



Today is 13th Gospel Reading of St. Matthew

13th Sunday of Matthew

Study Guide - Level 3 (Grades 6–8 / Ages 11–13)

Matthew 21:33-42

Lesson Order

- Opening Prayer
- Intro / Recap last week's lesson
- Review the scripture readings
- Review the hymns of the day
- Read front page of handout together
- Use study guide lesson and Q&A
- Complete handout activities
- Preview next week's lesson
- Closing Prayer

Tips & Hints

- Use as much or as little of the content in this study guide helping the students discover how the Orthodox Faith can be a part of their daily life.
- Use open-ended questions, encouraging young people to share their experiences or ideas, drawing connections to the topics of the day, strengthening their relationship with Jesus Christ and His holy Orthodox Faith.
- Questions, ideas, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to the publisher at orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com

✓ Goals

After completing this week's lesson, students should be able to articulate the following:

- What today's scripture lessons tell us about Jesus Christ as the Son of God
- How today's scripture reading applies to their life
- Understanding what God is expecting us to do and how to live as His followers and members of the Orthodox Faith
- How being part of the Orthodox Church gives us the tools and skills to live godly lives regardless of our circumstances
- Why they believe and follow Jesus Christ as Orthodox Christians
- What we believe as Orthodox Christians and how God is present in our lives
- Identify ways to live as Orthodox Christians 'in the world,' but not 'of the world'
- How scripture helps us encounter and know more about Jesus Christ
- Why scripture is an important part of our daily lives as Orthodox Christians
- Making scripture reading something we do on a regular basis

✠ Overview

This Week

We hear a parable from Christ, explaining how the Hebrew nation of the Old Testament rejected the prophets and messengers of God, and will reject and kill Him: the Son of God.

This rejection is contrasted with the wisdom of God, Who is glorified by what is often rejected and seen as foolish by society. God reminds us His plan of Salvation is in our best interests. He gives us the opportunity to freely follow Him with faith in Christ as the cornerstone of our lives.

The Kingdom of God is not some far off imaginary place, but something which we can encounter in the life of the Church here and now. Jesus Christ is present in our midst when we come together and receive the Eucharist. As members of the Church, we are part of the Body of Christ. As active members of the Church, we bear witness to Christ in our lives before others through our words, actions, and deeds.

We can build a life of Faith with the grace and blessings received from God.

📖 Gospel Reading

Have the students read today's gospel lesson out loud (dividing the reading by verses).

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-42

1. What took place in today's lesson?

Possible Answers

- A wine maker builds a vineyard and lets other people manage it for him.
- The owner asks to receive the results of their labors.
- The men abuse and disrespect the servants who come on behalf of the owner.
- The parable is about God, creating the world and allowing humanity to care for it as their means of living.
- God has established the world and sent His Son to redeem us from sin and death - this is very important.
- The people will reject Jesus, but His Father will make Him the cornerstone of the Church which will save us.

2. Why is this important for us living in the 21st century?

Possible Answers

- If someone leaves you in charge of their things, you should treat them with respect and not cheat them of any results.
- Jesus explains that those who reject the owner (God) will be punished at the Last Judgment.
- Jesus says that what the world rejects will be chosen by God as the cornerstone of the Church.
- Christ, as the cornerstone of the Church, provides the foundation for all that is good and blessed in our lives
- We can build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ by being faithful to His teachings

A Closer Look

Opening Review:

The Church was established by God, as the means of gathering for worshiping and praising God in worship, and sharing in the common mission and labors of those who identify as Christ's followers.

As we come in union with God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, the testimony of the Apostles (recorded in scripture and the oral traditions of the Church), the lives of the Virgin Mary and the Saints, and our liturgical life (both at church and at home), we continue the historical mission and life of the Church.

What Does This Mean for Us?

In today's Gospel lesson, Christ talks about an owner of a vineyard who leases his property to people who will plant, care for, and harvest the fruit. The process of growing and harvesting grapes takes many months over the course of many years, and is another parable shared by Christ which teaches us through the lens of the agricultural traditions of the Middle East (think of the parables of the landowner who plants a hedge, the Prodigal Son, etc.)

Once the work has been completed, and it's the appointed time to receive the fruits (and wine) from the servants, the owners asks for the results of their work. They refuse.

And they refuse violently. They beat and kill the servants he sends, even his son.

The vineyard is the community of the people who believe in God. When Christ told the parable, it seems plausible that it was implying those who lived before Him – the ancient nation of Israel, but the Church teaches Jesus is talking about the community of believers to whom He has revealed Himself: including us!

God provided everything needed for His followers (both in the Old Testament, and in the Church) to believe, act, and worship according to His commands.

Ask the students, *"In the parable, what things are needed for a vineyard to succeed?"*

- Hedge to keep out the animals and trespassers
- Fertilizer to help the plants grow
- Specialists to train and lead the workers
- Tools to trim and nurture the plants
- Wine press to make the wine
- Barrels, clay pots, and bottles to store the wine

Ask the students, *"If this parable is describing the community of believers, God's people, can you think of things within the Church which relate to the items you named for a vineyard? What tools and gifts of the Spirit help us understand and live the teachings of the Church? What helps us identify and avoid heresies and wrong teachings? What liturgical items do we bring with us everywhere? Or at home? Whose lives can we emulate?"*

- Scripture
- Traditions
- Lives of the Saints
- Liturgical Services and Sacraments

- Prayer and Fasting
- Repentance
- Acts of Charity and Mercy
- Icons, Liturgical Music, and Church Architecture

As the landowner, God provides what we need to live godly lives, making it possible for us to be wise in our decisions. When God asks us to give back to Him for the fruits of our labors, we offer donations to the Church, supporting its mission and efforts in spreading the Gospel message.

In the parable, we hear that God the Father sent the prophets and messengers followed ultimately by His Son, Jesus Christ. The workers rejected and killed them all. (This represents the many prophets of the Old Testament who were killed).

When Jesus told this parable, they responded that the owner should punish these wicked servants for rejecting his wishes and expectations. By saying this, they condemn their own ancestors for their bad behavior and foretell the founding of the New/Renewed Israel: the Orthodox Faith and Christianity.

We must watch our own behavior, because we are called to be servants of God, thereby doing what is expected of us (see the list above), and bringing our fruits to God (at the Last Judgment).

The message of this Gospel tells us the laborers didn't do what God intended. Whether they grew the biggest crop or got no wine, the servants rejected God's plan and refused to deliver what He wanted, expected, and deserved as God.

The circumstances of our individual lives are unique for each of us, yet the mercy of God is shown to each of us, enabling us to attain the same goal to the best of our abilities, if we make a conscious effort to do our best willingly and with love.

Wrap-up

Our Orthodox Faith is established on the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. He is our cornerstone, showing us the ultimate message of love in His life of miracles and teachings, His voluntary death on the cross, and His life-giving Resurrection.

Being His servant in His vineyard means we have a solid foundation of tools, resources, skills, and knowledge to live according to the Orthodox Faith.

In today's world, we face subtle and direct challenges to what we believe and how we believe in God. Society is inclined to reject Christ and the Church. But unless we leave the world to live in a monastery, we still need to "be in the world," going to school, activities, the store, and probably wanting to spend time with our family and friends.

How we choose to act in each situation helps us draw closer to God. It means asking God for the strength and wisdom to choose the right thoughts, and actions and words to be Christ's followers in our lives, all for the opportunity to be with God in Heaven.

Discussion Questions

Choose from these possible questions to explore today's reading.

Question #1a: Who was the audience of the parable?

Possible Answers:

- Christ is speaking to the Jews of His time
- Christ is also speaking to His followers (both those present during His earthly ministry and us today, as members of the Church)
- Those who want to follow God

Question #2a: What does the landowner (i.e., God) get in exchange for His leasing of the vineyard (our lives in this world)?

Possible Answers:

- The fruit of our Christian labor
- True worship and gratitude
- Loving obedience
- Faith and good works

Question #2b: Think about what types of fruit we currently produce - would God find them acceptable? Why or why not?

Possible answers will vary by student/child, but it's important to encourage them to seriously think about their lives and how they live.

Question #3: What is Jesus teaching in this parable?

Possible Answers:

- He is foretelling that He will be killed by those to whom His Chosen People/Holy Nation Israel (the Jews, Exodus 19:6) were entrusted, just as the Prophets were
- Through the mouths of His Jewish audience, He would give the lease (covenant) to a new (or renewed) Chosen People/Holy Nation Israel – Christians (1 Peter 2:9)
- Christ is the stone the builders (Jewish leaders) rejected; yet God the Father wondrously established as the foundation of everything.

Question #4: Why is membership in the Church important?

Possible Answers:

- Christ established the Church
- The Church teaches what God expects of us.
- There are a lot of teachings being said "in the Name of Jesus," but we need to listen and discern which ones adhere to the teachings found in Scripture as explained and taught by the early Church.
- God doesn't contradict Himself, and the teachings of the Church align with God's message.
- To be part of God's family, we must freely choose to be part of the community of believers: the Church.

Question #5: What are your fruits of offering to God?

Possible Answers:

- Mercy and Compassion
- Asking forgiveness and forgiving others
- Giving a portion of our income to those in need
- Helping others with acts of mercy
- Praying to God and the saints (for their intercessions for others) on a daily basis
- Visiting the sick and the imprisoned
- Seeing God in those around us (whether they like us or not)
- Actively participating in divine services on Sunday and feast days

On The Web

Learn more about this week's reading:

His Return on Investment (20:08 min)
<https://youtu.be/exAGdmXJCBw>

Christ as the Cornerstone

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/content/good-marriage-xxiv-trust-cornerstone-godly-marriage>

Jesus is the Rock

<http://www.stgeorgegoc.org/pastors-corner/fr-ricks-sermons/jesus-is-the-rockcornerstone>

Virtues

<https://orthodoxwiki.org/Virtues>

Read more about the Ever-memorable Archimandrite Vasily (Philippov) of St. Tikhon's Monastery

<http://orthochristian.com/91949.html>

