, first to that former people who had the oracles of God, but secondly to the Gentiles who brought forth fruit. For the word of God is given to none but to him who brings fruit thereof, and the kingdom of God is given to none in whom sin reigns. Whence came it then that it was given to them from whom it was afterwards taken away? Remember that whatever is given is given of free gift. To whom then He let out the vineyard, He let it out not as to elect already and believing; but to whom He gave it, He gave it with a sentence of election.

**JEROME.** Whoso sinneth, yet believeth on Him, falls indeed upon a stone and is broken, yet is not altogether crushed, but is preserved to salvation through endurance. But on whomsoever it shall fall, that is, whomsoever this stone shall itself assault, and whosoever shall utterly deny Christ, it shall so crush him, that not a bone of him shall be left in which a drop of water could be taken up.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Or, He here points out their twofold destruction; first in their stumbling and being offended at Him, signified in that, Whosoever shall fall upon this stone; the other in the captivity that should come upon them, signified by that, But upon whomsoever it shall fall.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Quæst. Ev. i. 30.) Or, Those that fall upon Him, are those that despise and afflict Him. These do not perish utterly, but are broken so that they walk not upright. But upon these He shall fall when He shall come from above in judgment with a punishment of destruction, and thence He says, Shall grind them to powder, because the wicked are like the dust which the wind scattereth abroad on the face of the earth. (Ps. 1:4.).

21:45–46

45. And when the Chief Priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

46. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

**JEROME.** Hard as were the hearts of the Jews in unbelief, they yet perceived that the Lord's sentence was directed against themselves.

**ORIGEN.** One thing they know which is true concerning Him; they esteemed Him a Prophet, though not understanding His greatness in respect of His being the Son of God. But the rulers feared the multitude who thought thus of Him, and were ready to fight for Him; for they could not attain to the understanding which the multitude had, seeing they thought nothing worthy concerning Him. Further, know that there are two different kinds of desires to lay hands on Jesus. The desire of the rulers and Pharisees was one kind; another that of the Bride, I held him, and would not let him go; (Song of Sol. 3:4. ch. 7:8.) intending to try Him still further, as she saith, I will get me up into the palm tree, I will lay hold of its height. All who think not rightly concerning His divinity, seek to lay hands on Jesus in order to put Him to death. Other words indeed excepting the word of Christ it is possible to seize and to hold, but the word of truth none

can seize, that is, understand; none can hold it, that is, convict; nor separate it from the conviction of those that believe; nor do it to death, that is, destroy it.

### **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

#### **21:33 A Householder Planted a Vineyard**

##### **Hear Another Parable.**

Chrysostom: This parable suggests many things: God's providence had been at work toward them from the outset; their disposition was murderous from the beginning; nothing had been neglected of whatever pertained to an attentive care for them. even when prophets had been slain, God had not turned away from this people but had sent them his very Son; it is now clear that the God of both the New and the Old Testaments is one and the same; we know that the Son's death will effect great blessings; we here learn that they were to endure extreme punishment for the crucifixion; here we learn of the calling of the Gentiles and the turning aside of the unbelieving Jews.

He presents this parable after the previous one that he may show the charge to be even greater in this case and highly unpardonable. In what way? Although the Jews had received so much care from God, they were now found to be worse than harlots and publicans, and that by a wide margin. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 68.1.

##### **He Set a Hedge Around the Vineyard.**

Chrysostom: Observe the great care that the owner took with this place and the extraordinary recalcitrance of the people. He himself did the work the tenants should have done. It was he who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it and built a tower. He left little for them to do. All they had to do was take care of what was there and to preserve what was given to them. Nothing was left undone but all accomplished. But they made little effort to be productive, even after they had enjoyed such great blessings from him. For when they had come out of Egypt, he gave a law, and set up a city, and built a temple and prepared an altar. Then he "went into a far country." He was patient with them. He did not always keep a close account of their sins. The meaning of "going into a far country" is God's great patience. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 68.1.

## **21:34–36 The Tenants Kill the Landowner’s Servants**

### **He Sent His Servants to Get His Fruit.**

Chrysostom: He sent his servants, that is, the prophets, “to receive the fruit.” By fruit he referred to their obedience, demonstrated through their works. But even here they exhibited their wickedness. They not only failed to give the fruit, after having enjoyed so much care, thus displaying their laziness, but also were angry with the servants who came. For those who did not repay what they owed should hardly have been indignant or angry. Rather, they should have asked for the householder’s forgiveness. But they not only were indignant; they even bloodied their hands. While deserving punishment, they themselves inflicted punishment. Therefore he sent a second and a third company of servants both to show their wickedness and the love toward humanity of the One who sent them. Why didn’t he immediately send his Son? In order that they might repent and condemn themselves for the things they had done to the others. He hoped they would set aside their anger and reverence him when he came. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 68.1.

## **21:37 Afterward the Landowner Sent His Son**

### **They Will Respect My Son.**

Chrysostom: But what does it mean that “it may be that they will have reverence for my son”? This is not the language of an ignorant man. Away with the thought! Rather, it is the language of one desiring to show the sin to be great and inexcusable. For though he himself knew that they would slay him, he sent him. When he says “they will respect,” he states what ought to have been done, that it was their duty to have revered him. Elsewhere he says similarly: “whether they hear or refuse to hear.” He is not ignorant of their motives. But lest any of the obstinate should say that his prediction was the thing that necessitated their disobedience, therefore he frames his expressions in a particular way, using indeterminate terms like “whether they will” and “it may be.” For though they had been obstinate towards his servants, yet they ought to have revered the dignity of the Son. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 68.



## **21:38 The Tenants Kill the Heir**

Let Us Kill Him and Have His Inheritance.

Chrysostom: What then do they do? While they had time to ask for pardon for their offenses and whereas they ought to have run to him to do so, they persist even more strongly in their former sins. They proceed to add even more to their previous pollutions. They always surpass their former offenses by their later ones. This is what he himself declared when he said, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers." For from the first the prophets used to charge them with these things, saying, "Your hands are full of blood," and "They mingle blood with blood," and "They build up Zion with blood."

But they failed to learn self-control. They had already received the commandment: "You shall not murder." They had already had been commanded to abstain from countless other offenses. They had already been urged by many and various means to keep these commandments.

Yet, for all that, they did not put aside their evil ways. What did they say when they saw him? "Come, let us kill him." With what motive and for what reason? What possible charge could they lay against him, either small or great? Is it that he honored you, and being God became a human being for your sakes and worked his countless miracles? Or that he pardoned your sins? Or that he called you into a kingdom?

But observe that their disregard for bad was accompanied by great folly, and the cause of his murder was filled with madness. "For let us kill him," it says, "and the inheritance shall be ours." The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 68.1.

## **21:39–41 What Will the Landowner Do?**

### **The Householder and the Vineyard.**

Epiphanius the Latin: The householder in this parable is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The vineyard he planted represents the Jewish people who were begotten from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, multiplied like the stars in the sky and the sand of the shore, liberated from the land of Egypt and the yoke of slavery, and led through the sea to the promised land, as the prophet said: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it." The Lord planted the Jewish people in the promised land, flowing with milk and honey, so that they would bear the fruit of the commandments of God. "He surrounded it

with a hedge” means that God fortified it with the protection of angels. The wine press he dug signifies the holy church, where the fruits of righteousness and holiness are gathered; just as the grapes are pressed only with great toil and effort, so also the holy martyrs are crushed like grapes and shed their blood only through great persecutions and tortures. The tower constructed in the middle of the vineyard is our Lord himself, who appeared like a strong tower in the midst of the holy church through the Virgin. Because of his presence, all the saints and martyrs are protected with spiritual weapons from their most wicked enemy, who is the devil. “When harvest time drew near, he sent his servants,” that is, the prophets, “to the tenants,” who were the teachers of the law, “to collect the fruit of the vineyard.” He had already sent the prophets to them repeatedly to collect his fruit, but they were disdainful and rebellious toward the Lord and greeted his prophets with swords, beatings, stonings and other persecutions. They killed Isaiah, stoned Jeremiah, pursued Elijah and beheaded John the Baptist. Every nation that persecutes its teachers and fails to produce the fruit of the gospel is an accomplice to the Jews. “Finally, therefore, he sent his only son to them, saying, ‘surely they will respect my son.’ ” The “only son” of the householder is the Lord, the Son of God, who came by the will of the Father to his vineyard, which is the Jewish people. “But when the tenants,” who are the teachers of the law, “saw his son, they said to themselves, ‘this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours,’ and they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” They also crucified our Lord outside the city, while they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Yet they did not in fact come to possess the inheritance of the law; instead, they sentenced themselves to death, for the Lord asked, “What will the owner of the vineyard do to the tenants when he comes?” They responded, “He will destroy the evil tenants and give the vineyard to other tenants who will produce its fruit in a timely manner.” They condemned themselves by their own words, as the Lord implies when he speaks about himself and their faithlessness: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; therefore, I say to you that the kingdom of God will be removed from you and given to a people producing its fruits.” Interpretation of the Gospels 31.

### **They Cast Him Out of the Vineyard and Killed Him.**

Chrysostom. And where do they wish to kill him? “Outside the vineyard.” Do you see how he prophesies even the place where he was to be slain? Well, they did cast him out, and they killed him.

And Luke indeed says, “He declared what they must suffer.” When they heard this, they said, “God forbid!” He then asks them to remember the testimony of Scripture: “He looked at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written: The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.’

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.” Matthew’s account does not contradict Luke’s. They passed the sentence against themselves, as Matthew says, and again, when they perceived what they had said, they added, “God forbid.” By the words of the prophet against them, he sought to persuade them that this certainly would come to pass.

He signified only in a hidden way that he would “give the vineyard to others,” not mentioning the Gentiles and not affording his opponents a handle to use to attack him. It was for this reason that he spoke in parables, that they themselves might pass the sentence. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 68.2.

### **21:42 The Lord’s Doing is Marvelous**

### **21:43–45 The Kingdom of God Will Be Taken from You**

### **21:46 The Multitudes Considered Jesus a Prophet**

#### **They Feared the Crowd.**

Jerome: Although [the chief priests and the Pharisees] were hard of heart and on account of their unbelief and wickedness blunted in their understanding against the Son of God, nevertheless they were unable to deny Jesus’ straightforward statements and understood that all the judgments of the Lord were directed against themselves. So they determined indeed to kill him but feared “the crowd, for they considered Jesus to be a prophet.” A crowd is always easily moved, not persisting with their will in their resolution. Additionally they are like waves and opposite winds blown to and fro. The one they now honor and revere as a prophet they later shout against: “Crucify, crucify” such a man. Commentary on Matthew 3.21.46.