**GOD’S MARVELOUS LOVE**

 April 28, 2019

Matthew 21:23-46 Key Verse:42, “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.’”

For the last 4 weeks we had studied our Lord Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection based on Matthew 26-28. Now we come back to Chapter 21. In the first part of Chapter 21, we learned that Jesus entered Jerusalem as a gentle and humble king, riding on a donkey. Then he cleared the temple with his burning zeal for the house of God. The religious leaders should have realized their wicked sins and repented. But sadly, they were indignant and reacted strongly against Jesus. In response, Jesus explained through parables how wicked they were and how patient and loving God is. Especially, through the parable of tenants, Jesus reveals God’s unfathomably patient love toward unrepentant sinners and the final consequence of their rebellion and stubbornness. Today we will learn God’s intention in his patient love. In short, it is to give us the opportunity to repent and bear fruit of repentance. May God open our spiritual eyes to see God’s long-suffering patient love and help us to live a repentant life!

1. **The parable of the two sons (21:23-32)**

After Jesus cleared the temple, the noise of business in the temple was no longer heard. Instead, the life-giving words of God could be heard echoing throughout the temple as Jesus taught (23a). When people heard the word of God, their souls were revived. Such scene is the right kind of scene that should be taking place in God’s temple. However, in such a happy occasion, some people were unhappy. They were the religious leaders. The chief priests and the elders of people were full of indignance, with even a murderous spirit. They confronted Jesus and asked, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” They were not ignorant of the significance or meaning of Jesus’ actions; they could have understood that Jesus did what he did because he was the Messiah but they chose to reject him. They did not like that Jesus was teaching the word of God without their permission. It frustrated their ego.

Jesus answered their question with a question of his own and promised that if they answered him, he would answer them. The question was, “John’s baptism-where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin? (25) If they said, “From heaven,” he would ask, “Then why didn’t you believe him? If they said, “Of human origin,” they were afraid of offending the people who believed that John was a prophet (25b-26). So, after discussing it among themselves, they said, “We don’t know.” While he knew the malicious intention in their question, Jesus did not retaliate and expose how pathetically wrong and petty they were. Instead, Jesus decides to not say anything. In this way, Jesus extends an opportunity for them to realize the hypocrisy of their question on their own (27). Jesus wanted to help them to understand their spiritual condition, its root problem, and the ensuing consequences. And despite their failures, God would fulfill his salvation purpose. Most importantly, Jesus wanted to reveal God’s patience, wisdom, and love, and how He exercises his authority. For this end, Jesus began to tell parables.

Jesus thus began telling the first parable asking, “What do you think?” Jesus wants us to think for ourselves based on the truth, a truth that we can deny, but a truth that remains an undeniable objective fact. We tend to follow our own subjective feelings or simply in the way that majority of people think without any kind of discernment. But we must think and follow the truth. The religious leaders were so blinded by self-righteousness that they were unaware of their wicked condition. Through the first parable, Jesus wanted to help them to recognize their condition in the sight of God. There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.” (28) Immediately, his son responded, “No, I will not.” But later he changed his mind and went (29). Then the father went to the other son and told him to go and work in the vineyard. He answered, “I will, sir,” but he did not go. Then Jesus asked, “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus explained the meaning of this parable (31b-32). Like the first son, the tax collectors and prostitutes were very rebellious at first. They were selfish and pleasure-seeking. But when they experienced the consequences of their sinful life, they became humble and repented. On the other hand, the religious leaders, like the second son, seemed to be very obedient. But they refused to follow the way of righteousness that John the Baptist showed them. Even after they saw the changed lives of tax collectors and prostitutes, they did not repent and believe (32). They were self-righteous and very proud.

The point of this parable is in verse 31b. “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.” This is shocking. How could this happen? Here we can find the deep truth about the kingdom of God. We can enter the kingdom of God only by grace, not by works. Like the Pharisees, some people assume that by doing many good works they can enter the kingdom of God. But this is not true. When we display our righteous deeds boastfully, they amount to nothing but filthy rags in the sight of God. The prophet Isaiah inspired by God said this in Isaiah 64:6, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags: we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” The Methodist founder, John Wesley who has been known as one of the greatest evangelists in Christian history had traveled over 4000 miles annually and preached some 40,000 sermons in his life time. Because of his influence, countless people came to God with genuine repentance. He had done great things in his life indeed. But as he neared his death, he confessed, “Only by the blood of Jesus (only by the grace of Jesus) can I approach God; it is not by anything I have done.” Self-righteousness makes us proud and useless; it even makes us God’s enemies (Ro 10:3). On the other hand, God’s grace makes us humble, thankful, loving, kind and generous. May we always remember God’s grace and hold on to it.

1. **The parable of the tenants (21:33-46)**

After hearing the first parable, the religious leaders were in shock. Still, they did not understand what their root problem was. So, Jesus said, “Listen to another parable.” There was a rich landowner. He planted a vineyard in fertile soil and invested a lot of time and money to make it productive. He made it very secure by putting a wall around it and building a watchtower. He also installed a winepress in anticipation of producing good wine. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place (33). For farmers to work in that vineyard was a great privilege and blessing. Their work environment was very good, and no one was lording over them as a supervisor. They could work together freely and creatively to produce a good harvest. The only thing they needed to do was to give the owner his share of the fruit at harvest time (34). What a good owner! This parable is a concise summary of God’s blessing upon his chosen people Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). It can also serve as a picture of God’s blessing upon each individual in this world.

When harvest time approached, the owner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. Suddenly the tenants became crazy. They seized his servants; they beat one, killed another and stoned the third (35). They completely forgot that they were not owners, but just tenants. After enjoying all the privileges of the vineyard, the tenants did not want to give any fruit to the owner. They wanted the vineyard to be theirs.

How did the owner respond to the tenants’ evil actions? He could have evicted the wicked tenants right away, or even destroyed them. However, the owner was a very different kind of owner from what we normally see in this world. He patiently tried to understand them. He may have thought that if he gave them more opportunities, they would come back to their senses and remember their owner. So, he sent his servants a second time and a third time with great patience. But this had no effect on the tenants; they treated these servants just like the first group. At this point, what could the owner have done? Amazingly, he showed even greater patience and respect toward the tenants. After much painful deliberation, he decided to send his own son. This, to many, sounds just absurd, if not naïve. The owner experienced how wicked the tenants were. Sending his own son was a huge risk. Still, he had hope for them, saying, “They will respect my son.” Here we are completely puzzled and amazed by the owner’s decision because this kind of patience and self-sacrificing love is beyond our imagination and understanding. In human history we have never heard of such crazy, self-sacrificing, patient loving landowner story. In fact, this kind of love is not the love of human. This is the love of God. Unlike human conditional love, God’s love is so patient, self-sacrificial, and unconditional. His love is so deep, wide, high, and long that no one can fathom. Then naturally we come to ask a question. Why? Why does God so love us in such patience? It is for our repentance. Apostle Paul knew God’s long-suffering patient love toward unrepentant sinners and the intention of such love. So, he said in Romans 2:4, “Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

How did the tenants respond to this love? Did they repent? No, they mistook God’s patient love for weakness. When the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance. So, they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” (38-39) Jesus’ parable now shifts from history to prophecy. Mistreating and killing God-sent prophets was Israel’s history. Now he foretold about what would happen to him in just a few days. The religious leaders would condemn Jesus to death as a criminal. They would crucify him and throw him outside the city. God had borne them through his long-suffering patience. But this was the last straw. Jesus concluded by asking what the owner would do to the tenants. The religious leaders answered, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” (41) Ironically, they pronounced God’s judgment on themselves. Here we learn that God is not only a God of love but also a God of judgment. God’s fearsome judgment would come upon them and they would not be able to stand. As Jesus prophesied, Jerusalem was totally destroyed in A.D. 70 by Roman General Titus. The nation Israel was scattered for 1900 years.

Jesus explained the meaning of the parable based on Psalm 118:22-23. Let’s read verse 42. “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.’?” They had studied the Bible diligently many times but did not understand its meaning. It was because their spiritual eyes were closed due to their pride and greed. Nevertheless, they were fulfilling prophecy. Jesus compared them to builders. They had their own idea of Messiah and made their own plan. To them, Jesus seemed useless, so they rejected him and crucified him. But God made Jesus the cornerstone, which is the most important stone in the entire building. God raised Jesus from the dead and made him both Lord and Messiah. When the leaders of Israel failed, it seemed that God’s redemptive plan had failed. But God never fails. God used their wickedness to bring about his great salvation.

In the parables we learned today, we saw that Jesus compared God to a father and a landowner. These are positions of authority which must be respected. Especially the father and the landowner in the parable are not authoritarian-like figures but very loving, generous and gracious ones treating sons and tenants respectfully. Indeed, at the root of our sinful nature is a rebellion; hostility against God’s authority. This sinful nature drove the teachers of the law to ultimately enact their hatred and pride in the most violent, cruel way; this sinful nature that drove these Bible scholars to put the Son of God to death is also in us. This sinful rebellion against God’s authority has its historical deep root from the Genesis 3-Satan’s temptation and the first man Adam’s disobedience. Since that time on, the human history has been filled with repeated rebellion against God’s authority. The very first example after Adam was found in his very next generation; his first son Cain. He rebelled against God’s authority and murdered his younger brother Abel because he was not pleased with God’s decision between himself and his younger brother. The very reason why there have been so many different languages and tongues among mankind was men’s rebellion against God’s authority (Genesis 11; the event of the Tower of Babel). The history of Israel also indicates that their rebellion against God’s authority was repeated right after God’s blessing and God had to deal with this same sin of Israel repeatedly. They say, “If we do not learn from the past history, we repeat same mistake.” We are not exempt. In us, we have everlasting text book telling about the truth; the Bible. So let’s learn from what the bible teaches so that we may not repeat the sin of rebellion against the owner of our life; our God.

There is a man who set the very good example regarding our absolute obedience to God. Andrew Murray was a very influential and fruitful South African pastor and writer and missionary. He said in his book entitled “Absolute surrender,” “our 99% obedience is after all disobedience.” God does not want just a part of our life but the whole of our life. God wants me and my life to be devoted to him wholeheartedly and absolutely 100%. In light of this truth, I find myself that I still fail many times. However, despite my many failures, I have one conviction that even if fail 1000 times, the only place that I should go back is Jesus again because Jesus alone is able to restore and re-strengthen me and he alone is worthy to receive my whole devotion of life.

Today we learned that God made Jesus the cornerstone of his great salvation work. When we come to Jesus as we are—with all of our ugly, filthy sins—he does not condemn and expose us but he forgives us, transforms us and commissions us to carry out his great salvation work. The love of God that did not spare his One and Only Son for sinners is beyond our imagination and understanding and makes us live in awe and wonder eternally. This very moment of life is a gift, an opportunity for us to repent and bear fruit that pleases God. May God help us to repent and receive God’s love and live a fruitful life of obedience in our Lord Jesus Christ!