

Sermon Title: The King Throws Down the Gauntlet, The Final Week, Week Three

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Sermon Questions:

1. Read through the parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-44) and talk about its meaning.
2. How angry do you think the vineyard owner would be that they killed his servants and his son?
3. Read through the parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-10) and talk about its meaning.
4. How angry do you think the king would be that they ignored his invitation and killed his messengers?
5. In light of Jesus being the gauntlet, how can you better run to him?
6. In light of Jesus being the gauntlet, how can you better be ready for his coming?

Transcript

As we step in, before we step into God's word, we just want to pause. Yesterday was a significant day really, in kind of in the world geopolitical scene, as Israel and US did strikes on Iran, Iran had counter strikes. And so it's a fragile time and we want to lift up the people of Israel, the people of Iran. We want to lift up the world before we jump in. So can we pray?

Lord, we are. We're reminded in times like this of how good it is that you are King of kings and Lord of Lords, the just judge. And so, Lord, we pray for your mercy on us, your people. God, we pray for your peace on this world. We pray for your protection for the people of Israel.

We pray, Lord, for your good, for the people of Iran. God, we look around the globe and we consider just the conflicts all over the world, from Venezuela to Ukraine, which just four years ago, Russia invaded. And we pray for your peace, God. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Bring your justice, bring your peace. And Lord, we pray for those leaders involved as well, especially, Lord, for President Trump. Lord, we pray for President Netanyahu as well, Lord, for their leadership, guidance, give them wisdom, give them wise counsel. And, God, we pray. We pray for your mercy on your world.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Someday Jesus will split the skies. There'll be no more war. No more war. We've been walking through a series towards Easter, preparing for Easter in many respects, walking each week through a day of the last week of Jesus life. So a couple of weeks ago, we started on the Sunday before the resurrection, Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, rode up into Jerusalem on the colt, the foal of a donkey.

Last week we went to the Monday of that Passion week. So each night Jesus goes back to Bethany, a couple of miles away from Jerusalem, stays with Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and then each day he comes back into Jerusalem. And so on the Monday, we reflected on him flipping over the tables and bringing Reform into the center of the Temple. And if flipping over the tables seemed a little controversial, it's time to buckle up your bootstraps. There's no more confrontational day in Jesus life than Tuesday.

Tuesday is the reason that Jesus Christ was crucified.

It's an exhausting day of teaching in which he marches again into the Temple. And there he exposes leaders, he sentences the Temple. All of history is redirected. And in a sense, you could say within the teaching of that day, he stands as a glorious king and draws a line in the sand, lays down the gauntlet and says you bow before me and you will live in eternal life, in splendor.

But if you refuse to bow before me, you'll face utter destruction for eternity. Now, this day, Tuesday, it's a significant day in scripture if you take the Gospel of Matthew simply as the one illustration. Tuesday of the last week of Jesus. Life is 24% of the gospel of Matthew. Almost a quarter of the whole gospel is this single day.

There's no more games, there's no more scooting around the issues. Jesus lays down a gauntlet and he says, everything hinges on your reaction to. To me. There's a choice to be made. Will you bow before me or will you reject me?

So he rides into Jerusalem. He goes into the temple. His authority is questioned. That's the very first mark of the day. Then he teaches in parables, this gauntlet, this choice that has to be made.

And then at the close, because he knows that the broad base of those listening to him are going to reject him, he speaks a prophetic judgment of destruction over Israel. The temple will fall.

Deception will increase. Tribulation will become overwhelming. He will return. And he says, stay awake. Stay awake.

So we join with him as he marches into Jerusalem and the day unfolds. There's a lot of teaching on this day. In fact, 24% of the gospel of Matthew is this day of teaching of Jesus. And so we're going to step into this day. And it begins, as Greg said, with this clash.

The stakes are going to be set immediately in the day between Jesus himself and the authority. So let's open up Luke, and we're gonna begin in chapter 20 in verse 1 begins here. 1 day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the Gospel, the chief priests and scribes with the elders came up and said to him, tell us by what authority you do these things or who it is that gave you this authority. Note that the little. These things, they're kind of smuggling in.

There are the. These things like the miracles of Jesus, like the raising of Lazarus, the teaching of Jesus. And there's no. It's unmistakable at this point in Jesus ministry. He is preaching with, he is leading with, he is directing his ministry with authority.

And they say, what authority are you teaching with? Not out of curiosity, not because their hearts are softening to Jesus. They're beginning to open up to Jesus. No, but because they want to create a trap for Jesus, to expose him. Jesus.

Jesus is going to answer. He's going to answer with a trap of his own. He answered them. I will also Ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?

You might remember a teaching of Jesus, be gentle as doves, wise as serpents. This is him living this out. Jesus is not going to be trapped. He is going to set a trap. And they have to respond to that trap.

And the trap is this. Okay, you want to know my authority? Then why don't you show us your hand and tell us who you think John the Baptist, what his authority was. Now, the problem here for the leaders is clear because John the Baptist came and he called out the leaders. He called them a brood of vipers.

And he raised up Jesus. He called him the lamb who comes to take away the sins of the world. And so Jesus says, if you want to know the authority that I'm leading in, then you need to tell me who you think John the Baptist is leading in. And whose authority is. Is he leading in?

Continues. Verse 6. And they discussed it with one another, saying, if we say from heaven, he will say, why did you not believe him? But if we say from man, all the people will stone us to death. For they are convinced that John was a prophet.

They huddle up.

We're in trouble, guys. It's not going to end well for us here. There's not a right answer that we can give that will satisfy the people and keep Jesus in this. And so they wiggle out of it. Verse 7.

So they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. If you are not going to be clear with me, then I will not remain clear with you. Greg already used this phrase, laying down the gauntlet. Throwing down the gauntlet.

I didn't know this until this week, what throwing down the gauntlet was? Gauntlet or like those medieval iron gloves. You can picture those. You take one out, you throw it, throw it down. Right?

It's throwing down. I'm challenging you to. To a duel, to a fight. Jesus is throwing down the gauntlet. Okay, okay, you want to respond this way to me, then we need to actually really respond and engage.

There's a question to be had about whose side are you going to choose? And you have to choose a side. Jesus is going to say from the beginning of this day to the end of the day, he's going to force a side. You can't stay in the middle and you can't stay undecided. You can't continue to just.

To just wobble between two sides. There's this story in the Old Testament of Elijah, he goes up to the top of Mount Carmel and he challenges the prophets of BAAL to a duel. And then he calls the people out and he says, you can't. You're not neutral here. Don't go wobbling between two opinions.

Choose a side. And so it is with Jesus in this final week. He looks at those who are in the crowds, he looks at the leaders, and he says, you must decide. The day of decision has come. Whose side will you be on?

There's no neutral ground. Jesus is the gauntlet. There's no putting off decisions till later. The time is not now to decide. Will you bow before me or will you refuse?

Jesus says from that point, he goes into teaching, and he teaches through parables and then through other teachings. And every parable and every teaching comes back to this. It comes back to this choice. We're going to walk through two of those parables. We're going to go to the Gospel of Matthew to walk through the parables themselves.

We're in Matthew, chapter 21, and we're going to begin in verse 33, the first parable, the parable of the wicked tenants. Here, another parable. There's a master of a house who planted

a vineyard and put a fence around it, and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country. So there's a vineyard. And the owner of that vineyard, he does everything for the vineyard that it would bear fruit.

He puts a tower in it, he puts a fence around it. There's no birds coming in to take away the grapes of the vineyard. He takes care of that vineyard and waters the vineyard. And every person listening to him knew exactly what he was talking about. For the vineyard is Israel.

One of the most famous songs of all of the Old Testament is Isaiah, chapter 5, the song of the Vineyard. And it is the background before every vineyard teaching Jesus has. Isaiah, chapter five. Let me sing for my beloved, my love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. And he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Israel had already been warned multiple times. Captivity occurred because the vineyard didn't bear fruit, and God had called it to bear fruit.

And Jesus comes back to the same story, the same story. The prophets back up from this song in Isaiah, saying there was a vineyard owner who had a vineyard. And he did everything for that vineyard. He put a fence around it, he put the tower in it, he watered, he took care of it. He took away the stones.

He did everything for this vineyard that it would bear fruit. Then he went out of town. And the parable continues, when the season for fruit drew near, verse 34, he sent his servants to the tenants to get its fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

The master did everything for this vineyard, took care of this vineyard, loved this vineyard, prized this vineyard, send servants to go get the fruit of the vineyard. And the tenants of the vineyard, they take the servants and they kill them.

The master, in his mercy, sends more servants. Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did the same to them.

Now, it doesn't take a lot of mystery to understand what Jesus is saying. Israel is the vineyard. God is the master of the vineyard. He did everything for the vineyard. And then he sent his servants, prophet after prophet after prophet.

And Israel took the prophets and stoned them and killed them.

And then Jesus gets right to the core of the issue. Finally, verse 37, he sent his son to them, saying, they will respect my son. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Him.

Everybody knows the tone of the passage. Jesus said, how do you think the owner of that vineyard is going to react? Everybody knows the wrath, the destruction. Are you kidding me? He's going to burn it down.

They kill his servants one after another. He sends more servants, they kill him. See, he sends his own son, and they mistreat him. And they kill him. Woe, woe to the vineyard, to these tenants of the vineyard.

When, therefore, the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? Jesus asks, what will he do to the owner? Or what will he do? Now, the judgment that Jesus is starting to draw here over a response to the Son, it's filled with threats. I will share with you that I've never been motivated by threats as much as I have been motivated by.

By love and reward. And both are here. The gauntlet is thrown down. If you bow before Jesus, there is everlasting splendor and glory and sweetness, mercy beyond anything you've ever imagined. Oh, it's sweet.

But if you refuse to bow before Jesus, there is a wrath and a fury. The owner of the vineyard that is being poured out there was a friend of mine in college. I bring it up now and then. I've never been a car guy. He was a car guy.

So he had. I don't even know what it was. He had this old souped up sports car. And it. I mean, it was a beautiful car.

You could hear it a block away if you were listening for it. I mean, this was back when cars had power that motivated them. Not little scarlet inside trying to get the thing going. It had flames. It was a yellow car for the most.

It was yellow to red. It was yellow in the front and then it had flames dancing up the side all the way to the back where it was just a bright red. Had this big spoiler on the back. And on the back of the spoiler said turn or burn.

That's one way to evangelize. It is.

But it's true. It's true. I mean, Jesus teaching in this day is holding nothing back.

Jesus is saying, you've killed the prophets one after another and you're about to kill the son. And you have no idea the judgment God is about to pour down upon you. Because the sun is everything, the son is everything. Everything. You think you're the vineyard?

You're not for. Let me tell you who the vine is. It is me. I am the vine and the vineyard are the branches that grow on me. And every branch that does not bear fruit will be cut off and thrown into a fire, and God will bring in other branches.

The tone is strong.

Blessings with Jesus or destruction without. Is Jesus the embodiment of love? Absolutely. He is loving, he is compassionate, he is merciful, he is slow to anger. But is Jesus also a God who in his love warns us?

Absolutely. If we miss this teaching, if we miss the fullness of the person of Jesus Christ, who is love embodied but is also in his love, one who comes and offers us a stern warning, who throws down the gauntlet, then we've missed him. Recently I invited someone to church, an acquaintance of mine, and they were kind of feeling it out, and they're like, so is your church like a fire and brimstone church? Kind of like with a wink, I'm like, well, I mean, there is fire and brimstone in Jesus. There is warning in Jesus.

And if we miss that, we miss the fullness of who Jesus is. And Jesus himself is the gauntlet. He himself is the one in whom you've put your trust on or you reject. The text continues, in verse 42, Jesus says this. Have you never read in the Scriptures?

The stone that the builders rejected has Become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Don't forget, Jesus says, as you are rejecting me, you are fulfilling the prophecies.

Jesus, just the day, two days before, prophesied that the temple would be laid, be overturned, would be destroyed.

And Jesus says, but a new temple's being raised. It's me. Will you build your life on me, on my foundation, on me, the cornerstone, or will you stumble on me? Peter uses that language over in his Epistle. Are you going to choose to build on the cornerstone of Jesus, or are you going to trip on that cornerstone?

Stumble on that cornerstone and you must choose.

You can't stay in the middle. You can't wiggle in the center. No one else can choose for you. It's not faith that's borrowed. It's not a decision someone else can make.

It's yours.

I was 10 years old, was raised by godly parents in a Christian home. And in that season, God was stirring in my heart. Went and met with the children's director. And he asked such an important question, John, have you put your trust in Jesus?

And it's a question every one of us has to answer, and we cannot stay neutral. Jesus says, will you put your trust in me, your faith in me, or will you live on your own? Will you follow the way of the leaders of Israel, or will you choose Jesus as your Messiah, as your Lord?

As Jesus starts to wrap up even this parable, he gets even more pointed. Verse 43. Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

The kingdom of God is not crumbling. The kingdom of God is not falling apart. It's just Israel. The kingdom of God is being pulled away from you and given to another people who, who will bear fruit.

Because I am the vine and the true vineyard of God is anyone in me that bears fruit. And Abraham and Isaiah and Daniel and Peter and James and John are all a part of the true vineyard of God. I will share with you. I love Israel. I love Israel.

I'm Jewish by birth, and that's certainly part of it. I love looking at the soil of Israel. It is so rich. It's been growing crops for 4,000 years. We struggle to fertilize our soil in this country and rotate our crops so the soil doesn't lose its nutrients.

I love the sights of Israel. I love the smells of Israel. I love the people of Israel. I love the music of Israel. I love Israel.

We have a group going to Israel Most likely five weeks from now. And I am hopeful and looking forward to to it for lots of reasons.

But make no mistake, for all that Israel is, Jesus is saying, if you reject me, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what your ancestry is, it doesn't matter who your grandparents are.

If you reject me, you are not of me. And the kingdom of God which was originally displayed through Israel has shifted specifically to Jesus. Now I'm not saying like replacement. It's not

that the church replaces Israel. It's that the true people of God have been, always have been and always will be those who who are in Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus is the vine. He is the vine. Will you abide in me, Jesus says, or will you be apart from me and wither and die? We move on to another parable. Jesus continues with a second parable, chapter 22 of Matthew.

He lays out this story. And again, Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. The king has a son whose who's engaged. And the wedding day is set and he sends out those invitations of two young adult kids in my life. I am excited for that day.

It's a fun day. You are saving, right? Like you have. I'm trying Greg. Two weddings.

Trying Greg. But I mean you send out an invitation to a friend, that's a holy thing. What a gift. Come participate in my joy. I anticipate it to be one of the most joyful days of my life.

And the king sends out the invitations and you can imagine the joy, the thoughtfulness that went into who's getting those invitations. And they go out, but they would not come. The text continues verse four. And he sent other servants saying, tell those who are invited, see, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen, my fat calves have been slaughtered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.

It's not too late, guys, this isn't an elopement with Taco Bell. Afterward, like it's a real deal. We got filet mignon, it's going to be amazing. The best wine, like dancing. Come, it's not too late to enjoy the feast.

I want to celebrate with you.

They refuse verse five, but they paid no attention and went off. One to his farm, another to his business. There's stuff to do, it's more important than this. Caught up in the stuff of life, while the rest seized his Servants, it amps up fast. Treated them shamefully and killed them.

How dare you invite me. How dare you keep coming at me? And they kill them.

The king responds. Verse 7. The king was angry and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, the wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you can.

Confined. Open up the invitation. The king says, invite in whoever wants to enter into my joy. And Jesus is saying, this is exactly what's happened now. God set his heart upon these people.

He invited them and they refused it. In fact, they refused it violently.

And can you see the violence with which they're refusing it even now?

Open it up. All are invited. Come join me. Can I just say to us, choose this day, whatever else has your attention, whatever else is swirling in your life, the business, the stresses, the anxieties, the none is more important than this invitation today from the King of Kings who says, come, enter my joy. I want you to experience me.

Enter into the joy that I have for you. Say yes today to the invitation of Jesus. I hope we can feel both the invitation of this and the judgment of this. Both. Both are there.

I mean, a king, a king knows how to throw a party. A king that says, hey, I'm splurging here. Like, are you aware this is my son, my only son, and it's his wedding and I am going overboard that this would be a fantastic feast. Come, come, like, sign me up. The king's having a wedding.

I want to be a part of it. At the same time, on the other side, the king's throwing a party. It's his only son, he's splurging. And there are a people who are refusing to the extent that they kill the messengers and say, no, no, we're not going. Can you imagine the wrath and the fury of that king?

He burns down the city. He's done.

Jesus is the gauntlet. Will we bow before him or do we reject him? Now Jesus continues to teach in other parables and teachings. He actually goes through seven woes over the leaders of Israel, saying, woe to you who. Woe to you.

Woe to you. He starts to close with these.

O Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones, those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not see, your house is left to you desolate, for I tell you, you will not see me again. Until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

But he answered them, you see all these, do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

It's all coming down. They have chosen to kill the Son. The disciples don't know it yet. It's just a few days away. They have chosen to kill the Son.

I longed to take them under my wing and give protection and love and mercy and kindness.

They wouldn't take it. And it's all coming down.

You can imagine a people of Israel saying, he's bluffing, like he's not taking down the temple. The temple. This is the temple of the Lord. Remember back when Hezekiah was king and Assyria came in and they had the whole city, all of Israel destroyed, The whole city, Jerusalem destroyed except for the temple. They had everything down to the temple.

And what did God do? God sent an angel down and smote 180,000 Assyrian soldiers. So that in the morning the soldiers woke up and those who were still alive woke up and there were dead soldiers in their tent and they all ran back to Assyria crying. That's what God does to protect the temple. Not only that, this temple has.

Rome. Rome built the temple. Rome's. Look, have you noticed how big Rome is lately? Nothing's going to happen to that temple.

Jesus is saying, don't trust in the wrong kingdoms, don't trust in the wrong dreams.

It all comes down to. To me, Jesus. And if we bow before Jesus, there is sweetness and celebration and again, mercy beyond what we can fathom. And if we refuse to bow to Jesus, there is torment and destruction.

Close with two applications, simple applications. The first is run to Jesus. Run to Jesus. The invitation has been sent. You have received it, right?

Now what will you do with that invitation? Will you say yes? Will you run to the wedding feast? Or will you head back to the fields, deal with your business, twiddle your thumbs? No, the gauntlet is down.

Choose Jesus. This day.

Choose Jesus. If it's the first time you've ever chosen him. Choose Jesus. Choose Jesus. If you've chosen Jesus before, but the reality is your life has pulled you away and it's time to to make a choice.

Yesterday, last week after the service, we had a blessing of praying over someone whose own story is that story. And through a season of incredible pain, he has run back to Jesus. And he

would tell you, why did I wait? Don't dawdle. The invitation is beautiful.

The king is inviting you to the wedding feast. This is really, you know, with my kids in their early 20s, this is a season of weddings just kind of bubbling up around me. So my daughter's best friend. Actually, my daughter's best friend and my son's best friend have a wedding this year, which is super fun. And so that engagement happened, and then over Christmas break, my daughter was home and she was invited to hang out with her best friend.

And lo and behold, as she goes into her house, the official invite to be the maid of honor happens. And as you can imagine, there's screaming and jumping and gleeful giggling and hugs and yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Why would I say no? How is this even a question? I would say the same to imitation from Jesus. How could we say no to such a question? The Savior of the world invites us to say yes to him.

Would today be a day of yes? Whether you're here in person, the prayer team would love to pray with you. Whether you're watching online, a team would love to pray with you online. Would today be a day in which we say yes? Maybe that yes.

We have baptisms coming up. Maybe that yes is a yes. I'm finally doing this, and I'm finally doing this publicly. Say yes. There's an old hymn, it talks about what that yes does in terms of all of the stuff of the world that seems so important.

The hymn goes like, turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Turn your eyes on Jesus and say yes to him. Run to Jesus. Run to Jesus. And a second application point is, be ready.

So in the teachings of this day, the parables lay down a gauntlet, and they turn a corner in the day to be ready. Be ready. Judgment is coming. Be ready. Now, an interesting aspect.

A lot of the teachings of the Judgment in this passage, which is called the Olivet discourse, a lot of the teachings have been, in a modern context, understood to all be in the future. The reality is that much of it took place 70 AD. The temple was destroyed in a cataclysmic way. The sun was darkened, the moon turned blood, the stars fell, the temple fell, and the kingdom was pulled from Israel. There hasn't been a sacrifice at a temple in Jerusalem for 2,000 years.

But in all of that language, Jesus is saying, I am coming back. I will split the skies if you choose Me, don't fall asleep to it. Don't say, I'm going to run to Jesus. And then a few weeks go by and you get distracted. I am coming back.

You say, when is that day? No human being knows. I will say this. I do not believe there's a

single prophecy of scripture that needs to be fulfilled. That Jesus could come back two seconds from now.

He could come back this afternoon, he could come back tomorrow morning. Jesus could come back at any given moment. And any human beings who tries to pretend they know when it's going to happen, they don't. They don't. The one thing we know is it could be right now.

And the call of God is be ready. Be ready.

Stay focused on me. Jesus says I'm the gauntlet, not just for salvation. I'm the gauntlet in life. I am the vine, I am the temple. Stay in me.

Have your mind fixed on me, have your dreams fixed on me, have your ambitions fixed on me, have your spirit and your strength fixed. I mean, I am everything. I am the gauntlet. And so run to Jesus. Yes, but then stay.

Be ready. May today have a bit of a wake up call in it for anyone who has surrendered their life to Christ. Not to fall asleep to the siren songs of the world, but to. To be fixed on Jesus. On Jesus, On Jesus.

Run to Jesus and be ready. Would you pray with me, Lord?

Thank you. Thank you for an exhausting day of teaching. We dive into it with curiosity and intrigue. We want to absorb it.

Help us. Help us to receive every word you taught and help it change our lives.

Jesus, we recognize you are the King of kings and the Lord of Lords, that you are glory. We fix our lives on you. Help us to do that with an order urgency. Today, tomorrow, this week, every day of our lives. For our good and for your glory.

In Jesus name, Amen. Amen.