



Today is 13th Gospel  
Reading of St. Matthew

# 13th Sunday of Matthew

Study Guide - Level 2 (Grades 3–5 / Ages 8–10)

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 that God loves His people, and sends people to guide them. Sometimes people don't want to listen, which is sad, because they miss out on the wonderful things which God has planned for them.

If we listen to God, like we listen to our parents, we can be part of His family. Jesus died on the cross, making it possible for us to always be with God, at home, church, school, and every day of our life. All we need to do, is love God back.

God is very important to follow and believe in.

## 📖 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 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.

## 🔍 A Closer Look

### Opening Review:

Jesus Christ established the Church as the community of believers who follow His teachings and commandments.

As His followers, we worship and praise Jesus the way He wants - because He's God and He makes the rules. We also are called to read the bible, come to liturgy, receive the Eucharist, pray, fast, and help those less fortunate.

As we do God's commandments, we grow closer to Him and to those around us - because we share the bond (connection) of love, just as love is an expression of God towards all of creation.

### What Does This Mean for Us?

In today's Gospel lesson, Christ talks about an owner of a vineyard who hires people to work for him, caring for the grapes. 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 is finished, the Owner comes to collect what is rightfully his. The servants refuse, and they're mean to the people who follow and work for the owner.

Ask the students, "Who's son was killed by His own people?" (answer: Jesus)

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!

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, "What are the things God provides for us as the community of believers?"

- Scripture (the old and new testaments)
- Lives of the Saints
- Liturgical Services and Sacraments
- Prayer and Fasting
- Repentance
- Acts of Charity and Mercy

God provided everything needed for His followers (us) to believe and follow Him. He wants us to act in a particular way (with love, compassion, and forgiveness), and worship Him in a particular way (the liturgy, the fasting, prayers, Eucharist, etc.)

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.

For this, they were condemned and cast out. In our life, we have choices to make - do we want to go to soccer practice on Sunday morning or attend liturgy? Do we want to be kind to people or be argumentative and gossip behind their back? Are we going to help those in need or be greedy wanting more things for ourselves?

As the people of God, we are called freely to be part of God's family and community of believers – the Church. In return, we offer back to Him a portion of our efforts. But what are our fruits?

- **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 on a daily basis
- Asking the saints for **their intercessions** for others
- Visiting the **sick and the imprisoned**
- **Seeing God in those around us** (whether they like us or not)
- **Going to Church** for services on Sunday and feast days
- **Receiving the Eucharist**
- **Being the Body of Christ**

Each of us is unique, yet we all have the same commandments and teachings from God - to be loving, faithful, worshiping, grateful Orthodox Christians, doing our best to be like Jesus.

### Wrap-up

Jesus loves us, and provides for what we need to be His followers - He doesn't ask us to do anything unrealistic, and we have the examples of the saints to inspire us that it's possible to follow Jesus as He commands.

Our Orthodox Faith is full of wonderful people who want to grow closer to Jesus. 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 do what we can to use His tools, resources, skills, and knowledge to live according to the Orthodox Faith.

We can help our friends, be nice to our siblings, or do what our parents ask (without complaining or dragging our feet). Virtues are the expressions of our life in Christ, in different forms, reflecting our love of God and neighbor.

Our behavior and actions now, will shape how we live in our 20s, 30s, and beyond.

## 💡 Discussion Questions

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

### Question #1:

*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 the season
- True worship
- 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.

## 💻 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>

## 📄 Handout Activities

Read through the *One Brick at a Time* activity, discussing with the students what Christian virtues are, and how they can be found in our daily lives. Help the children write words into the bricks, identifying ways each of us can be God-like in our lives. We don't have to do all of the virtues, or even one a day (well, maybe prayer - that *should* be done every day!), to be good Orthodox Christians.

The idea is to do what is right, making us feel closer to God. God will always love us, no matter what we do, but our journey to God will be better if we live as God expects us. He will see we love Him, wanting to be with Him, and being a positive person in the lives of others.

We can help our friends, be nice to our siblings, or do what our parents ask (without complaining or dragging our feet). Virtues are the expressions of our life in Christ, in different forms, reflecting our love of God and neighbor.

This concept may be met with reservation or lack of concern since most youth think of death as something which won't happen for years, if not decades. But our behavior and actions now, will shape how we live in our 20s, 30s, and beyond. This topic will be addressed throughout the course of the school year.

