

Matthew 21:45

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

Analysis

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them (καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ ἐγνωσαν ὅτι περὶ αὐτῶν λέγει)—The verb γινώσκω (ginōskō, 'to know, to perceive, to recognize') shows they correctly understood Jesus's meaning. The parable of two sons (21:28-32), the wicked tenants (21:33-44), and later the wedding feast (22:1-14) all condemned religious leaders' rejection of God's messengers. Their perception shows intellectual understanding without spiritual transformation—knowing truth and rejecting it is worse than ignorance (James 4:17; 2 Peter 2:21).

The phrase περὶ αὐτῶν ('concerning them, about them') indicates personal application. Unlike the crowds who missed the point, the leaders saw themselves in the wicked tenants who killed the son to seize the inheritance. Yet this knowledge didn't produce repentance, only rage. Jesus's parables function as judgment oracles against those who hear but refuse to heed (13:13-15). Understanding without obedience hardens the heart.

Historical Context

The chief priests (ἀρχιερεῖς) included the high priest, former high priests, and leading priestly families—Sadducees who controlled temple operations and collaborated with Rome. The Pharisees (Φαρισαῖοι) were influential lay teachers emphasizing oral law and tradition. These two groups rarely agreed (Acts 23:6-9),

but both opposed Jesus, uniting against common threat to their authority. Their theological enemies became allies against God's Anointed (Psalm 2:1-2).

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does intellectual understanding of Scripture without heart transformation lead to greater condemnation?
2. When have you correctly understood God's Word as addressing you but responded with defensiveness rather than repentance?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἀκούσαντες	οἱ	ἀρχιερεῖς	καὶ	οἱ	Φαρισαῖοι
And	had heard	G3588	when the chief priests	And	G3588	Pharisees
G2532	G191		G749	G2532		G5330

τὰς	παραβολὰς	αὐτῶν	ἔγνωσαν	ὅτι	περὶ	αὐτῶν	λέγει·
G3588	his parables	them	they perceived	that	of	them	he spoke
	G3850	G846	G1097	G3754	G4012	G846	G3004

Additional Cross-References

Luke 20:19 (Parallel theme): And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.

Luke 11:45 (Parallel theme): Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.

