

St. Andrew's UMC  
October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Matthew 21:33-46  
"The Stone Which the Builders Rejected"

**A** man went on a hike in the remote wilderness area. He surprised a huge grizzly bear, and the bear swatted him across, knocking him to the ground. The man did not even feel any pain. He was just as surprised as the bear was, only frightened more than the bear. He thought it best to pretend that he was dead. While on the ground motionless, he earnestly prayed to God: "If you please save me from this bear, Lord Jesus, I will become a better man."

The bear did not go away, and began to sniff around his body. To the man's surprise, the bear sat down next to him and lifted up a devout prayer: "For this meal which I am about to receive, I give you thanks. In Jesus' name, Amen."

**W**hat do religious people do, when those who belong to the same religion have conflicting interests against one another? Do the Christians who have more teeth and bigger muscles sit down like the bear, and devour their Christian prey? Or, do they try to share the wealth and resources with the less fortunate brethren?

If we would read carefully what Jesus told his listeners, we would not mistake that he was talking to a group of brethren belonging to the same House of Prayer. Jesus sounded, however, as if he was rather talking to a group of adversaries, not to the brethren.

**J**esus started out with telling the religious leaders a parable, and then asked them a question, what should the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants who beat, killed, and stoned, his slaves whom he sent to collect the share of the crop, and eventually his own son?

The answer the religious leaders gave was an innocuous one, knowing what a vengeful and furious landowner would do to his tenants who killed his messengers and even his own son. The writer of the Gospel shows the religious leaders answering Jesus' question, not realizing that the parable was referring to themselves. If the religious leaders had realized that Jesus was setting them up, they

would probably have deflected question, or just refused to respond. Who knew that the innocuous question would come around to bite them?

Jesus was referring to the past history of the religious leaders who beat, killed, and stoned the prophets who criticized the culture and practice of the government of the religious establishment. To put it in today's equivalency, the religious leaders in the past silenced the reformers and dissidents of the corrupt and misbehaving religious establishment.

Through the parable, Jesus made the religious leaders to be the judges of themselves, who condemned their own past practices. We may identify such a response as a political gaff, but Jesus was just good at making those who were in the power to condemn their own wrongdoings with their own words. No wonder they did not like Jesus.

Jesus quoted the Psalm 118, and said that “**This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.**” What was so marvelous in our eyes? “The stone that the builders rejected became the cornerstone.” And what will this stone do?

Jesus was saying that what the contemporary religious leaders had done was rejecting the prophets whom God had sent, and they had also rejected Jesus. But God has raised him up to be the indispensable and fundamental basis of the building, and that was the Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in the eyes of the people.

And this stone will be the retribution for what they have done, for if it falls on them, or if they fall on it, they will be destroyed. The cornerstone would be the cause of their demise, and it is the Lord's doing. The stone that they rejected will come around this time to fall on them. It was such an obvious condemnation of the religious establishment, and Jesus had never said anything so belligerent to anyone before.

From this statement, we can see that Jesus had developed a certain sense of finality in his view of the world. He had had it up to here, and he is not afraid of telling things as they are. He did not see any

more of the possibility of the rehabilitation for the religious establishment. He now saw and treated those religious leaders as the adversary whom God rejected. God chose, instead, the one whom they rejected.

Here we must confront the thorny issue of the clashing interests. Who possessed the truth, the prophets, or the religious establishment? Was the clash between the two parties just the unfortunate disagreement of the different views? Or, did one side stand with the truth, while the other side refused to admit the truth?

Did the prophets speak the truth, or did they just opine what they believed to be the truth? Did the point of contention merely depend on the two different sets of the religious interests and views? Was the clash between the prophets and the religious establishment simply the ancient story of the conflict between the progressive and the conservative?

If we conclude that the prophets and the religious establishment shared different views of the world, and that is why they clashed, then, the claim to the truth becomes rather relative. Such a truth is not universal, but true only to those who share the similar sentiments and interests.

For example, whether the next president should be black, or white, or a woman, is not a contest of the universal truth. It is matter of the opinion and the perceived needs which not everybody shares outside the US soil.

The bigger problem grows from this issue, if one group of the people began to include God in their rhetoric, why their candidate is preferred by God over the others. The truth of God becomes relative, and God is rather impressed into the secular service of defending one party's claim to a truth.

For example, one might have heard from a vice-presidential candidate that it is God's will that we wage war on Iraq . We are looking at the mentality that pervaded the Crusaders in the Middle Ages: God is "our" God, and no one else shall have "our" God.

When we involve God into our squabbles, the truth we uphold has to be the universal truth that is applicable to everyone. When we object to the truth, do we object, because we did not like the truth? When we accept the truth, do we accept it, because we like it?

We can raise the same question over what happened with Jesus. Did the religious leaders reject Jesus, because they did not like what Jesus said? Or, did they reject Jesus, because Jesus said something untrue?

It is probably the case that Jesus did not say anything that was untrue. If so, Jesus was rejected, because he spoke the truth. In the land where the truth is disliked, only the liars will get advanced. They will not, however, enter the kingdom of Heaven .

What is marvelous in our eyes? The stone which the builders rejected, God would make it the cornerstone. Those individuals who speak the truth against the establishment are always rejected by the establishment. God selects the rejected, however, to be the indispensable and fundamental basis of the kingdom of Heaven .

Jesus said, **“Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mt. 7:21).”**

The bear is not going to enter the kingdom of Heaven , just because he prays devoutly before the meal. Unless its diet changes, it won't be doing the will of God anytime soon.

Nowadays, you hear God language in the speeches of the presidential candidates. It turns out, everyone is a Christian. In 4 weeks you will be casting the vote to determine which team of candidates should govern this land. Do you believe that God had already predetermined which party's nominee gets elected the president? What is God's will for this election?

I will tell you what would not be God's will: God will not stoop to partisan politics. But this I would believe to be God's will: that we vote not because we like a particular candidate, but because of the truth for which the candidate stands.