



Today is 13th Gospel  
Reading of St. Matthew

# 13th Sunday of Matthew

Study Guide - Level 4 (Grades 9–12 / Ages 14–18)

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](mailto: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.

At times, we may feel awkward or different from others because our Orthodox Faith is so radically different from what others do in society. Yet God's plan of Salvation will provide for our every need, so we can grow closer to Him and those around us, sharing His love so that we can transform the world into Paradise.

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 in the liturgy to worship Him as our Savior and the Son of God. When we receive the Eucharist, we are part of the Body of Christ, called to be active members of our Lord to bear witness to Him 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
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2. Why is this important for us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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
- As members of the Church, we have the saints who came before as examples of how to live
- Following Christ allows us to remain close to God the Father

## 🔍 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.

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.

We know Christ is speaking about the Jewish religious leaders of His day, but does His critique only apply to them? If Christ is the Cornerstone of the Church, are our bishops and priests able to do whatever they want?

The answer is no, of course not. There have been moments in our Church's history where our own leaders have not given God the fruits in their seasons, even persecuting (or condoning the persecution of the faithful by civil authorities) of those who preach what Christ taught. Some examples of those who suffered for the Faith, as a result of wrong decisions within the Church, include: St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Mark of Ephesus, St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, St. Symeon the New Theologian.

### What Does This Mean for Us?

It's not just our leaders who are obligated to bear fruit for Christ. Each of us, as members of Christ's Body (the Church), are called to help the Church grow and thrive.

In this way, today's Epistle gives an example of how St. Paul encouraged the members of the early Church to remain faithful in their labors. It might seem like he is trying to "pump up" the faithful like a coach on game day. That's how he begins this Epistle.

The reading includes greetings from other Christian communities - again boosting morale, (remember, take heart, there are others out who also are committed Christians....), there who care like Stephanas, the first convert of Achaia/northern Peloponnese in Greece.

In regard to "ministry to the saints," it is important to remember that the Church is full of sinners called to be saints. St. Paul and the other Epistle writers call the people saints as a means of encouragement (again, like a coach calling their players 'champions' during the season), not because they are already saints.

### In this Parable

The story centers around process of growing and harvesting grapes which takes many months over the course of many years. It 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!

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.

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 on page 4), 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.

We might get disheartened or feeling alone, but God is always with us, especially in those moments where we have to decide what to do. That's what prayer is for - we will face choices when making difficult decisions.

God won't come to us in a magic message or dream. It may be in a quiet, or subtle moment after fervent prayer. As the cornerstone of our lives, Christ can be the foundation for our relationship with God the Father.

We will need confidence and humility to hear God's voice in our lives. Like the servants, we need to remember that what God intends for us may not agree with our expectations or desires.

That means, in order to hear God and what He expects, we have to keep our will from consuming or drowning out our ability to hear and see God in our lives. Prayer is our opportunity to express our love and devotion to Him, while having the faith and willingness to also ask what we need for our salvation.

### Wrap-up

Being able to accept what we receive, and being grateful, especially if it's not what we expected or think we need is a sign our faith in God is maturing. 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.

Our Orthodox Faith gives us the solid foundation of tools, resources, skills, and knowledge to live in the world and yet not be of the world. It's about how we use those tools, acting in ways to bring us closer to God in this life so we can live humbly with faith in God's strength and love.

## 💡 Discussion Questions

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

**Question #1a:** 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 the season
- True worship
- Loving obedience
- Faith and good works

**Question #1b:** 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 #2:** Why does St. Paul put so much time into "pumping up" his audience?

**Possible Answers:**

- His greatest fear is that, like the seeds that fall on stony places or among weeds (Matthew 13:20-22), his audience will either lose their enthusiasm, or be overtaken by cares of this world.
- The early Church expected the Second Coming of Christ at any time, so there was a great urgency.... As years became decades, centuries, and now millenia, we've lost that sense of immediacy. But Christ can still return at any moment.

**Question #3:** Discuss "ministry to the saints" based on these readings.

- 1 Corinthians 1:2
- 1 Peter 1:15-16, Leviticus 19:2
- Ephesians 2:18-20
- Ephesians 4:11-12
- Revelation 8:4

**Follow-up to Question #3:** How do these texts remind you of the divine liturgy?

**Question #4:** 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 (Exodus 19:6) were entrusted, just like the Prophets

- 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 #5:** As the people of God, we are called freely to be part of God's family – the Church. In return, we offer back to Him our efforts. But what are our fruits?

**Possible Answers:**

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

**Question #7:** Why is membership in the Church important?

**Possible Answers:**

- Christ established the Church
- The teachings of the Church align with God's message
- To be followers of God, we can't just believe whatever we want, that makes us "God," deciding what is right or wrong
- Recognizing the presence of God in our lives means accepting the role of the Church as our spiritual hospital
- The devil will do whatever he can, trying to separate us from the presence and love of God. Being in the Church will not prevent him from trying (it may even seem harder at times), but being part of the community of believers provides us with a support network and fellow travelers on the journey to Salvation in Jesus Christ.

## 🖥️ 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>

