

Matthew 21:28-22:14 | “Portraits of Grace”
Preached on March 10, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Good morning, I invite you to open up your Bibles and flip to Matthew 21, verse 28. *[pause]*

We will be looking at three parables that Jesus gives.

So we have a lot of ground to cover this morning, but trust me, it will be worth it to see all three of these parables together. *[pauseeee]*

This morning, I want you to imagine that you are going to go into an art gallery, the gallery of God’s Word.

And today you are going to be looking at 3 portraits in the gallery of Scripture....

...But don’t let the small number of portraits deter you from paying attention this morning, for they are powerfully deep and important. *[pause]*

This is no normal visit to an art gallery, for this visit to the 3 portraits is meant to change you, so that you are never the same again. *[pauseeee]*

Now when you look at a portrait or painting, there are multiple things going on...

On the one hand, the basic understanding of what is drawn is recognized, but then there is typically a deeper meaning and symbolism going on. *[pause]*

So also, these three parables have a basic meaning, but they also point to something deeper, and I hope to show you what that is.

Therefore, as you come to the gallery of Scripture today, I will be your tour guide.

I will point you to the basic understanding of each portrait, but also, show you some deep truths and some common themes as we look at them together. *[pause]*

So get ready to fix your gaze upon the portraits, as we step up and look at portrait #1 found in Matthew 21, starting in verse 28. *[READ 21:28-32]*

If you remember, Jesus had just been confronted by the religious leaders, who asked him by what authority he was doing what he was doing.

And it’s that interaction that will now start a string of rebukes by Jesus of the religious leaders, as he especially goes after them in these three parables. *[pauseeee]*

This first one is a question about who obeyed: a son who refuses to work in the vineyard at first, but then goes, or a son who says he will go, but never does. *[pause]*

The answer is of course, the one who eventually went. *[pause]*

Jesus then gives us the clear meaning of this parable - the tax collectors and prostitutes are like the first son, and the religious leaders are like the second son. *[pause]*

The tax collectors and prostitutes were living in sin and rejecting God, saying, “I will not obey.”

But now they are repenting and believing! *[pause]*

Yet the religious leaders are like the second son, acting like they will obey God, yet John came, and they refused to believe him. *[pauseeee]*

This should bring shame upon the religious leaders, for here are the tax collectors and prostitutes, who were looked down upon as the worst of sinners, and they are believing!

Yet the religious leaders *still* do not believe John nor Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

This would have brought a certain shock factor for the religious leaders to hear that the tax collectors and prostitutes would go into the kingdom before them. *[pauseeee]*

That’s the basic meaning of portrait 1, but now let’s look at portrait 2.

Look down at Matthew 21:33. *[READ 21:33-46]*

I won’t go into every detail, but let me recap what we see and what it means. *[pause]*

This parable is describing Israel’s religious leaders’ history and response to God. *[pause]*

God is the master of the house, and He gave Israel’s leaders the job of being tenants of Israel, who is the vineyard.

But everytime the master sent servants to get the fruit, they were violently attacked and some killed. *[pause]*

This pictures what Israel did when God sent His prophets to call them to repentance and faith.

So the master sends His Son, kind of reminds you of Jesus being sent, right?

Exactly. *[pause]*

And what happens to the Son? Killed.

That’s what will happen to Jesus by the religious leaders. *[pauseeee]*

So in telling the parable, Jesus gets the religious leaders to condemn themselves by having them answer what should be done to the wicked tenants.

They should be put “to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” *[pause]*

So also, Jesus tells them that because of their rebellion of rejecting Him, the cornerstone, the kingdom will be taken from them and given to a people, who would produce fruit. *[pauseeee]*

This points to how now the church would be the focus and no longer Israel, yet I believe Israel does still have a place in the future.¹ *[pauseeeee]*

Jesus is showing us that a new community of people with Christ as the cornerstone would bear fruit because they are connected to Him.

They do not reject Him, but see Him as the cornerstone, yet those who reject Him will face judgment. *[pauseeee]*

So that's the second portrait, but let's back a little away from that one, and move over to the third portrait in the gallery of God's Word.

Notice chapter 22, verse 1...*[READ 22:1-14]*

Here is another parable, and it's of a king, who invites people to his son's wedding feast, but many reject the invitation. *[pause]*

Some reject in indifference, but others reject in violence and kill the servants, who were sent to call them to come. *[pauseeeee]*

This is once again a description of Israel's response to God.

He kept calling them to close relationship, fellowship, and joy, like an invitation to a feast, but they treated His prophets horribly. *[pause]*

So what's the result?

The king sends troops to kill the murderers and destroy their city. *[pauseeee]*

Now for some people, this response by the king doesn't make sense because they are only thinking in today's terms of a normal wedding invitation. *[pause]*

They think, "Wow, that's harsh to react that way when people just don't want to come to your son's wedding." *[pause]*

But that's the wrong way to think about this parable.

You must put yourself back in that day where you had a king and his subjects. *[pause]*

For a king's subjects to respond in such a way to a gracious invitation of the king is an act of rebellion.

It's to stick up your nose at the king. *[pause]*

¹ See Romans 11:25-32.

You kill the king's servants? That's a big deal!

So the king brings down the hammer upon them, so to say. *[pauseee]*

Many people think that this pictures what happens in AD 70 when Jerusalem is destroyed, and that may be, but at the very least it's a picture of judgment. *[pauseee]*

OK, so now what will the king do?

He extends His invitation to the wedding feast to anyone who would come.

He calls his servants to go out and just invite as many as they can find, so they gather both bad and good people, who fill up the wedding hall. *[pauseee]*

This details how God moves away from focusing only on Israel, and now invites both Jews and Gentiles to come to Him.

It tells of the time of the church, where the gospel is preached to all and many different types of people respond. *[pauseee]*

But not all is as it should be yet, for when the king comes to see the guests, there's a man with no wedding garment. *[pause]*

To not wear the wedding garment would have been a sign of rebellion against the king, not caring about what the king wants.

Commentator Craig Keener says, "Patrons invited their social dependents to banquets, expecting due honor in return; this man...has responded to grace with an insult."² *[pauseeeee]*

It's not like he didn't have access to wedding garments, for everyone else does, and some believe that the king actually would provide the garment for everyone. *[pause]*

So what does this man with no wedding garment point to?

It points to how there will be many who identify as being a part of the church, but they do not truly belong.

They do not have the wedding garment of righteousness that is required, the garment of Christ's righteousness.

They think they can just come to Christ on their own terms, yet God sees their status with perfect vision. *[pauseeeee]*

² Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 22:11–14.

This parable shows us what the wheat and weeds parable showed us:³ the church will have a mixture of saved and unsaved people in it. *[pause]*

There are people who appear like they are a part of us, but they are not, and only God will reveal who they are.

For there are some who *seem* to respond well, but haven't *truly* responded in faith. *[pausee]*

Jesus then ends and sums up the parable by saying, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

That is, many are invited by the gospel going out, but only few are truly among the chosen ones, who respond to Christ rightly. *[pause]*

Not all respond correctly to the gospel, but those who respond correctly in faith are the chosen. *[pause]*

It's those "few" who get to be at and participate in the wedding feast of the son, and what a blessing that will be!

Being there shows our relationship with the King, our fellowship with the King, and it's a time of joy!

We look forward to that day of eating at the great banquet in the kingdom!⁴ *[pausee]*

As your tour guide, I have pointed you to each individual portrait and showed you one-by-one its basic sense, as well as its deeper meaning.

But now I want to step back, look at all three, and show you the common themes that run through all three portraits. *[pause]*

So as we look at these three portraits, we see...

I. Three portraits of awful rebellion.

In each of the parables, there was a rejection of God's rightful authority.

God was the father who was disobeyed, the master rebelled against, and the king spurned. *[pauseee]*

Mankind's natural, sinful disposition is to rebel against God, the Creator. *[pause]*

Even though He is the rightful authority, who should be obeyed -- we have sinned against Him.

You see this all the way back when Adam and Eve chose to go against God's command and all thereafter throughout history. *[pause]*

³ See Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

⁴ See Luke 13:29 & 14:15-24.

In our natural, sinful state, we are rebels against God.

This is why if you look around at the world: people, groups, and governments do not want to follow God's ways.

They do not want God "having the say" in their lives, but want to do things how they want. *[pause]*

Sinful mankind wants to be in charge, and lift itself up in the place of authority.

That's where we were, but for the grace of God in our lives. *[pauseeee]*

Not only do these parables show a rejection of God the Father, but also of the Son. *[pause]*

In the parable of the tenants, it's the master's son who is killed.

In the parable of the wedding feast, it's the son's wedding feast that is rebuffed. *[pause]*

You see, mankind doesn't *only* reject God the Father, but they also reject the Son, who was sent to them.

And to reject Christ is to reject hope, reject salvation, reject life. *[pauseeee]*

Don't you find it interesting how many people are willing to talk about a "higher power" or a generic "god", but you bring up Christ and they recoil. *[pause]*

This is because many don't actually love God, but by rejecting His Son, they show that they hate Him.

No wonder in the parables, after the Son is rejected, He comes down hard in judgment!

If you hate the Son, then you show that you hate the Father.⁵ *[pauseeeee]*

You need to understand this -- if you reject Christ, there are *severe consequences*. *[pause]*

Jesus as the cornerstone can be built upon, if you believe in Him in faith.

But if you refuse to believe in Him, He says, "the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." *[pause]*

You either stand upon Christ in faith, or you will be crushed by Him in judgment. *[pauseeee]*

This is the importance of Christ! *[pauseeeee]*

There are countless people out there who have some sort of spirituality or religion, and they think that because they are "spiritual" or "religious" then they are good to go.

⁵ John 15:23 (paraphrased by me).

But let me tell you, based on God's Word, if your spirituality or religion is Christless, you will only face condemnation. *[pause]*

Christ the great dividing line in humanity.

You believe in Him, you are saved.

You reject Him, you face judgment. *[pauseeee]*

You are not in a good spot if you reject Christ for some self-styled spirituality or other Christless religion.

If Christ isn't the focus of your faith, then you are without hope in this world.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Something else about rebellion against God seen in these parables is that *rebellion is never truly hidden*. *[pause]*

The son in the first parable could act like he would obey all he wanted, but God knew he didn't obey.

The tenants didn't get away with their rebellion in the vineyard, and the invited guests' rebellion was dealt with.

Even the man in the wedding hall not wearing the wedding garment was found out. *[pause]*

God is never fooled.

He is not some naive boss, who you can trick or deceive, but God knows every heart and every act.

You rebel against the authoritative Lord and there will be consequences, for He is a just Lord, who every single person is accountable to, for He created us all. *[pauseeee]*

If you go to God how you feel like going, you will find yourself like the man without the wedding garment -- caught in your error and facing judgment. *[pause]*

God is not fooled, for He sees and knows, and at the final judgment He will cast into outer darkness all those not properly wearing the righteousness of Christ. *[pauseeee]*

You must wear the wedding garment, not what you feel like wearing! *[pauseeee]*

What are you trusting for as the basis of your standing before God?

Is it your own righteousness? Is it because your parents or grandparents believed in Jesus?

⁶ A reference to Ephesians 2:12.

Turn and trust in Christ alone to save you and give you that righteous standing before God.

[pauseeee]

The son who said he would work in the vineyard, but never went shows us that God knows the truth.

Mere words do no good, if you don't actually believe. *[pause]*

God is not fooled by our hypocrisy.

We can say, "I go, sir," until we are blue in the face, but if we never actually "go" then we are liars and hypocrites. *[pauseee]*

This is like many professing Christians and maybe even *you*.

They act religious, they act like they will obey in faith, but they never truly have. *[pause]*

Your words saying that you believe in Jesus do not count for anything, if you don't actually put your trust in Him. *[pauseeee]*

Have you simply put on a show in front of others when it comes to your faith?

Has your life all just been words and appearances and not actual faith? *[pause]*

You may look good on the outside, just like the chief priests and elders, but that counts for nothing without true heart change. *[pauseeee]*

We also see that rebellion against God is *absurd*. *[pause]*

In the second two parables, the tenants and the invited guests were given chance after chance to do what's right, but they didn't.

And in our stubbornness, we show ourselves to be fools. *[pause]*

They said they would work in the vineyard, didn't go, and thought it would go unnoticed?

They killed the master's son and thought they could get away with it?

They were invited to an amazing feast, yet rejected it? *[pauseeee]*

Sin shows us to be fools.

To reject Christ is the epitome of foolishness and is completely ridiculous when you think about it.

He is the only hope for the world in darkness and they reject Him?

He died on the Cross for sins, and yet they reject the very One who gave His life? *[pause]*

Rebellion against God rejects His grace. *[pause]*

The Lord didn't say, "You can come to the wedding feast if you pay me a million dollars," or, "You can come if you do this and do that first."

No, He simply invited them in His grace.

So how absurd to decline such an invitation! *[pauseeee]*

The feast was all made ready and prepared for them.

They didn't do anything to merit it, but were invited out of grace and simply had to go. *[pauseeee]*

This is like the gospel.

All people are invited as the gospel message is offered to all.

Life and salvation is made ready and prepared for people, but in their sinful foolishness, many reject the free offer of salvation.

They show themselves to be rebels, but not only rebels - they are *foolish rebels*, who reject a gracious invitation that God has provided for them. *[pauseeeee]*

These three parables are portraits of awful rebellion.

In each one, there is rejection of God, and it reminds us of mankind's rejection of God. *[pause]*

Are you living in rebellion against God by rejecting His gracious offer of salvation through His Son?

Turn in faith today in Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and receive life! *[pauseeee]*

As we look at these 3 portraits, we not only see rebellion, for we also see...

II. Three portraits of wonderful grace.

Amid our awful rebellion, God's grace shines forth. *[pause]*

Yes, God is seen as just in these parables, as He brings judgment upon those who wickedly rebel against Him.

But He is also so very gracious. *[pause]*

His grace is seen in His *patience*.

In the parable of the tenants and in the parable of the wedding guests, He gives them chance after chance to do what's right. *[pause]*

With the tenants, after the first set of servants were beaten, killed, and stoned, He could have stopped there and killed them all for their act of defiance.

Yet He sends two sets of servants, and then even sends His Son to them. *[pause]*

Isn't God's patience amazing?

After one sin or act of rebellion, He doesn't give up on sinners.

Rather, He gives sinners chance after chance to repent. *[pause]*

If we were that king or master, we would probably have given up after the first set of servants were treated with disregard.

Yet God is not like us, for He is incredibly patient. *[pauseeee]*

Just think of how Christ welcomed the tax collectors and prostitutes when they believed.

Your past doesn't have to determine your end, for you can believe now! *[pause]*

No matter what you did in your past, you are not beyond grace.

There's still an opportunity for you to respond in faith now! *[pauseeee]*

God is patient with you, do you believe that?

Think of all of your sins and failures, and how He hasn't given up on you.

He is patient with your sins, weaknesses, and failings. *[pause]*

You once again do the sin that you said you would never do again, and you feel defeated.

Yet there is God graciously patient with you, and ready to grow you and give you opportunities to follow Him closer. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you are sitting there thinking, "But you don't know what I've done!"

Let me tell you, if even the tax collectors and prostitutes could receive forgiveness, then you can, too!

You are not too far gone, for Jesus delights to forgive even the worst among us and it just shows off His deep mercy. *[pause]*

He doesn't give up on you based on your past sins, but He calls to all sinners saying, "Come to me and find rest!⁷ Come and find forgiveness! Come and find life!" *[pauseeee]*

What a wonderful portrait of God's patient grace!

⁷ A reference to Matthew 11:28-30.

Though mankind's awful rebellion shades the portrait in all black, God's gracious patience bursts forth in bright color. *[pauseeee]*

We also see God's grace in His *extravagant generosity*.

He's like a King who wants to invite His people to His Son's wedding feast. *[pause]*

He doesn't prepare a measly meal, nor does He make His subjects pay for it.

Instead, He lavishly provides the feast, and invites people to come and eat. *[pause]*

The dinner is prepared, the oxen and fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready!

He simply says, "Come!" *[pause]*

He says to sinners like us, "You are invited! Come!"

All is made ready! All is prepared! The feast is extravagant! The king's generosity is flowing!

We only need to go to Him! *[pause]*

He desires relationship and close fellowship with us!

He desires for us to experience joy and blessing!

And not only this, but His grace extends to all people! *[pause]*

He goes to the main roads, He goes out to all, and says, "Come! The feast is ready! It's all prepared for you!"

And any who would come are gathered in!

But we must simply wear the wedding garment of righteousness that Christ provides!

We must come on His terms, not ours! *[pause]*

What extravagant generosity of God!

He's not stingy with His blessings, and He doesn't hold back on giving to others.

But He's the Lord, who desires to give, give, and give.

He loves to give to the undeserving, and bring joy to more and more people.

He welcomes all who would go to Him in faith, no matter your past, ethnicity, or social standing. *[pauseeee]*

When you think about the awful rebellion displayed in these parables, God would rightfully be just to bring judgment and that's it.

Yet amid rebellion, grace arises.

In the thick of man's appalling sin, God's faithful grace pushes through, reminding us that...

Our sin is great, but God's grace is greater!

Israel's leaders were disobedient, wicked, and even killed the Son of God.

And amidst that, God showed His patience and generosity.

For He gave them many opportunities to repent, but they turned away from the Lord by rejecting Christ. *[pause]*

What about you?

God graciously sent His Son, but will you reject or believe in Him? *[pause]*

His gracious invitation is given, but will you reject it and face severe consequences, or will you respond in faith and experience joy and life forevermore? *[pauseeee]*

God's purpose go forward: He will have a people for Himself, but are you truly one of them? *[pauseeee]*

For those of us who believe, are you forever grateful at the astonishing grace of God?

Though we were awful rebels, rejecting our Creator God...

...God in grace sent Jesus Christ to come and die for our sins and then rise again, so we could have life. *[pause]*

He doesn't just let us squeak by by not having to face eternal death, but more than that, He welcomes us with open arms. *[pause]*

He holds us close as sons, rejoicing that we finally obeyed in faith.

He delights in causing us and seeing us bear fruit, and He welcomes us to His wedding feast with joy. *[pause]*

Now that's a portrait of grace.