

Our Gospel Responsibility

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Date: 30 November 2008

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[0 : 01] Let us turn again to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 21, and we'll read from verse 42.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures that the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. Particularly the next verse, 44, which we also find in the other Gospels, and the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Privilege always carries with it responsibility. And to have the privilege of the Gospel always brings with it its own responsibility.

We have a responsibility with this Gospel that we have. The Gospel isn't just something that we can take and leave. Well, we can do that.

[1 : 18] But there is an awesome responsibility with it. Having the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings with it great responsibility.

And Jesus here has been speaking to the Jews, and latterly in this chapter he has been speaking in parables. And the last parable that he gave us was the parable of the tenants, those who were looking after and working in the vineyard.

And when you read that story, you say to yourself, well, you know, that's quite an awful story.

Because here was this master of the house, and we read there, who planted a vineyard.

He put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and he leased it out to tenants.

And he went into another country. And then, in due time, he sent servants to get fruit from his own vineyard.

And everything that was done there was right. But we read what happened. When the servants came, those who were tenants in the place, they took the servants, and they beat some of them up, they stoned some of them, they killed them.

[2 : 33] And so the master, he sent more servants. And they did exactly the same thing. They beat them up, they stoned them, they killed them. And then he said, well, this can't go on.

What I'll have to do is I'm going to send my own son. And surely if I send my son, they will at last give me the fruit, which is really my fruit.

But, of course, when the son came, they took the son, they threw him out of the vineyard, and they killed him. And you say to yourself, as you read that, that is just so wrong.

It is so unjust. And you cannot read that without a sense of feeling just the injustice of the whole situation.

And then, of course, we find that afterwards, the master of the vineyard, he comes. And he says, and whenever the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do?

[3 : 32] He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruit in due season. And you say to yourself, well, these people really, although we don't like to see this happen to anybody, they got what was going to come to them.

Because you say to yourself, well, they actually, this was the only justice that could come. And you say to yourself, well, what they actually reaped was what they sowed.

But you see, Jesus here was talking about the Jews. And Jesus was painting to the Jews a very graphic picture about their own history.

Not just their history, but he was also painting a picture about their present, what was actually happening in the here and now. And he was also painting a picture of what was going to happen in the future.

So that Jesus there at the central point, where it really was all happening, is showing to the Jews, this is what has been, what is taking place now, and what is going to happen.

[4 : 46] And you see, this is what God is looking for. God gave, God set the Jews apart. And it was through them that all the nations of this world were to be blessed.

He worked through them. He gave the word of God to them. And, of course, it was through them that the Lord Jesus Christ was coming into this world, the second person of the God, that it was in human nature coming through the Jewish race, the humanity of Jesus.

And God is looking for fruit from them. But, you know, when you read the history, sadly, of the Jews, although there were glorious and wonderful periods, so often it is a painful reading.

You cannot go through Kings and Chronicles. You cannot go through the prophecies without seeing how they just turned their back upon God.

And the fruit that God was looking for wasn't there. Because they had embraced the idolatry of all the nations round about. In fact, there were times in the history of Israel when they had degenerated to an even worse state than the nations round about.

[6 : 02] And God kept sending prophets to them as a reminder of their responsibility, of their obligation to him.

And many of these prophets, they imprisoned, they stoned, they killed, and on it went, right throughout the centuries.

Until eventually, God sent his own son, Jesus Christ. And what happened? Just exactly as in the vineyard. Remember, when the sun came, they took the sun, and they threw him out of the vineyard.

And they killed him. And that's exactly what they did with Jesus. They even took him outside the city. And there, on Calvary and Golgotha, they put him to death.

And so, you see that what Jesus, this particular parable that Jesus is giving to them here, is speaking so powerfully of what was actually taking place before their very eyes.

[7 : 10] And then, of course, Jesus, he quotes from Psalm 118. We were singing there about the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Now, it's very interesting that at the beginning of the chapter, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, and the crowds were gathered round, and there was all the adulation and the honor, and they were singing Hosanna to the Son of David.

And then they quote the crowd quote from Psalm 118. Remember the Jews? They grew up with the Psalms. They would have learned these Psalms.

And they were singing, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. That's what we read in verse 9. Hosanna to the Son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And Jesus is showing them. As he quotes from Psalm 118, I am the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

[8 : 13] In fact, he is showing them that he himself is the Lord. And Jesus is trying to show these Jews all these Psalms that you've learned.

These things that are part of your life. It's unfolding here in front of you. And then he goes on to show that here is the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

And these old buildings, that cornerstone was so vital. It was the one that held the building together. It was the foundational stone in the whole work that had this cornerstone that was fashioned there that kept us at where.

The building together and Jesus is saying, that's who I am. But we find that it's a stone that was rejected. The stone that was rejected actually is the cornerstone.

It is a foundational stone to the whole building. These people were rejecting Jesus. Remember how it tells us in John. He came unto his own and his own received him not.

[9 : 22] He came to his own land. And his own people received him not. That's what it says. And sadly, even to this day, people keep rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we read there that the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Now, as we know, life is full of buildings. And I think anywhere we go, wherever we go, we're always seeing new buildings.

We say, oh, I never saw that before. And often we stop and we admire. We say to ourselves, well, that really is quite magnificent. And life is full of new buildings. But it's not just actual physical buildings.

I should say buildings as such of stone and brick. But life itself is full of building. We're always building. There is building going on all around.

Society is building. Families are building. Individuals are building. We're all building. We're always trying to build on whatever society itself is building.

[10:32] Building for our future. We ourselves are building. We're building our life. We may not think about it. We may not be stopping to think and say, right, I'm building my life.

What am I building my life on? But I would say that's a very, very important question to ask. What are you building your life on?

Remember, Jesus used the story about the person who built a house on a rock and another person who built a house upon sand. One was a disaster. The buildings may have appeared identical, but one was a disaster because the foundation was all wrong.

That's what we've got to ask ourselves. As I build my life, as I look into the future, as I look and as I exercise hope in that future, what are my hopes built on?

What is it that I am building my life on? Because our life is being built on lots of things. Our life is full of supports. It's full of props.

[11:36] We may not realize that. We may not be stopping to analyze and say, what are the props my life is being built upon? What are all the different things? But it is. It's happening all the time.

But one day, every prop, every support, everything in life is going to be taken away bit by bit.

All the things that are so much part and partial of our life. Because one day, everything is going to go. Our family will go.

Our friends will go. Our home will go. Our work will go. Our money will go. Our health will go.

Our strength will go. Even our body will go. Our soul. Our soul. It's just our soul. That's all that's going to be left. When life ends here.

[12:38] And if all that we have is these things that I've been talking about, then we have absolutely nothing for eternity.

Because we're stripped of everything. And we enter into eternity. All alone. Nothing.

And that is why it is so important that our life be built upon the rock that is Jesus Christ. because Jesus tells us that he will be with us in death.

In life. In death. In eternity. So you see, this is a wonderful thing. As everything else is stripped away from us, if we have Jesus, he's still there.

He has hold of us. Never, ever, ever going to let us go. And that's what Jesus keeps telling us over and over and over again.

[13:43] And he's saying, please, please listen to what I am saying. And that is a great and wonderful thing about having the Lord Jesus Christ a Savior.

And so Jesus is saying to the people there, he's saying to the Jews, this rejection, see what's going to happen. Verse 43. Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

And that's exactly what happened. The gospel was taken away and was sent to the Gentiles. A great spread of the gospel right throughout this world.

And it's still going on. And that's what is happening even to this very, very day. And then Jesus goes on and he says, And the one who falls on this stone, and talking of the cornerstone, the stone the builders rejected, and the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces.

And when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Now as you see here, the first part speaks of people falling on the stone and the one who falls on the stone.

[14:58] In other words, the one who falls on Christ. That's what it says, will be broken to pieces. And when this stone falls on anyone, it will crush him.

So we see that the second part is talking about the stone falling upon people. The first part is people falling on the stone. The second part is the stone falling upon people.

Or as we can say, on Christ. So what does it mean to fall upon Christ? Well, in another translation, it says stumble.

And maybe that gives us maybe a hint of a better or a clearer idea of what I believe has been spoken of here. Where a person will fall or stumble upon Christ.

You see, there are an awful lot of people who just don't lay hold upon the gospel. Remember what Paul said. The preaching of Christ is to the Jews a stumbling block.

[16:04] A stumbling stone. A stone that they're falling on. And to the Greeks, it is foolishness. How is the gospel a stumbling stone to so many people?

Well, for instance, there's many things you could say. Say a couple of things. One, a lot of people look at the life of Jesus. And I don't think that you could find any person who would look at the life of Jesus and dismiss Jesus and just say, oh well, I don't agree with anything that Jesus did.

I think even those who have no place for the Christian faith would have to agree. And they do agree that when they look at Jesus that he was a revolutionary, they look at his teaching and there are aspects of the teaching of Jesus that everybody will say, that really is quite superb.

Even the greatest critics of the Christian faith who will look at his teaching and they'll have to agree and say, well, you know, that really is. Some of these sayings are so profound. They are so true.

Even in the days of Jesus, there were those who had no place or time. They hated him and yet they had to accept that he taught in a way and in a manner that was quite extraordinary.

[17:18] However, people look at the life of Jesus and they saw this man who had these great principles, these great philosophies, these great ideas that were radical, they were life-changing, but he was taken and he was put on the cross.

And people think that all these ideas died with Jesus. End of story. And they look at Jesus as a failure. There are a lot of people who genuinely look, they've looked just at a kind of a superficial way at Jesus and they think it's a failure.

And in fact, they think that Christians are failures. Some people, that's what they say, Christianity is for losers. And they say that because they look at Jesus and think that that's what his life was, a life of failure.

Great ideas, but failure. failure. And that those who follow Jesus are just trying to perpetuate his teachings and try to live the way that he lived, but ultimately it was failure.

And so, there are people who reject, they walk away from the gospel, its challenges, its claims, and they say, no, it's not. It's for losers. For them, the gospel is a stumbling stone.

[18:37] It's that where they're falling on it. And then there are others who look at the claims of the gospel and they look at the challenges of the gospel and they look at the demands of the gospel and they say no.

Because you see, human nature glories himself. Human nature wants to be big, wants fame, wants glory, wants power in this world.

Human nature by the very direction that human nature is and goes in, wants to make a name.

Remember the building of the Tower of Babel, let us make, let us make a name for ourselves.

That's human nature. But the demand of the gospel is something different. Deny yourself. Take up the cross and follow me.

And you know, there's a lot of people say no, I don't want to do that. And there's a lot of people who will make an actual decision and say, it's not fun. Count me out of that.

[19:46] I'm not into this taking up a cross and denying myself. That's not what I want my life to be. But of course, they're looking at it at a wrong way.

But you know, the sad thing and the sorrowful thing is this, that any person who turns away from the gospel does so at a price. Because there is a wounding of the conscience.

I don't believe that a person who has heard the claims and the challenges and the demands of the gospel can just walk away from it and never feel a pang of conscience.

I don't believe a person can just say, I won't have any of that. Yes, they'll say that, but it's at a price.

But you know, when the conscience is wounded and when a person begins to harden themselves against the gospel, unbelief grows and a hardening effect takes place.

And that is why people who continue to reject the gospel often become harder and harder and harder against it. There's a growing hardness against the gospel.

[21:04] And it's an awful thing where people say, we will not have this man to rule over me. And so, there is this, that's what it says, and the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces.

And then it goes on and it says, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. And I believe that this is speaking of the ultimate judgment that will come upon all those who have rejected Jesus.

It talks of crushing him where there will be no recovery. Navy says, grind to powder. You see, it's a total destruction.

And let's remember this, that Jesus is warning us to flee from the wrath to come. that word flee. Jesus is actually saying to us, it's not just move away.

It's not just run. It is run with the most intense urgency. And there's only one way, one place that you can run to, and that is the refuge of Jesus himself.

[22 : 13] There is nowhere else to go. That's why Jesus has come and he's saying, run to me. I'm the shelter for the storm. I am that rock that you can build your life on.

There is no other place. There is no other way. So Jesus is saying to us, flee from the wrath to come. You see, this is a destruction Jesus is talking of here.

And it's an eternal destruction. It will crush. It's like destruction going on all the time. It's not just an annihilation where somebody is, as it were, ground out.

And that's it. It's finished. It's not. It's ongoing forever and ever and ever. And when you go to the Bible and study the words of Jesus and what he tells us about hell and the eternity of hell and the woe of hell, let's remember something about Jesus.

Jesus never spoke any word that was untrue. Remember that. Never. Jesus never even exaggerated. Very often when we're maybe telling a story we might throw in a little extra just to make it that wee bit juicier or to make it a wee bit more entertaining.

[23 : 44] There's some people who do lots of that because they love to embellish the story so much. Some people don't do it at all. But often in life there can be a wee hint of exaggeration.

Jesus never exaggerated. He never made it something bigger than it was or smaller than it was. He just told it as it was, as it is. That's what he says.

This crushing is an eternal crushing. It goes on forever and ever and ever. And maybe you're saying to yourself, oh this is so unfair.

This is unfair. This is not right. Well we go back to the parable of the tenants. And that's the very thing Jesus is saying. It is fair.

God made us for himself. And surely the owner, the one who has made us, has our right.

[24 : 50] He has his claims upon us. And when he comes looking for the fruit, there is none.

And we have rejected everything. We have joined with those who said we will not have this man rule over us.

You think about it. There were only a few that actually put Jesus to death. Pilate passed a sentence. The Jewish leaders passed a sentence and sent Jesus on to Pilate.

Pilate passed a sentence. And there were a few soldiers around the cross that actually put Jesus to death. And only one soldier pushed Jesus.

And yet in the Bible it talks about those looking upon those and they shall look upon him whom they pushed. Talking of a whole crowd of people. Lots of people.

[25 : 51] You see there is an identity with those who have put Jesus away and rejected Jesus. If we reject Jesus, we have said this before, if we spend our lifetime rejecting Jesus in eternity, we will get what we chose here.

That's logic. And that's what God is saying. There is no other alternative. You can't all of a sudden say, well I'm going to reject Jesus all my life and then when I die, well, well what?

You'll only get what you've chosen. It's a fearfully solemn thought. And that's what Jesus is saying here. That's why Jesus says, look, I've come to offer life.

I've given my own life so you can have life. I have done it all. Nothing for you to do except take me, believe in me, accept me, trust your life to me.

And discover the freedom and the liberty and the forgiveness and the pardon and the newness of life so that you may live in me and with me forever and ever.

[27 : 04] Let us pray. Oh Lord of God, we pray that as we have considered very solemn, challenging issues in God's word, that we may take them to heart.

Because this is the challenge of life. It is a challenge of life and death. We often don't want to dwell on these things.

We push them away from us. But they're things which one day we will have to face up to. We pray then when we have the opportunity that we might close in with Jesus and that we might know his pardon and forgiveness.

Lord, we give thanks for the secret silent way that thou art working in people's hearts and lives. And we give thanks that the Lord is the Lord of the kingdom and that he is taking into himself a number that no man can number.

We pray that we might all be part of that number. Take away from us in all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.