

## Gospel of Matthew Chapter 21 -- John Karmelich

1. Chapter 21 can be summarized in one word: rejection.
  - a) We are going to read of Jesus being corporately rejected by the Jewish nation.
    - i) When I say "corporately" I mean the vast majority of the Jewish people who were aware of Jesus, rejected him as the Messiah.
    - ii) There were many individual exceptions.
  - b) The first section of this chapter deals with Jesus presenting himself to Israel as their king.
    - i) This takes place in Verses 1-11.
    - ii) While many accept and praise Jesus as the Messiah, the majority of this same group will reject him once they realize Jesus is not there to overthrow Rome.
  - c) The next section has to do with the "cleansing of the temple".
    - i) This takes place in Verses 12-13.
    - ii) The religious leaders of Jewish temple were corrupt at this time. They were taking advantage of people and profiting off of people's desires to worship God.
  - d) The next story is Jesus performing some more healing after the temple is "cleansed".
    - i) This is just one verse, Verse 14.
    - ii) This one verse is sandwiched between a number of stories about rejection.
      - a) It shows that "miracles are not enough" to convince people who Jesus is.
  - e) From Verse 15 to the end of the chapter, and going into Chapter 22, we have Jesus telling parables and illustrations that all tie to his corporate rejection by the Nation of Israel.
    - i) There is an "exception" in Verses 17-22, where Jesus curses a fig tree.
      - a) The main point of that cursing is not because Jesus hates figs, ☺ it was symbolic of Jesus' rejection by the Jewish leadership. We'll discuss that some more when we get there.
2. To most of the readers of this study, the rejection of Jesus is old, historical news.
  - a) It is as if to say, "Yeah, yeah, I know all of this, what does it have to do with me today?"
  - b) What is interesting to read as a modern application is how Jesus handled rejection.
    - i) What I want to comment upon off and on through this study is how Jesus dealt with rejection and how we can apply that to our lives.
    - ii) All adults go through some periods of rejection.
    - iii) Jesus promised in a sense that non-believers would reject us for our belief.
    - iv) Jesus said, "All men (non-believers) will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22, NIV)
  - c) Remember that Matthew didn't write this for the purpose of showing of how we are to deal with rejection. He wrote this to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah despite the fact he was rejected, collectively by the Jewish nation.
    - i) Matthew goes out of his way to show the Old Testament predictions about how the Messiah ("the king") is to be rejected.
    - ii) Jesus himself will quote predictive scriptures in this chapter on that issue.
    - iii) It is only a secondary "purpose" of this chapter that one can study this chapter for comfort and say, "You know, if people will reject Jesus, they are going to reject me. If I take a stand for Jesus, I can expect rejection. It comes with the territory."
  - d) What you are not going to see in this chapter is Jesus throwing a temper tantrum, nor are not going to see Jesus calling out for angels to strike people dead, etc.
    - i) Jesus still focuses on those who are called to serve them.
    - ii) He focuses on those who want him, and predicts the bleak future of those who choose to reject him. On that somber note, let's go to Verse 1.

3. Verse 1: As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,<sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me."<sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."
  - a) OK, let's set the scene:
    - i) In the latter part of Chapter 20, Jesus has been on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It is about a 17-mile journey.
    - ii) This is an uphill climb. In this journey, one rises about 3,000 feet in elevation.
    - iii) Bethphage means "house of figs". This is a hillside location that is part of the Mount of Olives area. From this point one has a panoramic view of Jerusalem, which is in a valley surrounded by a mountain range. This spot is about 300 feet higher than where the temple was located.
    - iv) We know from the other gospels that the village ahead is called "Bethany".
      - a) Matthew will refer to Bethany later in the text.
  - b) Here was Jesus about to enter the town. He told his disciples in effect, "All right guys, go into town. Here is what you are going to find. There will be a donkey and the donkey's colt. Take them, and if anybody questions you, say "The Lord needs them."
    - i) That is a miracle in itself. Imagine if a couple of strangers walks up to your driveway and start to take your car away. You spot them, and they say, "The Lord needs them". What are you going to say? "Ooh, that's ok, it's got a full tank of gas, enjoy!" ☺ Are you going to say that? If you're like me, you're either reaching for a gun or the telephone to call the police.
    - ii) My point is that the taking of the donkey is a miracle unto itself.
    - iii) It shows the miraculous powers Jesus had as he was able to predict in advance what was going to happen.
4. Verse 4: This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:<sup>5</sup> "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"
  - a) Let's remember the basic purpose of Matthew's gospel, which is to show Jesus as the promised eternal king of Israel.
    - i) Matthew is quoting Zechariah 9:9 in Verse 5.
    - ii) This verse was written after all the kings listed in the book of Kings, and after the return from the Babylonian captivity. Therefore, it does not refer to any other Jewish king. It is a prophecy of the Messiah to come.
    - iii) Zechariah was sent to encourage the Israelites to rebuild the temple, which was destroyed by the Babylonians. Zechariah is predicting, "Your king is coming".
  - b) Of all the Old Testament predictions about Jesus, this is the only one I can think of where Jesus goes out of his way to arrange the fulfillment of that prediction.
    - i) Other predictions like "born in Bethlehem, born of a virgin, miracles, etc., could not happen without the power of God working through Jesus. Yet this one miracle of riding into town on a donkey, let's face it, could be done by anybody.
    - ii) The only "miraculous" part was the fact that the donkey and his colt were there and nobody complained that the disciples took the animals.
      - a) That little verse is a reminder that God is working in the background in ways we may not comprehend for the moment.
    - iii) Some commentators believe that the fact that Jesus could ride on an "unbroken" (un-trained) colt was a miracle unto itself.

5. Verse 6: The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.<sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.<sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.<sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"
- a) This is the story of "Palm Sunday".
    - i) It is mentioned in all four gospel accounts.
    - ii) We call it "Palm Sunday" as the followers of Jesus cut down palm branches and laid them at Jesus feet. John's gospel says they were palm branches. (John 12:13).
    - iii) Christians usually take the Sunday prior to Easter to remember Palm Sunday, as it occurred exactly 7 days prior to Resurrection Sunday (i.e., Easter Sunday).
  - b) OK, time for the big theological question. Why did Jesus do this?
    - i) First of all, it is so that Israel has no excuse as to why they rejected Jesus.
      - a) Let's suppose "Palm Sunday" never happened. The Israelites could claim to God, "It is not our fault we rejected Jesus. We never had an opportunity to worship Jesus as a collective group. We never got to see him proclaim himself as the Messiah. How can you blame us when he never came to us as a group to proclaim his Messiahship?"
      - b) With that possibility, it was necessary for Jesus to do this.
    - ii) Another reason was to fulfill prophecy.
      - a) In Daniel Chapter 9, there is a prediction of the exact day when Jesus would come to proclaim himself as the king. Palm Sunday is that day.
      - b) "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'" (Daniel 9:25a, NIV)
        - (1) That word 'sevens' is a period of seven years.
        - (2) This verse says that from the day the order comes to rebuilt Jerusalem "until the Anointed One (Jesus) comes, it will be 62 'sevens' plus 7 'sevens', or 69 'sevens' in total.
        - (3) If a 'seven' is a 7-year period, the total time frame is 69 x 7 years.
        - (4) In the book of Nehemiah, a decree was given to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, which was in rubble from the Babylonian conquest.
          - (a) History records this date as March 14th, 445 BC.
          - (b) (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume 10, Page 642).
          - (c) This period ends on April 6, 32 A.D. That is Palm Sunday.
        - (5) Daniel says from that day in Nehemiah, you count 69 x 7 years. (The Hebrew calendar has 360 days in year.) The exact day that ends is Palm Sunday. Again, I don't want to go into all the details of the calculations, but it does work!
        - (6) In fact, in Verse 26 of Daniel, a prediction goes on to say that "after this" (i.e., the events of the 69 'weeks') the Messiah will be "cut off". This means to be executed.
        - (7) If you desire more details on this, please see my writings on Daniel Chapter 9, Part 2.

- iii) I believe Jesus held the nation of Israel responsible for understanding the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. The religious leaders should have known that this is the day that the Messiah would come to present himself before the people of Israel. Even if they didn't know the exact day, they should have known "roughly" that this was the time.
  - a) "As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:41-44 NIV)
- c) Let's get back to the verses and describe this scene.
  - i) Jesus descending from a high hillside down to the City of Jerusalem. He was riding on the colt of the donkey. The "mother" donkey was leading the colt. The disciples laid their clothes on both animals. The other gospels make this clearer. Again, this story is told in all four gospels.
  - ii) Here was this procession of people coming into town with Jesus.
  - iii) The verse says some were in front of Jesus and some were behind him.
  - iv) I suspect many of the followers of Jesus were hoping that he was going to overthrow the Roman Government and here was Jesus the Messiah.
- d) Next to the Jewish temple, was a Roman fort, known as the Antonio Fortress.
  - i) Can you imagine what the Roman soldiers were thinking about this procession?
  - ii) Did they have their guards up, thinking that a revolt was about to happen?
  - iii) Further, when Roman soldiers saw kings coming to town, usually the king was lead by a big fancy procession. The king himself would be riding in a chariot or at least on a horse.
  - iv) Here was Jesus sitting on a donkey's colt. The crowd was calling Jesus their king.
  - v) I don't know if the Roman soldiers were laughing at this procession or nervous or both. We don't know. The point to learn from the Romans and their silence is one can't be neutral about Jesus. You can't watch Jesus go by, shrug your shoulders and be neutral. Jesus says that whoever is not with him is against him (See Matthew 12:30). Eternal condemnation is not just rejecting Jesus, but being neutral about Jesus when you are aware of his presence.
- e) Let's talk about Verse 9 for a second. It says the crowds following Jesus were saying "'Hosanna to the Son of David!' Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"
  - i) Remember that "Son of David" is a title for the Messiah as God made a promise to King David in that he would have a son who would rule forever. (See: 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7:12).
  - ii) The word "Hosanna" was originally was a cry for help: "Save!" (Ref.: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sam. 14:4; and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 6:26). In time it became an invocation of blessing and even an acclamation, the latter being the meaning here." (Bible Expositor's Encyclopedia)
    - a) John's translation: Those Israelites knew what they were doing. They were worshipping Jesus as the promised Messiah.

- iii) Remember that most of this same crowd would later reject Jesus.
      - a) This is why I believe they were hoping Jesus would overthrow Rome. When they saw that was not Jesus' intention and saw him beaten by the Romans, that helped lead to the rejection.
      - b) It is also a reminder that an emotional reaction by a crowd is not enough to get people to change their lifestyle. It has to be a change of heart.
  - f) One more bit of bible trivia before we move on.
    - i) This Sunday was 4 days prior to the Passover.
      - a) Passover is a Jewish holiday ordained by Moses to remember the Exodus from Egypt. It always occurs on the "10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of "Nissan", on the Jewish calendar. It would be "Thursday" of this week.
      - b) It is required of all Jews to celebrate Passover.
      - c) Many went to Jerusalem for this celebration. The historian Josephus records that the population of Jerusalem swells up for this holiday. Visualize the population of New Orleans "normally" versus the population at the time of Mardi Gras, and you get somewhat of an idea.
      - d) On this Sunday, traditionally, is the day when the religious leaders picked the lambs to be slaughtered. One of the requirements for the Passover dinner was to eat roasted lamb. On this Sunday, the lambs were chosen to be slaughtered. No lambs with "blemishes" or defects of any kind were picked. (All of this points to Jesus as the perfect "lamb of God" sacrifice, but we'll save that for another day.)
      - e) My point is while the religious leaders were picking which lambs to choose, here is Jesus saying in effect "choose me, I am the true lamb of God coming to be sacrificed for your sins".
- 6. Verse 10: When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"  
<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."
  - a) Again, remember that Jerusalem's population swelled immensely for Passover.
  - b) Many Jews who live in other parts of the world make a pilgrimage for Passover.
  - c) The point of these two verses is that Jesus trodding into Jerusalem on the donkey's colt was seen by a large crowd. It was the major event of the moment.
  - d) It is interesting to note that the crowd saw Jesus as a "prophet" but not as Messiah.
    - i) The followers of Jesus understood this and were proclaiming that fact.
    - ii) The bystanders who heard of Jesus' reputation were calling him a prophet.
    - iii) This has to remind you of something that occurred in Matthew 16:
      - a) "Jesus asked his disciples in effect, who do "the people" say that I am?" Peter answered, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:14 NIV)
      - b) Peter then had one of his better moments when he declared that Jesus was none of these other people, but that Jesus was the Messiah.
    - iv) In the world today, many acknowledge Jesus as a prophet, but not the Messiah.
      - a) Muslims honor Jesus as a great prophet, but no more.
        - (1) I've never understood how they acknowledge Jesus as a prophet, but then ignore his predictions about himself being the Messiah!
      - b) Many religious Jews argue that Jesus existed, and he was a great teacher, but nothing more.
      - c) My point is unless you understand that Jesus is God, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, anything "lower than that" (i.e., "prophet") is not acceptable for eternal salvation.

7. Verse 12: Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. <sup>13</sup> "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.' "
- a) Notice Jesus first order of business after riding into town on the donkey's colt.
    - i) It wasn't to stand on the temple and say, "Thank You, Thank you, yes, I am the Messiah, you know!" ☺ No, he went up to the temple and cleaned the place out.
  - b) It may help to understand the historical context:
    - i) The 1<sup>st</sup> century historian Josephus records that the High Priest of that day was very corrupt. He was eventually ousted by his own people.
      - a) He made money by selling "official" sacrificial animals. People would bring their sacrificial animals to the temple and they would say, "Sorry, there is a blemish here, you can't use that one. Tell you what, we have some good one's over here. I'll sell you one for this price.
      - b) Also, a temple tax was required. Only a Jewish "sheckle" was permitted to pay this tax. When foreigners would come to exchange their money, they would charge very high exchange rates.
      - c) The modern comparison is the danger of those who rip-off Christians with "official" Christian merchandise.
  - c) The fact that Jesus had a large crowd following him was enough intimidation that the moneychangers had to let Jesus get away with this for the moment.
    - i) I suspect the crowd that followed Jesus, who wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome, were cheering as they knew these officials were corrupt. It was common knowledge, but they had the power of the Roman government behind them.
  - d) This is actually the second time that Jesus cleansed the temple.
    - i) In John Chapter 2, we read of Jesus cleansing the temple in an early part of his ministry.
    - ii) There are many sermons preached on the fact that Jesus occasionally "cleans out our temples" as Jesus wants to be worshipped alone. There are times in our lives where we get focused on other issues, or our life is getting some corruption, and we need Jesus to clean out "our temples" whether we like it not.
8. Verse 14: The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.
- a) I love this verse, particularly in this location of the text.
    - i) Here was Jesus cleaning out the temple of the corrupt officials.
    - ii) Jesus does not say, "Woe is me, I'm being rejected? ☺
    - iii) Jesus does not say, "Ok, the temple is clean, let's go take on the Romans!"
    - iv) Instead of all of those options, Jesus goes back to healing people!
  - b) Jesus came to help the hurting and pay the price for their sins. Despite the rejection by the Jewish leaders, Jesus still took the time to reach out to those who wanted to be healed.
    - i) This is a reminder for us to focus on what God has called you to do, no matter what the circumstances.
    - ii) As believers, God has called on us to be his witnesses to the world, no matter what the circumstances or whatever else is going on in our life.
    - iii) Here was Jesus, about to face rejection and crucifixion and he still took the time to minister to other hurting people. We need to keep that in mind during the difficult times of our lives as well.

9. Verse 15: But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.
- a) Here were the religious leaders, seeing children yelling to Jesus as the Messiah and they further saw the miracles Jesus performed, yet refused to believe.
  - b) I was thinking about this verse and wondering, "What does it take to convince people?"
    - i) This verse is a reminder that miracles are not enough to change people's hearts.
    - ii) People can see all sorts of evidence of changed lives through Jesus and still not repent, mainly because they don't want to change their lives.
  - c) There is a term I use on occasions called, "The tyranny of the status quo".
    - i) What that means is once a big organization is formed, be it a government organization, private organization or even a church organization, it is difficult to get it to change. People get set in their ways. People get comfortable in the structure of that organization as it is. They don't want to change. That is, "the tyranny of the status quo". Status quo just means "the way things are now".
    - ii) Here were these religious leaders. They were making a comfortable living from the money exchanges. Even if some were not corrupt, they were "used" to being in power and used to people coming to them for religious help.
      - a) Now their existing power is threatened by Jesus.
      - b) It is as if to say, "Who cares about Jesus' miracles? He is affecting my income. In that sense, he has to go!"
      - c) Unfortunately, many in the world reject Jesus because it would hurt their income, their source of power, or their existing beliefs. These issues become too much of a "mountain" for them to overcome.
      - d) Thus, they reject Jesus and they reject you and me.
      - e) God does change people's hearts, even of those who face these issues. It is only through prayer that God can reach out to the hearts of those who are trapped in the "tyranny of the status quo".
10. Verse 16: "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"<sup>17</sup> And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.
- a) Jesus quotes a line from Psalm 8:2 to the religious leaders.
  - b) Jesus is telling them that even the fact that kids are calling out to Jesus as the Messiah is an Old Testament Prediction. If you read that verse in Psalm, you would think it is simply a praise to God. Jesus is saying that verse is predictive of him.
    - i) It is simply another reminder that the Old Testament is full of predictions that we may not realize are predictions. The Old Testament is full of word-patterns and word-pictures that are fulfilling some aspect of the events of Jesus' life.
  - c) Notice Jesus left these guys in Verse 17.
    - i) He didn't spend hours debating them.
    - ii) This is a reminder to use our time and resources wisely. If people aren't interested in change, don't spend lots of time trying to convince them otherwise. Part of the "trick" of being a witness for Jesus is learning how best to use our time wisely.

11. Verse 18: Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup> Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.
- a) This is the only place we ever read of Jesus saying to anyone else he was hungry.
    - i) When Jesus fed "the 5,000" and "the 4,000" in earlier chapters, there was no mention of his personal hunger.
    - ii) Yet here, we read of Jesus going back to Bethany to spend the night (Mark 11:12).
    - iii) The next morning, he was walking back to Jerusalem to continue his ministry.
    - iv) Next we read that he was hungry, saw a fruitless fig tree and cursed the tree.
  - b) To best understand these verses, it is best to read it in context of the surrounding verses.
    - i) We just read of Jesus being rejected the night before by Jewish leaders.
    - ii) In a few more verses, we are going to read of additional rejection by those leaders.
    - iii) In between these "rejections" we have the story of Jesus cursing a fig tree.
  - c) There are two main applications to see from this story:
    - i) The first is to teach his disciples about the power of faith.
      - a) We'll tackle that subject in a few verses.
    - ii) The second is the symbolic reference of Israel as this fig tree.
      - a) Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is often compared to grapevines and fig trees. Often both of these are coupled together.
      - b) For example, when Jeremiah was predicting the fall of Israel to the Babylonians centuries earlier, he used this metaphor:
      - c) "'I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them. (Jer. 8:13, NIV)
      - d) Therefore, Jesus cursing the fig tree is a visual-picture for Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.
      - e) That curse of Jesus has been true for the last 2,000 years. Israel was destroyed as a country in 70AD. It did not form again until 1948. For 2,000 years, the Jewish people have collectively (exceptions of course) rejected Jesus as their Messiah.
        - (1) It is important to note that Jesus has not completely rejected the Nation of Israel. I'll talk about that in a few pages.
12. Verse 20: When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. <sup>21</sup> Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. <sup>22</sup> If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
- a) The first thing to notice is that this tree cursing takes place in front of the disciples.
  - b) The second is Jesus uses it as an illustration to teach the disciples about faith.
  - c) Notice Jesus did not say, "I'm still hungry. Let's go to Denny's first for some eggs and then I'll tell you what it means. ☺"
  - d) Jesus is saying in effect, "If you believe, God can give you the power to kill a tree or move a mountain.
    - i) This does not mean we are to go around praying for trees to die and praying to rearrange mountains. In the history of Christianity, not one literal-mountain has ever been thrown in the sea due to prayer. Jesus is not being that literal.
    - ii) Jesus is talking about the power of prayer. If we are praying for something that is God's will, God does give us the power to accomplish that will, and that can include some incredible miracles.

- iii) To me, there is no greater miracle than someone receiving his or her salvation. That miracle lasts for an eternity. It is greater than any other healing miracle.
    - a) God also wants healing miracles as a witness to non-believers and simply because God cares about those who follow him.
  - iv) Paul summed it up well: "Now to him (God) who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV)
  - v) God wants to work through us to accomplish his plans. Prayer is a way we stay close to God and draw upon His strength to do His will.
    - a) "Without God, we can't; Without us, God won't".
- 13. Verse 23: Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"
  - a) First of all, notice Jesus boldness to keep teaching despite the circumstances.
    - i) He went through all of the rejection the day before.
    - ii) He knows that the crucifixion is coming up in a matter of days.
    - iii) Yet he still goes to the Temple to teach.
    - iv) In my opening premise I talked about having focus during times of rejection.
    - v) Jesus is showing how we are to be his witnesses and to do God's will for our lives despite previous rejections and despite any rejections to come.
  - b) Notice the religious leaders are again focusing on the "status quo" of their organization.
    - i) They could care less what Jesus is saying. They were only worrying that he didn't have the "proper authority" to preach the Gospel.
    - ii) The point is people will miss the main point because they are focusing on "the rules" and not the message itself.
    - iii) As a modern example, I've seen churches do this as well.
      - a) I've seen Christians with great God-given talents to do all sorts of things, but because "they didn't go to the right seminary" or they are not part of *their* denominational belief, or agree on a particular view, that they are not welcome in that particular church.
- 14. Verse 24: Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" <sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'From men'--we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.
  - a) Let me summarize this story:
    - i) Jesus was asked by what authority was he preaching.
    - ii) He turnaround and asked by what authority did John the Baptist preach?
    - iii) The religious leaders knew John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Messiah.
    - iv) On the other hand John the Baptist was very popular with the common people, so they were afraid to say John was not a Prophet.
    - v) Therefore, in order to deny Jesus as the Messiah and at the same time not have the people reject their authority, they simply said, "We don't know."
  - b) The purpose of John the Baptist was to be a forerunner of Jesus.
    - i) John did his job. People looked at John as a prophet.
    - ii) Remember by this date, Herod had John killed. (Ref: Matthew 14:10)

- iii) Many of the “common” people believed John the Baptist was a prophet sent by God and were aware that John pointed to Jesus as the Messiah.
      - a) Also remember that a large percentage of Jews were willing to accept Jesus if he would overthrow Rome. The “full” rejection didn’t come until they saw Jesus beaten by the Roman soldiers, and realized he wouldn’t fulfill their preconceived notions of the Messiah.
  - c) In summary, Jesus silenced his critics.
    - i) The religious leaders were too fearful of their own lives to go say John was wrong.
    - ii) The religious leaders feared for their own lives. They paid for eternity.
  - d) From this point forward to the chapter end, Jesus goes on to teach about rejection of Jesus.
    - i) There are two parables left in this chapter.
    - ii) Both deal with the issue of eternal damnation as punishment.
    - iii) You have to remember it is not just Jesus and the religious leaders in this scene.
    - iv) His disciples were also there, as well as a large crowd Jesus is teaching.
    - v) I believe these parables are not only given as warnings to the religious leaders, but as teaching for all followers of Jesus to remember.
  - e) The first of these two parables begins in the next verse.
- 15. Verse 28: "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' <sup>29</sup> 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. <sup>31</sup> "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.
  - a) To understand the parable, one has to remember the events of Matthew Chapter 3.
    - i) Chapter 3 took place over three years prior to the time of Chapter 21.
    - ii) In Chapter 3, John the Baptist was preaching repentance.
    - iii) Jews, religious and non-religious alike were coming to John, repenting of their sins and agreeing to be baptized to “wash away” their sin.
    - iv) The Jewish religious leaders go out to check it out, and for all intents and purposes, reject John’s ministry.
    - v) John, who was getting popular at that time, then points to Jesus as the Messiah.
    - vi) This same group (more or less) is still the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
    - vii) Jesus is reminding them that despised tax collectors and the prostitutes repented at the preaching of John, but the religious leaders did not.
  - b) With that in mind, let’s summarize the parable itself:
    - i) Jesus is teaching about a father who has two sons.
    - ii) He told both to go work in the field.
    - iii) One said no, but changed his mind and went.
    - iv) The other said yes, but changed his mind and never went.
    - v) Jesus then “ends” this parable by saying the “tax collectors and prostitutes” will, in effect, enter heaven before you guys.
  - c) This gets back to the basic concept of salvation.
    - i) Salvation has nothing to do with how “religious” you are.
    - ii) “Religion” in this context, is about trying to please God on your own efforts.
    - iii) Jesus is trying to teach them that salvation is about trusting in Him, not in their own efforts.
    - iv) Jesus is comparing the religious leaders to the son who said he would go in the field, but didn’t. They didn’t, because they failed to recognize Jesus as Messiah.

- d) Let's get back to the purpose of Matthew's gospel: to show Jesus is the Messiah.
  - i) This book was originally intended for the Jewish reader.
  - ii) For them, to comprehend that a Jewish religious leader, who has spent their entire lives studying the Old Testament, is not going to heaven, or worse, is second fiddle to tax collectors and the prostitutes is a difficult concept to accept.
    - a) Here is Jesus saying all of their lives' work of study and "belief" in the God of the Bible fails because they did not recognize Jesus' purpose.
    - b) On the other hand, "sinners", did get it and change.
    - c) That is the purpose of the parable.
- e) One has to be careful when reading this parable not to over-analyze it.
  - i) (Gee, I'm guilty of this every now and then! ☺)
  - ii) Jesus teaches in the last few verses of this parable that tax collectors and the prostitutes get into heaven ahead of the religious leaders because they recognized that Jesus is the Messiah.
  - iii) My point is that's it and nothing more.
  - iv) People try to read this specific parable about how the first group is the Gentile nation and the second group is the Jewish nation. Other parables talk about that issue, but not this one.
- f) The only other phrase I want to talk about is the words "ahead of you" in Verse 31.
  - i) Jesus said, "The tax collectors and the prostitutes get into heaven ahead of you".
    - a) I see this phrase as Jesus still pleading with the religious leaders to repent.
    - b) The tax collectors and the prostitutes are "ahead of them" because they repented and believed in Jesus first.
    - c) Jesus' point is that it is not too late, nor never too late for those who wish to open their heart to the Gospel message.
    - d) In fact, in the book of Acts, there were some Pharisee's, that became Christians (Acts 15:5). Although the number of Jewish Christians remains small throughout history, they have always existed.
- g) While this parable is about salvation, there are some modern examples of this parable.
  - i) This parable is about two sons. One does what his father wants, the other doesn't.
  - ii) The tax collectors and harlots are "saved" because they repented at the preaching of John. Repenting means changing their ways for the better. It is not about being perfect, but acting on the desire to do what God calls them to do in their life.
  - iii) There are people who say, "I commit their lives to Jesus", but then don't.
    - a) They think they are saved because for example, "twenty years ago I stepped forward at the preaching of a pastor". The question is always, "that's great, but what have you done since that commitment?"
    - b) Not everybody who steps forward at an evangelistic rally gets into heaven. It is about those who act on their belief that Jesus is Messiah, not just proclaim it. That is a point about the "two sons".
- h) I've always been amazed to watch people from some of the worst backgrounds, commit their lives to Jesus and do tremendous things.
  - i) Back then, tax collectors and prostitutes were the worst professions imaginable.
    - a) Those professions haven't improved their reputation much today. ☺
  - ii) My point is never underestimate what God can do with a person who has decided to repent and change their life for Jesus.
    - a) Some of the most powerful ministries I have seen have come from people that society has "written off" at some point in their life.

16. Verse 33, First sentence: "Listen to another parable:
  - a) From Verse 33 to the end of the chapter is another parable. Jesus says so right here.
  - b) Before I list the whole parable, look at what Verse 45 says, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them."
    - i) They were correct. This parable is about the Pharisees who were the religious leaders of Israel at that time.
  - c) Let me summarize the parable before we read it verse-by verse:
    - i) A landowner built a vineyard, complete with winepress and watchtower.
    - ii) The landowner leased the vineyard to farmers.
    - iii) The landowner sent servants to collect his payment, and they refused.
    - iv) The landowner sent more servants who were killed.
    - v) Finally, the landowner sent his son, who was also killed.
    - vi) Jesus ends the parable by saying in effect, "The landowner will kill those wicked servants and at harvest time give his share to others."
    - vii) When you read this parable in Luke's Gospel, there is an interesting line:
      - a) "When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" (Luke 20:16b, NIV)
      - b) My point is that the people hearing this parable understood that Jesus was preaching how God will turn to someone other than the Jewish nation.
      - c) It is important to understand that this parable is talking about the nation of Israel collectively and the individual Jews of that time who saw Jesus and willfully choose to reject him.
17. Verse 33, second sentence, "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.
  - a) The landowner in this parable represents God himself.
    - i) Remember the end of the parables is about the rejection of the vineyard tenants.
  - b) Notice the landowner is the one who "did all the work".
    - i) The landowner built the vineyard farm, and the tenants worked it.
    - ii) That simply analogy refers to God's creation, i.e., the "earth".
    - iii) Our "job" as vineyard tenants, is to be God's ambassadors to the world. That is the "work" required of them, and of us today.
  - c) Verse 34 is payment time. All people are held accountable to God based on what information we do know about Jesus.
18. Verse 35: "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. <sup>38</sup> "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.
  - a) What I noticed studying this parable is the patience of the landowner.
  - b) If I were that landowner, I would send an army to wipe them out the first time they refused to make payment, or at least "evict" them as tenants.
  - c) This parable shows the patience of God the father.
    - i) God knows eternity is far longer than our time here on earth.
    - ii) Therefore, God the father, who loves all people, is doing everything possible to get people to repent and change their ways for the sake of eternal salvation.

- iii) Let's jump ahead to Chapter 23:
    - a) Jesus said, "And you (Pharisees) say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets." (Matt. 23:30-31, NIV).
    - b) My point is the "servants" who were killed in this parable represent the Old Testament prophets already sent to Israel.
- 19. Verse 40: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"  
<sup>41</sup> "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."
  - a) At the end of Verse 41 in Luke is where the crowd yells, "May this never be!" (20:16).
  - b) Those hearing the parable understood that Jesus is predicting the collective rejection of Jesus means that others (i.e., non-Jews) would now be the main ambassadors for God.
  - c) Two thousand years of history has shown this to be true.
    - i) The primary religion in the Western world has been Christianity. While Jews have remained throughout history as a small force, it is Christianity that has dominated the western world for two thousand years.
  - d) I also need to add here I disagree with the view that the rejection of Israel is permanent.
    - i) Paul teaches that God made unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel.
    - ii) Paul says, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." (Romans 11:25b-26a, NIV)
      - a) This means there are a "fixed" number of Gentile (non-Jewish) believers and then God the Father turns his attention back on the Nation of Israel.
      - b) If Jesus is going to come back one day, there has to be only a fixed number of believers. Only God the Father knows that exact number.
- 20. Verse 42: Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"
  - a) This is a quote of Psalm 118, Verses 22-23.
  - b) Psalm 118 is considered Messianic. It is predicted about the Messiah.
    - i) The Jews of that day mistakenly thought it referred to the Nation of Israel. They thought it was about how "they" were rejected by the surrounding nations and "they" were the capstone. Jesus is teaching it is about Him.
  - c) Notice Jesus has not given up on trying to teach the religious leaders who he is.
  - d) Jesus is not putting them down, but still trying to convince them of the truth.
- 21. Verse 43: "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. <sup>44</sup> He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."
  - a) I'm running long so I'll make this brief:
    - i) This parable within the parable is about a stone.
      - a) Whoever the stone falls on will be crushed.
        - (1) This refers to eternal salvation.
      - b) Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces.
        - (1) This sounds "bad", but it is not. This part specifically is about Jesus working in our lives and he "breaks us" of our old habits.
  - b) For extra credit, study Isaiah 8:14-15 and Daniel 2:35 as similar "stone" references to Jesus.

22. Verse 45: When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. <sup>46</sup> They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.
- a) It is sad to think about the religious leaders at this point.
  - b) It never occurs to them that Jesus might be right and they have to repent.
  - c) The only reason they didn't arrest Jesus on the spot was fear of the people.
    - i) They feared for their own lives. They eventually lost it.
  - d) It reminds you of Jesus saying, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39, NIV)
23. My opening premise is that this chapter is about rejection.
- a) It teaches how Jesus was rejected and how he reacted to that rejection.
  - b) It teaches about those who willfully choose to reject Jesus, despite the biblical evidence and despite Jesus teaching otherwise, and their eternal punishment for making that choice.
  - c) We too, like Jesus must make that choice.
  - d) We too, like Jesus must live and be around people who also reject Jesus.
  - e) We too, like Jesus must try to warn as many as possible about the eternal consequences of rejecting Jesus. In that sense, we are preaching the same message.
24. Sorry I ran so long today. Please don't reject me for that. ☺
25. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have called us to be with you for eternity. We live in a world surrounded by people who willfully choose to reject you. Help us to see others not as sinners, but as those who need Jesus as much as we do. Help us to have the same sort of compassion you have for this world, and to live our lives to point others to you, as you did yourself. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.