Matt. 21:43 - Therefore say I unto you: The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

This is a terrible word—a word of solemn and significant judgment. One could almost say: harsh, merciless judgment if one listens superficially. In how is it possible that this Jesus, whom we have come to know as the loving and forgiving One, could be so heartless and callous as to indicate that this most precious property, the kingdom of God belonging to Israel for so many ages, would be taken away from them? Had it not become theirs by a promise of God—so specific and so secure that there was not the least possibility of losing it? Was this people of the Old Covenant not the elect of every nation chosen by God as a home of his special love and care to them? (First question)

What of Israel and its house completely and very conveniently forget—and what we as the new Israel, the people of God of the new covenant, many times also forget—is that the kingdom of God was a gift—a very special and wondrous gift of God to his people and to the world. It was not theirs, and it cannot be by right or under no church and no Christian has a legal claim to it. That is why Christ uses the words take and give in our text: a clear proof that Israel had no right to view the kingdom of God as legitimate to church property which they could
dispose of and deal with according to their own will and inclination. Do we realize this well enough? That the Kingdom of God is God's most wonderful gift offered us in and through his Son and that we cannot deal with it according to our own fickle nature and wishes?

To we must ask another question - of great importance to the life of the church and the Christian: Is it possible to lose this gift? How does one lose this gift? How did Israel lose it? Surely such a valuable possession is worth retaining as long as possible! Nobody would like to lose it through ignorance or neglect. Christ gives the answer when he says: "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This was the crucial test: does the life and love of the nation who has been entrusted with God's Kingdom prove that it has understood the nature of this Kingdom, has yielded to it, has voluntarily submitted itself to its spirit, its laws, its aims? If so, the lives of these people, the citizens of this Kingdom, will prove it: their actions will have a quality, a depth, a beauty which will be clearly evident for anyone who wishes to see.

But these fruits do not grow automatically; they must be cultivated by diligent labour, of the weight of Christ's mind, of prayer, of sacrifice. In fact, the final test, apart from whether you are part of his Kingdom in your personal relation to Christ himself, lies in the answer to this question: Do you find Christ a stumbling block in your life or a corner stone? The神色 of the
The writer refers to the practice of those times when a big stone was used (either as a corner stone or as a crowning stone above the main entrance). The writer builds there was real danger that you may stumble across it and fall or that it may fall down from its lofty height and just crush to pieces anyone foolish enough to pit his strength against it.

Yes, says Christ in effect: this is the test for entering God's Kingdom: Where do I put into your life, the life of your church, your community, your nation? Am I the key, the cornerstone to your existence or just an afterthought, an appendix? These many people have hesitated.

The right rejected Christ but by trying to evade the issues which he brought in their way, have stumbled over the cornerstone and fell—perhaps confusing this obstacle lying in their way:

- What does Christ mean to you? Is He your fear in attitude, in human relations, in church policy, in social witness, in judgments on right and wrong? Is it Christ only, or Christ and, or, none of Christ?

We must ask a third question: Does it affect a whole nation if its spiritual leaders alone become involved in a controversy with Christ? Christ's side—by the spiritual leaders, the clergy, and seemingly the people were just passive participants.

This may be our view, but it is not Christ's view. He is on His way to the Cross, and this parable in Matt. 21 and especially our text holds in the solemn announcement that the Kingdom will be taken away from the nation as such: preaching priests and people.
The future destiny of the whole nation depends primarily on the attitudes and actions of the spiritual leaders—the preachers, the prophets, the priests. What a serious moral obligation this holds in for both past and present leaders, to maintain unity, balance, and purity, to proclaim Christ in all his fulness and Christ alone!

But this does not exonerate or exempt the people of God, the members of the church, from their moral responsibility to be true in spirit and word and deed to their Christ-like faith and witness. What it may be that we are called to the ministry of the Word and sacrament or of discipleship, we all share in the responsibility—and we all pay the price of disloyalty, dishonesty, distrust. It was because of such indifference, such apathy, such futile blindness and callousness of heart that the solemn prophecy of Christ became reality: the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you!

But, please note, this is not the last word—God's last word to man is always an offer: It shall be given! God did not withdraw his Kingdom from earth; he entrusted it to us, his people of the new covenant, his elect of every nation, to become his holy bride, the who knows him and loves him, we are the partakers in his Kingdom—a Kingdom of truth and love and purity and humility and sacrifice! Do we realize this, and do our lives prove it? Does it become so horrible that people outside the Kingdom, while watching us are caught up in this evergrowing longing to become part of the Kingdom of Christ?

—Suffering