

October 31, 2004 by Steve Brandon



# A Parable for Israel

## Matthew 21:33-46

### 1. The Parable (verses 33-41)

### 2. The Interpretation (verses 42-46)

I love the time change in the fall. I love falling back an hour and getting an extra hour of sleep, like we did last night. I trust that you have come this morning, refreshed from the extra hour of sleep last night that you received. It came at a great time this year. Our family has been late to several things past week. The Winnebago flock began meeting last Friday evening. The schedule has the flock beginning at 6:30 with a half-hour of fellowship, with the Bible study beginning at 7:00 sharp. We knew this, but we didn't get there until 10 minutes after 7pm. Additionally, we attended a wedding yesterday, which began at 2:00pm. When you attend a wedding, it's always a good idea to arrive a little bit early, that you might be seated before everything begins. Again, we were running late, and didn't arrive until a few minutes after 2:00pm. In order to see the wedding, we had to scurry in the side door to get a seat. I was given some good advice yesterday in an effort to help us be on time. A man told me, "Steve, when you go to bed tonight, set your clock back by only 40 minutes, rather than a full hour. That way, you might be on time for these things."

I'm thankful for your patience with us. We are far from perfect people. I'm also thankful for the patience of our God. In our text this morning, we will see exactly how patient and kind our God is.

Perhaps you remember the story of king David, when he remained at home, instead of going out to war. In his leisure, he took a walk on the roof of his palace. He spied a beautiful woman, who was bathing. Upon inquiring about the woman, he found out that her name was Bathsheba, and that she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was out fighting for Israel. In his sin, David lay with her, and she became pregnant. Rather than confessing his sin, David attempted to cover up his sin, by calling Uriah back from the front lines. When Uriah refused to go home to his wife, David sent him back to the battlefield, where he was killed through a purposefully poor tactical maneuver. After the death of Uriah, David took Bathsheba as his wife. In the process, David had broken half of the ten commandments.

David coveted his neighbor's wife (commandment #10).  
David committed adultery with her (commandment #7).  
David committed murder (commandment #6).  
David essentially stole Uriah's wife (Commandment #8), and  
David lied throughout the entire affair (commandment #9).

It was a terrible thing that David did. Perhaps the worst thing of all is that David did not confess his actions as sinful. For an entire year, David was silent about these things. For an entire year, David put forth no confession of his sin. It was only when a man named Nathan came along to confront him of his sin that he finally repented. Do you remember how Nathan confronted David? It was masterful. Nathan told David a story. He said, ...

2 Samuel 12:1-4

"There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

David responded immediately with burning anger against this man. David said, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. And he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." At that moment, Nathan had David right where he wanted him. Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7).

What made the story so great is that it described David's situation exactly in such a way that David could be an impartial, third-party observer. David was then allowed to expose His own sin! And the good news of the story is that David repented of his sin, and gave much glory to God. The fruit of his repentance has come down to us in several psalms (for instance, Psalms 51 and 32).

This morning, we find ourselves in Matthew 21:33-46. In our passage, we find Jesus doing exactly the same thing as Nathan did. To be sure, the situation is different; the story is different; the scope of events is different. But, the method of confronting sin is exactly the same. Jesus tells a parable, which engages the religious leaders. When Jesus asked for a response, they too were emotionally charged, just as David had been. They made the right judgment. Then, like Nathan had done so masterfully, Jesus brought it back upon these religious leaders to show them that they were the subjects of His story. They fully understood that Jesus "was speaking about them" (verse 45).

This parable that Jesus tells is really, "the story of Israel." Jesus tells of a kind, caring, and patient God, who is rejected by a sinful, rebellious,

and unthankful people. Sadly, when the story is finished and when these religious leaders understand clearly what Jesus is communicating, they didn't repent, as David had done. Rather, "they sought to seize Him" (verse 46).

My message this morning is entitled, "A Parable for Israel." It's a parable that Israel needed to hear. It's a parable that we need to hear.

Our text begins (in verse 33) with Jesus saying, "listen to another parable." This is the second in a series of three parables that Jesus speaks to the religious leaders. Last week, we looked at the first of these parables. It was the parable of the two sons. Next week, we will look at the third of these parables. It is the parable of the wedding feast. This middle parable sums up for us the whole Old Testament. It tells of the biggest issues presented to us in the Bible. It tells of God's patient dealings with Israel. It tells of Israel's continual rejection of God. It tells of the centrality of the cross of Christ.

Let's begin by looking at ...

#### 1. The Parable (verses 33-41)

Jesus introduces the first character as "a landowner who planted a vineyard" (verse 33). The land of Israel is covered with vineyards, as the climate is perfect for growing grapes. The Jews who heard Jesus describe the planting of this vineyard, would relate very well. I don't think that it is too difficult for us to understand. We drive but a few minutes and we can see the farmers caring for their fields in much the same way that the vine growers of Jesus' day would have done for their vines.

In planting the vineyard, he certainly took some effort to prepare the soil. If this particular piece of land hadn't yet been cultivated, this may have required some intense labor, removing any large rocks, cutting down any weeds that happened to be growing there, and cultivating the hard soil for the first time.

In verse 33, we read that he "put a wall around it." This wouldn't have been a cheap enterprise for the owner. To build a wall would require much labor. This wall would have protected his vines from any animals that might attempt to come and enjoy the crop for themselves.

Furthermore, we read that he "dug a wine press in it" (verse 33). This action certainly speaks to his expectation that fruit would come from this vineyard. Rather than taking his grapes off to another location, this owner wanted to streamline the process, by pressing the grapes right there within the vineyard.

He also "built a tower" (verse 33). This would have allowed for further care and protection for his vineyard. A tower would enable him (or one of his workers) to watch out for thieves, who might attempt to plunder his vineyard.

In all of this activity, (planting, building a wall, digging a wine press, and building a tower), we see the **great care** of the landowner to insure that this vineyard would produce fruit. The soil was cultivated. The field was protected by a wall. The wine press was ready for the fruit. It was intended to be a successful and profitable operation for this landowner.

Now, for some reason, once the vineyard was all built, and ready to put forth fruit, the landowner "rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey" (verse 33). We aren't told the purpose of the journey. But, in his absence, this landowner transferred responsibility for the welfare of his vineyard over to these vine-growers. It says here that they "rented it" from him. Such an arrangement isn't so unusual. This even takes place today. It is very common for one person to own land, while another agrees to farm the land. In doing so, various arrangements are possible. The land can be rented for a set price each year. Or, the owner and the farmer can split the profits of the crops. In either event, those who rent the vineyard made some type of business agreement to make a return to the owner.

In verse 34, we are met with some tragic circumstances. "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce." Surely, this was in accordance with their rental agreement. Verse 35 continues, "And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third." What an awful thing to do. These slaves had been sent by the landowner to collect his share from the vineyard, as had been agreed upon before he left on his journey. These slaves were merely following the requests of their master, who sent them. Rather than being received kindly, they were harshly treated. Jesus said that one of them was beaten, and the other two were killed. We can only imagine the beating that took place. Wooden sticks or metal rods were used to strike these slaves before they were sent back to the owner with cuts and bruises over their bodies, with stories to tell the owner. We don't know how they killed some of these slaves. But, others were stoned. They were killed by stones which others threw at them or dropped upon them. It was a painful way to die.

In verse 36 we read that the owner sent some more slaves to collect his rent, "Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them." Perhaps the owner sent more slaves to collect the rent this time because he sensed the danger. Perhaps he figured that a larger number of slaves would be able to better protect themselves against the few vine-growers. The first time, the owner had sent only three slaves. This time, there were at least four slaves that went. He may have sent 10 (or even 20 slaves). But, it didn't matter, "They did the same thing to them." Some were beaten and that others were killed. Those who were only beaten were able to return to the landowner to tell them him what took place when they attempted to receive his fair share of the vineyard.

At this point, the landowner does an amazing thing. He sends his own son to confront these dangerous men. His reasoning is found in verse 37, "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" In some ways, such an action borders on being naïve. If they killed several sets of slaves, why would they not kill the son also? But, by sending his son, the landowner is demonstrating his patience with these wicked men. Perhaps he had given them the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps they had beaten and killed the other slaves in thinking that they were deceivers, not having been sent from the landowner. But, when the son arrives, there would be no doubt that he was sent by the landowner.

The results of this visit are given in verses 38-39, "But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.' And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him." Such was the wickedness of these men that they killed the son as well.

Then, Jesus asked the question in verse 40, "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" It's not a mystery what he will do. He will bring these justice. This is exactly what how the religious leaders responded. "They said to Him, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the proper season'" (verse 41). They rightly interpreted what sort of people these vine-growers were, in calling them "wretches." These vine-growers were dishonest men, who had forsaken their contract and had spilt blood in their defiance.

These religious leaders understood what Jesus was saying on the level of the parable. Little did they know that they had pronounced their own condemnation, as David had done when Nathan told him the story of the poor man with one ewe lamb.

Which leads us to my second point. Let's now look at, ...

## 2. The Interpretation (verses 42-46)

These religious leaders should have known that Jesus was speaking about them in His parable, because it was remarkably similar to the one that the prophet Isaiah had told some 700 years before. In fact, Matthew 21:33 is a direct quotation from Isaiah 5.

Please turn back in your Bibles to Isaiah 5. As experts in the law, these religious leaders should have understood the parable that Jesus told. Let me remind you that Isaiah was much more familiar to them than it is to us today. Certainly those who heard Jesus tell this parable were familiar with Isaiah 5. As religious leaders, I'm sure some of them had even preached sermons on the passage.

### Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. And He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, And hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. And I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

The elements of this parable are exactly like the ones in Jesus' parable. God is the one who planted the vineyard (verse 1). The plants are the people of Israel (verse 7). He expected to see fruit (verse 4). But, fruit wasn't produced (verse 4). And as a result, God would come in condemnation. In His condemnation, the wall would be broken down and the vineyard destroyed (verse 5). The field would lay uncultivated and weeds would arise (verse 6). And the rain would be withheld, to prevent anything from growing (verse 6). This was prophetic of what would take place in a few years of Isaiah's writing this. Israel had already been destroyed by Assyria. Soon, Judah, the southern nation, would be taken into captivity in Babylon. Why? Because Israel bore no fruit. And as we saw a few weeks ago, the fig that puts forth leaves, but bears no fruit will wither up and die.

Back in Matthew 21, Jesus took the parable that Isaiah told and gave it a little twist. As in Isaiah's parable, the landowner represents God, and the vineyard represents Israel. Jesus adds a few more components to His parable to direct attention away from the lack of fruit in general to the misconduct of the Jewish leaders in particular. The vine-growers represent the religious leaders of Israel. The slaves represent the prophets. The son represents Jesus, Himself.

God had planted and cultivated this nation of Israel. He had protected them from the surrounding nations, as this landowner did in building a wall around the vineyard. He had expected to see fruit from Israel, as this landowner did in digging a wine press within the walls of the vineyard. He had provided a future means of protection, as this landowner did in building a guard tower. God gave the responsibility of spiritual leadership to the religious leaders of Israel, as this landowner rented his vineyard to the vine-growers. God sent His prophets to Israel, as this landowner had sent his slaves to the vine-growers. God sent Jesus to Israel, as this landowner had sent his son to the vine-growers.

From this parable, there are two main points that we should extract.

### 1. The kindness of God.

From the parable, you get a strong sense that the landowner cared for His vineyard. He went to great extents to see that the vineyard would grow and prosper. And when you take this into history by looking upon the kindness of God to Israel, it is stunning! In Genesis 12, the nation began with a choice that God made. He chose Abraham to be the father of His chosen nation. A nation whose numbers would be as the numbers of the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5), or as the sand in the seashore (Gen. 22:17). Through amazing providences, God protected this family from a famine that came upon the land. Though enslaved for some 400 years in Egypt, God blessed them and they multiplied greatly during this time. Furthermore, He delivered them from slavery by such unbelievable displays of His sovereignty that the Jewish people today still remember them (some 4,000 years later) by celebrating the Passover each year. He brought them into the promised land and blessed them abundantly. Listen to the abundance of blessing that God bestowed upon Israel,

### Joshua 21:43-45

So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

And then, in contrast to the kindness of God, you see, ...

## 2. The rebellion of Israel

How did they respond? They rebelled. They rebelled. They rebelled. If you read the book of Judges, you read about how they forsake the Lord again and again and again. Israel was oppressed and afflicted. And then, God raises up a judge to deliver them. They say, "Thank you very much" and soon after forsake the Lord again. And then, God raises up another judge to deliver them. Then, they rebel again. During the times of the kings, it is the same thing. Some kings are good (like Hezekiah and Josiah) and seek to reform the people. But, many kings are bad, and lead Israel into great sin! Israel was a rebellious nation.

When the Lord sent the prophets, do you know how the people of God responded to them? Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jeremiah 20:2). He was thrown in prison and had been cast into an empty cistern (Jer. 37, 38). We are told in 1 Kings 18:4 that Jezebel "destroyed the prophets of the Lord." We don't know how many were killed, but we do know that Obadiah took 100 prophets and hid them and provided food for them. Perhaps Jezebel killed hundreds of prophets. In 2 Chronicles 24, the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, who told the people, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.'" What did they do to him? They stoned him to death (2 Chron. 24:21).

It was well known among the people that the Jews were those who persecuted their own prophets. Jesus refers to it in Matthew 23:30. Stephen refers to it in Acts 7:52, saying, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" The exception for a prophet was to experience a life of no persecution.

And yet, despite their great rebellion, God continued to demonstrate His patience to this rebellious nation by sending them more prophets and more prophets and more prophets. And Israel hated them, and beat them and stoned them and killed them. It was exactly as Jesus described it in His parable. You see the kindness of God on the one hand and you see the rebellion of Israel on the other. **Yet, even in their rebellion, the Lord continued to demonstrate His patience to them.**

It is the same today. God has been extremely patient with all of us. Today is a day of God's tremendous kindness and patience. If any of us don't believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, who's to blame? It certainly can't be God, who has extended His great patience to us. The gospel is widely proclaimed in our nation. Churches abound in America. Anyone interested in learning the truth about God can walk into many churches in our land and hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Oh, I admit that in many churches, the gospel has been distorted. But, usually, there is enough light to begin a pursuit of the knowledge of Jesus. In recent days, I have spoken with a college student from another nation. He was absolutely astonished at the number of churches that we have here in America.

But if people don't come to church, there are always other options for hearing the gospel. I'm guessing that across our land, 95% of our nation can turn on their radio and hear the clear truth of the gospel from gifted preachers. Even on secular stations, there are good preachers proclaiming the truth of God's word. For instance, D. James Kennedy plays on Fox 39 every Sunday morning! The message of the gospel has gone forth in our nation. God has abounded in kindness to our nation. There is no other nation in the history of the world that has had the Christian heritage that we have had. Many of the early settlers in America left Europe for religious reasons. Many of these people had the exact same theology as we believe at Rock Valley Bible Church. Furthermore, there is no other nation in the history of the world that has been blessed from a material perspective.

And how have we responded as a nation? Just like Israel. We have rebelled. We have rebelled. We have rebelled.

We have rebelled in the sheer numbers of children born out of wedlock. In speaking recently with a nurse, I was told that many births today in hospitals are to unwed mothers. We have rebelled by legalizing abortion. We have rebelled by accepting homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. We have rebelled in the wickedness and sensuality that is displayed upon our television sets. We have rebelled in removing God from our children's education. We have rebelled in allowing the exploitation of the poor with all of our state lotteries. You could continue on and on and on and on. We are a nation adrift!

I believe that the elections that will take place this week will be a clear indication to us of whether God continues to demonstrate His incredible patience and kindness to our rebellious nation, or whether God allows us to reap our own consequences of our sin. I'm praying fervently for God's undeserved blessing upon us.

If we continue in our rebellion, there will be a day when God's patience runs out. We will have no one to blame but ourselves. God has been incredibly patient and kind to us. With Israel, those days arrived when they rejected the Son of God.

Beginning in verse 42, we see Jesus focusing His attention upon what happened when the Son came to the Jews. The Son was to be the one who was to be received. The Son was the chief of the prophets ever to be sent. Verse 42 begins with a rebuke, "Jesus said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures?'" Jesus said this to the Jews on several other occasions (Matt. 12:3; 19:4; 21:16), and it was always a rebuke, "You should know these things! They are written in the Scriptures!" And then Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22, 23, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes." (verse 42).

There are different ideas about what exactly a cornerstone is. Some say that it is the very first stone laid at the foundation of the building to be built, from which all of the walls will be measured. Some say that is the chief stone placed upon an arch which perfectly balances the other stones and keeps them in place. We don't know exactly what a cornerstone is. But, the cornerstone is the most important stone in the whole building.

Here is the ironic thing: if anybody knows stones, it is the builders. Builders are always looking at their materials. A carpenter studies his

materials to know which boards can be used here and which sheets of plywood can we put there. A carpenter can spot a good 2x4 and a bad 2x4. A machinist knows a good hunk of metal from a bad hunk of metal. A geologist knows where to dig the well and where not to dig.

For builders of Jesus' day, a perfect stone that can be used as the cornerstone will not be quickly overlooked by the builders. They may not notice a perfect stone in the midst of many stones. But, when they see it an examine it, they certainly won't cast it off.

Likewise, if anybody should know the Messiah, it should be those who are searching for the Messiah. And here, the Messiah was under their nose and the Pharisees totally missed Him. They had witnessed His miracles. They had seen His life and conduct. They had scrutinized His teaching. And they still rejected Him. That's the point of verses 45-46, And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet."

It was a typical response of these Jewish people, who hated Jesus with a passion. This entire section of the gospel of Matthew we are in right now has to do with Jesus stirring up the animosity of the religious leaders against Him. He knew that He was come to die. He was doing His part to insure that He would die, by bringing truth to the surface.

But, lest we think that this was a plan which spun out of control, we see, "**This came about from the Lord**" (verse 42). God did this whole thing. It was no accident that Jesus died upon the cross. You have to remember that when Jesus told this parable, He hadn't yet been crucified. But, He knew that He would be. On several occasions, Jesus had told His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to die (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). On one occasion, He even said that He would be crucified (Matt. 20:19).

When Jesus was crucified upon the cross, it was God who put Him there. Don't ever think in your mind that the cross was an unfortunate turn of events. Certainly, the Jews were responsible. They even admitted it, "His blood be upon us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25). But, it was God whose hand was guiding all of history to bring it to pass. "This came about from the Lord." Why did the builders reject the chief corner stone? Because it was "from the Lord."

Turn you attention now upon the last phrase in verse 42, "And it is marvelous in our eyes." It is marvelous in our eyes! The cross is what gives us hope in this life. Were the truth known, we aren't so much different than ancient Israel. We haven't been perfect to merit God's kindness. Yet, God has been kind to us despite us. He has been far beyond kind. The good news of the gospel is that God has extended His saving arm to those who simply believe in the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.

If the chief corner stone had never been rejected, we would still be in the state that the Israelites were in. We would be travelling to Jerusalem to offer up bulls and goats in an effort to atone for our sin. But, the book of Hebrews is clear: It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:4). If the chief corner stone had never been rejected, we would still be dead in our sins, without hope in this present life!

The cross of Jesus Christ should be marvelous in our eyes! In this church, we have sung often of "The Mighty Cross." Listen to one of the stanzas, ...

"O mighty cross, what throne of grace  
He knew no sin, yet took my place,  
His sacrifice on Calvary  
Has made the mighty cross a tree of life to me."

We sing that way, because the rejection of the chief cornerstone is "marvelous in our eyes!" If you know nothing of the marvels of the wonderful cross, then you are no different than these Pharisees who rejected Jesus in Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago. If you are no different than these Pharisees. In your case, the warning of verses 43 and 44 come to you.

Verse 43 says, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. With these verses, Jesus is speaking directly to those Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus. As they rejected Jesus, the kingdom of God was taken away from them, and it was given to another, which would produce fruit.

As you read the New Testament, you see that this new "nation" isn't a political entity, like Mexico or Germany or Yugoslavia (or even America). But, this new "nation" is comprised of those who believe and trust in Jesus. It's those who, by faith, have embraced the stone that the Jews stumbled upon. This is what Peter said when he wrote his letter to those who were scattered "throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). They weren't all one nation. But, they were in union with one another because they believed in the stone that was rejected (1 Pet. 2:7). Peter writes to these scattered people, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9).

Verse 43 tells us that the Jews forfeited their right to the promises. And thus, the kingdom was taken away from them, and given to another people--those who receive the Son. **We get life because they rejected life!** The reason it the promises of Christ have come to us is because the Jews rejected it! And they still reject it today. In Romans 11:25, Paul says that "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." In this, we ought to rejoice!

Imagine yourself at a ball game, rooting for a particular team to win! What do you do when they miss a field goal? You cheer, because it is good for you! What do you do when they miss a free throw? You cheer, because it is good for you! Their misfortune is fortune to us! Israel botched it up, which meant good for us.

Israel rejected their Messiah, and so, the blessing of God extends far beyond the nation of Israel today! It comes to us who believe! We ought to rejoice as those at Pisidian Antioch did when the Jews rejected the gospel of Christ. It was then that Paul "turned to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). When they heard of the blessings of salvation that had come to them, "they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:48).

In this, we ought to be warned. Verse 44 is a warning. The one who stumbles upon a crucified savior will be destroyed. The one who fails to embrace the grace of God as displayed in the cross will be punished. This is what Jesus says in verse 44. He uses the imagery of a stone (picking up from verse 42). The one who stumbles upon the corner stone will be "broken to pieces." And when that stone, Jesus, comes and finds you unbelieving, you will be pulverized into tiny particles of dust. Have you ever seen what happens when you take kernels of wheat and smash them with a rock? It breaks up into fine flour. This is the picture that Jesus uses here. Those who stumble on the cross of Christ are in great danger.

This story that Jesus told was "a parable for Israel." But, it is also a parable for us. We need to rejoice in their rejection of Jesus. But, we ought never become prideful of our possession. In Deuteronomy 9, the Lord gave a warning to Israel, shortly before they were to go in to possess the land of Canaan. They were warned against pride and arrogance.

Deuteronomy 9:4-6

*Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, "Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land," but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.*

Three times in as many verses, Moses warned the people of Israel, "It is not because of your righteousness" that the LORD has blessed you. We ought to take heed to the same warning. We are sharers in the gospel, not because we are righteous and the Jews are not. We are sharers in the gospel, only because Israel was wicked, and God punished them and extended His grace and compassion to us! May we never become prideful that we are recipients of God's mercy! It's all of His grace that we have anything! We deserve none of it.

Jesus told "a parable of condemnation to Israel" which has become "a parable of mercy to us!" May we rejoice in God's kindness to us!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 31, 2004 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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