

The Rejected Stone

A 5-Day Devotional Bible Study

Based on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants — Matthew 21:33–46

This five-day devotional invites you into a slow, prayerful walk through Jesus's parable of the wicked tenants and the sermon it inspired. Each day focuses on a single theme drawn from the passage: the patience of God, the mystery of the Messiah, the stone rejected and made cornerstone, the grace that comes before understanding, and the call to keep returning to be reoriented by Christ. Whether used in the morning quiet or at the close of a busy day, may these readings draw you closer to the one who keeps going — toward you, toward the cross, for the whole world.

📖 MATTHEW 21:33–46

📅 5 DAYS

💖 PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

A Vineyard Prepared with Care

Key Verse: "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went away." — Matthew 21:33

Devotional

The parable opens not with conflict, but with provision. Before a single servant is sent, before any harvest is expected, the landowner has already done the hard work. He plants. He fences. He digs. He builds. The vineyard is not handed over to the tenants as bare, rocky ground and left to their ingenuity. It is prepared, protected, and equipped for fruitfulness from the very beginning.

This is the character of God that Jesus wants us to notice first. Long before we were aware of it, long before we could have asked for it, God was at work preparing the conditions for life to flourish. The Law, the prophets, the covenants, the long story of Israel — all of it was God fencing, digging, building, making ready. The question the parable raises is not whether God has provided. The question is what we do with what we have been given.

It is easy to take inherited gifts for granted. We receive faith, community, scripture, sacrament, and sometimes we treat them as simply our own, as though they arrived by accident or by our own merit. This day invites us to pause and recognize the vineyard we have been placed in — to see the care that preceded us and to ask how we are tending what we have been trusted with.

Reflection Questions

1. What gifts of faith or community have you inherited that you may take for granted?
2. In what ways has God "prepared the vineyard" in your own life before you were even aware of it?
3. What does faithful stewardship of those gifts look like for you this week?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the care you took before I ever knew to ask. Open my eyes today to see the gifts you have placed around me, and give me a grateful, generous heart to tend them faithfully. Amen.

A Messiah We Did Not Expect

Key Verse: "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." — Isaiah 53:3

Devotional

Even the people who walked closest to Jesus struggled to understand him. The disciples had eaten with him, watched him heal the sick, heard him teach with breathtaking authority, and witnessed miracles that defied explanation. And still, when Jesus spoke plainly about suffering and death, they could not hold it together. Peter confessed Jesus as Messiah in one breath and rebuked him for talking about the cross in the next. James and John were quietly calculating who would sit in the places of honor.

We should not be too hard on them. They were working with a very human picture of what power looks like, what greatness looks like, what a promised deliverer is supposed to do. And into that very reasonable picture, Jesus kept inserting something that did not fit — a Messiah who serves, suffers, and dies. A king who rides a donkey. A savior who is rejected before he is raised.

We carry our own expectations too. We like a Jesus who blesses our plans, who fixes the things we think need fixing, and who rewards the people we think are deserving. The invitation of this day is to sit with the discomfort of a Messiah who does not always look like the one we would design for ourselves, and to ask whether we are willing to follow him anyway — into the places that do not make immediate sense, toward a kingdom we cannot fully map out in advance.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life have you expected Jesus to act in a certain way, only to find him working differently than you anticipated?
2. What does it mean to follow a Messiah whose path leads through suffering before it leads to glory?
3. Is there an area of your life where you sense God calling you to stretch your imagination about what faithfulness looks like?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times I have tried to shape you into the savior I prefer rather than the one you truly are. Stretch my imagination. Help me trust you even when your ways confound me, and give me courage to follow where you lead. Amen.

The Stone the Builders Rejected

Key Verse: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." — Matthew 21:42 (quoting Psalm 118:22–23)

Devotional

Jesus reaches back into the Psalms to name what is happening to him — and what has always been true about the way God works. The cornerstone is not the polished stone the builders set aside for display. It is the one they looked at and set aside, the one they judged unfit for the structure they had in mind. And yet it is precisely that stone which holds the entire building together.

This image is almost absurdly countercultural. Every human instinct says that power builds on power, that strength is recognized and rewarded, that the rejected things stay rejected. But the gospel insists on something else entirely. God takes what humanity discards — the outcast, the shamed, the crucified — and makes it the very foundation of something new. The cross, which looked to every watching eye like the final defeat of Jesus, turns out to be the place where God is doing something the world has never seen.

This truth is not only about Jesus. It speaks into every corner of human experience where something good has been overlooked, dismissed, or cast aside. The person the community ignores. The vocation that seems too small. The act of forgiveness that no one else thinks is worth the effort. The wounded heart that God is quietly, patiently rebuilding. The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is — it truly is — amazing in our eyes.

Reflection Questions

1. Where have you seen God bring life or meaning out of something the world had discarded or dismissed?
2. Is there something in your own story — a failure, a wound, a season of loss — that you have been afraid to offer to God? What might it mean to trust him with it?
3. How does the cornerstone image change the way you think about weakness, rejection, or suffering in the Christian life?

Prayer

God of the rejected stone, thank you that your ways are not our ways. Where I have written off what you intend to use, give me new eyes. Build something lasting in me and through me, on the only foundation that holds. Amen.

Grace Before Understanding

Key Verse: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." — Romans 5:8

Devotional

One of the most striking and consoling truths woven through this sermon is the observation that Jesus did not wait. He did not wait for the disciples to fully understand before he gave himself for them. He did not wait for the authorities to approve. He did not wait for the crowds to stop misidentifying him as merely a prophet and recognize him as the Messiah. He kept going — toward the very people who did not quite get it, and ultimately gave everything for them.

This matters enormously for those of us who sometimes feel like we must have our faith sorted out before we are truly welcome at the table. We carry a quiet fear that our doubt disqualifies us, that our incomplete understanding puts us on the outside, that God is waiting for us to reach some threshold of worthiness before grace is fully extended to us. The gospel says otherwise. Christ meets us in the mess of our ordinary and complicated human lives, not on the other side of it.

The Lord's Table is perhaps the clearest picture of this truth in the life of the church. Week after week, we come forward not because we have earned our place or finally understood everything correctly, but because Christ has invited us. The bread and cup are given and shed for you — for you as you actually are, not as you imagine you ought to be before God can love you. This is the grace that precedes understanding, the welcome that arrives before worthiness, the gift that meets us exactly where we stand.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you ever feel that your doubt or incomplete understanding makes you less welcome before God? Where does that feeling come from?
2. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus gives himself to people who still do not completely understand him?
3. How might the truth of grace-before-understanding change the way you approach worship, prayer, or the Lord's Table this week?

Prayer

Lord, I come to you today not because I have it all figured out, but because you have made room for me anyway. Thank you for a grace that does not wait for my worthiness. Meet me here, in the middle of my confusion and my faith, and feed me with what only you can give. Amen.

Yet Another Parable — Keep Returning

Key Verse: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22–23

Devotional

Jesus does not tell one parable and consider the work done. He tells another. And another. He keeps building a case, keeps layering image upon image, keeps pushing at the comfortable assumptions of his listeners because he knows how deeply rooted those assumptions are. The opening words of today's gospel — "listen to another parable" — are not a throwaway phrase. They are an invitation born out of patient love. Jesus knows we do not get it the first time. So he tries again.

The sermon captures this beautifully: much like the disciples who followed Jesus through his entire earthly ministry and still struggled to grasp what he was doing, we do not always get it either. We need to be reoriented again and again — away from the ways that are most convenient or most profitable, and back toward the strange, upside-down, cross-shaped ways of God. This is not a failure of intelligence. It is the nature of the spiritual life. We are always in the process of being formed, always returning to hear the story fresh, always in need of the renewal that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

This is why the community of faith gathers week after week. Not because every Sunday produces a dramatic breakthrough, but because the slow, faithful accumulation of hearing and confessing and receiving and going out again is itself the shape of Christian discipleship. We come back to be reminded. We come back to be renewed. We come back to keep our eyes on Christ, to follow where he is going — toward the cross, toward resurrection, toward us, for the whole world.

Reflection Questions

1. What practices or rhythms help you return, week after week, to be reoriented by Christ?
2. Is there a truth from this week's devotions that you sense you need to hear again and sit with longer?
3. How does knowing that Jesus "keeps on going" toward you change the way you approach your own stumbling and confusion in faith?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, thank you for not giving up on us when we do not understand. Thank you for the parables, for the table, for the community that keeps calling us back. Reorient us again today. Keep us close. And when we wander, come after us once more. Thanks be to God. Amen.