

**PHONY RELIGION**  
**Matthew 21:18-46**  
**11/27/11**

**Big Idea:** God's kingdom program will be taken from the nation Israel and given to those who truly repent and believe.

**Purpose:** To get religious phonies to repent and believe

An American missionary in Russia made a sad but true observation about most Christians in the United States.

*She said, "People live for themselves and church is more like a hobby."*

What she meant is that most of us don't take our faith seriously.

*It is something most play at or use for our own purposes.*

*Social life, entertainment, or to make us feel good, etc.*

One college pastor said, "Students fifteen years ago want to know what is true, today they want what is cool."

*We say we are Christians, but it doesn't change much how we live or who we are living for.*

**There are few things God hates more than religious phonies.**

*Jesus confronts religious hypocrisy in Matthew 21-23.*

*He begins with a graphic illustration.*

**1. The Cursing of the Fig Tree 21:18-22**

**18-19** *Some don't believe that this miracle is worthy of Jesus.*

*They say that when Jesus cursed the fig tree He was acting like a spoiled child who didn't get his way.*

*Others say that it is unthinkable for Jesus to blast a poor, innocent tree, simply because it was fruitless.*

*These same people would have no problem if Jesus had cut the tree down for firewood.*

*But here Jesus uses the tree for an even higher purpose.*

*He uses it as an object lesson to teach a spiritual lesson.*

Jesus cursed the fig tree as a visual parable and warning to the Jewish people of His day.

The fig tree was commonly used as a symbol for the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 8:13; 29:17; Hosea 9:10,16 etc.)

Just like this fig tree, Israel had the outward appearance of spiritual health, but it was barren on the inside.

The cursing of the fig tree is picture of God's coming judgment on the nation's religious hypocrisy. (70 AD)

Jesus' actions here have symbolic importance to us also.

They signify God's attitude toward the all who put on a phony spiritual appearance. (cf. Hos. 9:10–17).

## 20-22 What does this mean?

Moving a mountain was a common metaphor in Jewish literature for doing what was seemingly impossible

Jesus was speaking figuratively about the power of God, unleashed in the lives of those with true faith.

Some people rip these verses out of context and say that they are teaching that whatever you want will come true if you can only drum up enough faith.

Jesus is not teaching that there is power in positive thinking.

Those who **doubt** here are those who are double minded.

They aren't committed to following God.

They are religious phonies.

**James 1:6-8** But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

**James 4:8** Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

*Jesus assumes here that what we ask for will be  
“according to his will.”*

**1 John 5:14** This is the confidence which we have  
before Him, that, if we ask anything according to  
His will, He hears us.

If what we are praying for is in accordance with the will of  
God:

No assignment of God is impossible.

No burden is too heavy nor task too difficult

No barrier is too high

No force of darkness is too strong

## **2. The Question of Authority 21:23-27**

**By what authority does Jesus:**

Come riding into Jerusalem to the fanfare of the Messiah.

Barge into the temple and forcefully drive out the  
merchants, money changers, and animals

Have the audacity to teach what He is teaching

Jesus was on “their” turf

He had not been trained by them

He had not been ordained by them

The Jewish religious leaders had both the right and the  
responsibility to check out anyone who claimed to  
represent God. cf Deuteronomy 18:15-22

But these men did not have pure motives.

They were not seeking the truth.

They were looking for an excuse to destroy Him.

**23-27 Jesus exposes their hypocrisy with a question of His  
own.**

“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”

They are trapped.

If they acknowledged that John's message was from God, Jesus would ask them why they didn't believe John's testimony about Him. cf John 1:26-34

If they disavowed John the Baptist they feared the response of the people.

They didn't care about what was true.

They were seeking a politically correct answer.

They were hypocrites and man-pleasers.

So they plead ignorance.

Since they refused to answer Jesus' question, He refuses to answer their question.

They had heard the testimony of John the Baptist about Him.

Some of them had the voice of God out of heaven.

They knew about the fulfilled prophecies

They had seen His miracles.

He had already told them many times who He was. John 5:17-18; 8:23-24, 54-59; 10:31-33

Jesus wasn't going to give them more ammunition.

He wasn't going to cast more pearls before swine.

*Before they have an opportunity to leave, Jesus tells them a parable that reveals where their sin is leading them.*

### 3. The Parable of Two Sons 21:28-32

The religious leaders said the right things but did their own thing.

Repentant thieves and prostitutes have a better standing with God than hypocritical religious people.

*regretted* (v. 29) and *feel remorse* (v. 32) come from the same Greek word (**metame, lomai---**)

They had a change of heart which led to a change of behavior.

*Believe* v. 32

Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of *repentance* toward God and *faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. The Parable of the Landowner 21:33-41

a. The landowner is God the Father. cf Isaiah 5

He paid for and provided everything.

He took great pains to make the vineyard healthy and productive.

He put up a wall to keep the wild animals (invaders) from ruining the vineyard.

He dug a pit for a winepress in expectation of its produce.

He built a tower for storage and as a vantage point from which the vineyard could be observed and protected.

b. The vineyard was a familiar image of Israel.

Cf Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7

Matthew 21:43 identifies it with God's kingdom

c. The vine-growers represent the Jewish religious leaders.

d. The slaves represent God's prophets.

Elijah hid in the wilderness to save his life while most of the other prophets of his day were killed.

Isaiah was sawn in two.

Zechariah was stoned to death.

John the Baptist was beheaded.

God's patience is seen in how He allows Himself to be treated as His servants are rudely turned away.

These rebuffs, insults, and beatings were really a defiance of God Himself.

e. The Son represents Jesus.

He was about to be killed by them.

f. The destruction of the vine-growers represents God's setting aside of Israel.

A great national judgment came upon Israel in 70 AD under the Roman leader, Titus.

**g. The new vine-growers represent us. v. 43**

Their verdict against the evil tenants was also Christ's judgment against them.

The leadership of God's kingdom program has been turned over to His Church comprised of both Jews and Gentiles.

We are now God's vine-growers.

God's program on earth has been entrusted to us.

**5. The Point of It All 21:42-44**

**42** Israel as a whole rejected the chief cornerstone of God's kingdom program.

They rejected Jesus.

**43** The kingdom of God will be taken away from Israel and given to a nation producing.

God has it to the church, which is comprised of people from all nations.

**Ephesians 2:19-20** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*

**1 Peter 2:9-10** But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;* 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Israel will one day repent and believe in Jesus.

At that time they will be restored as the center piece of God's kingdom program.

Romans 11:20, 23, 25-27

Cf Ezekiel 47 & 48; Revelation 7:4-8; 21:12

**43 Jesus expects us to bear fruit**

**John 15:16a** "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit

We are to live for Him.

We are to represent Him here on this earth

We are to tell others about Him

We cannot bear fruit by ourselves.

**John 15:4** "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.

**6. Their Response 21:45-46**

Sadly, they didn't repent, but hardened their hearts.

They looked for a way to arrest Him and kill Him.

Some today get a twisted pleasure in rejecting Christ.

They want to be in charge of their lives.

They don't want Him ruling over them.

Some are foolish enough to think that they can defy Him and nothing will happen.

**7. Your Response?**

**What we do with Jesus will determine our ultimate fate.**

**John 3:18** "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

**John 3:36** "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

**1 John 5:12** He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

**Big Idea:** God's kingdom program has been temporarily taken from the nation Israel and given to those of us who truly repent and believe.

Are you for real?  
Where's the fruit?