

Title: The Cornerstone
Text: Luke 20.9-19
Theme: Rejecting Christ never ends well
Series: Luke
Aim: I aim to convince my audience that relinquishing all sense of entitlement and ownership to God is right and wise.

Read Text:

My dentist is a believer and we talk way more about the Lord, the church and our families than we do my teeth. Our conversations are always in the presence of others, so we often get to talk about the gospel and related matters to each other, for the benefit of others. In our text this morning, Jesus tells a parable to the people. While he is talking to them his intended audience is the chief priests, scribes and elders who are plotting to find a way to arrest him and silence him. V.19 says, *“The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.”* Well, they at least got one thing right. Jesus did tell this parable about them, but they were not the only audience, were they?

All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.16-17

This parable is also here for us. The Spirit of God directed Luke to record this event in his account of the life of Christ because it is profitable for us. We need this and we need it not just know that it happened in an information way, but we need to take to heart the warnings and the encouragement. There are several things that we need to know/remember.

1. **The Good Owner.** (9)

“A man planted a vineyard....” This should sound familiar to us.

Genesis 2.8 *“And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden....”*

Isaiah 5 has 30 verses. The prophet wrote this long song about the vineyard of the Lord, which was the nation of Judah. It begins by saying, *“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard....”*

Jesus is using imagery that his Jewish audience would be familiar with not only from their “Bible” but from their culture. Vineyards were a very important part of the life of the people. You may have a garden and around here, we generally wait until around Memorial Day to plant our tomatoes, peppers and beans. Cathi and I have a garden and it generally does decent thanks to her. Thus far the one thing that is growing faster than anything else, by far is the broccoli. It is such a conflict of interest for me when she asks if I will go out and water the garden. I don’t

want to water that stuff. I want that stuff to die. So here I am paying money for the water that I am putting on this stuff that I can't stand and it is outgrowing everything! I realized that this was actually a fulfillment of a promise from God. He told Adam in Genesis 3.17-18, "*cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.*" So, I look at it and think that it sure is doing that. But one of my cherry tomato plants already has little tomatoes on it. That's pretty good, and that is the kind of gardening that we are used to. If you plant corn in May, you get it in August or September. But vineyards? Vineyards are not like that. Vineyards take time, a lot of time.

Before you even plant, you prepare the ground through soil testing, site preparation and building the trellis that will hold the vines. That may take a couple of years. Then you plant the young vines that you purchased and you care for them and cultivate them so they have a chance to establish a strong root system. That takes another year. By year 3 or 4, your vines will start to spread out and you will see a lot of growth of the vines, but the grape harvest will be minimal, if at all. The ones you get will be small and probably sour. It is not until year 5 when you finally get a harvest that has value. This is why one acre of an established vineyard can be worth anywhere from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Farmland in Michigan varies from between \$5k and \$10k because we do corn, soybeans, and beets for sugar. Vineyards are much more valuable.

In this story, the owner of the land is the guy who planted the vineyard. The owner is the farmer. The owner is not in his counting house counting all his money, he is in the field getting dirt under his nails, measuring out the rows, planting the vines, trimming, weeding, watering, dealing with disease and infestations and all the things that plague people who try to grow stuff. This is his vineyard. It is obvious from v.13, that Jesus is speaking of his Father. So, God is the owner, but he is an owner who is personally invested in his vineyard. It is personal and it is costly. However, after the hardest work has been done and before he gets to enjoy the fruit of his efforts, he goes into another country for a long while. What is he going to do with the vineyard? He let it out to tenants (v.9b)

2. The Inexplicable Tenants. (10-15)

A tenant is one who has been loaned something to use, but it is not theirs to keep. The tenant can only use what is loaned to them in agreement with the terms of the deal. The tenant has been entrusted with oversight but not ownership. The people that Jesus told this story to, understood him. Some of them, perhaps many of them were tenants. To this day, Israel, tiny little Israel produces 135,000,000 to 150,000,000 pounds of grapes a year. It is an important part of their economy. They knew vineyards. They knew owners. They knew tenants. They knew how these arrangements worked. It was common for an owner to split the income from the vineyard 50/50 with the tenant. So far, there is nothing unusual about what Jesus is describing. But what he says next is shocking. It is shocking because it makes absolutely no sense.

The owner sends a servant to the tenants in order to get his share of the returns. Instead of giving him his share, they beat the servant and send him away empty handed. Wait. What? They did what? They beat the servant and sent him away empty handed! Our heads are

spinning as we try to figure out any logical explanation for this. Was this a case of mistaken identity? Did they fail to understand who the servant really was? Did they think he was trying to cheat them? Did they think the owner was somehow unreasonable? Had they already sold the grapes and spent all the money? Maybe they were so irresponsible that they didn't take care of the vineyard and there wasn't much of a harvest at all. Jesus does not elaborate.

We can only assume that the owner is going to come back with the police, but no, he sends another servant and they beat him and shame him. In beating him and shaming him they are giving a big middle finger to the owner. That's it! We brace ourselves for what is going to happen to these insolent fools, only for Jesus to say that the owner, instead sends a third servant. It's not just the tenants that are inexplicable, but the patience of this owner is truly astounding. How many of us have ever met someone so patient? The response to the second servant was more severe, and now the response to the third servant is even more severe. The first one they beat. The second one they beat up and humiliated.

Many of us in the west do not understand the offense of shame and dishonor that is felt in middle eastern contexts. We see massive protests in streets where people are burning effigies, flags, pictures, taking their shoes off and hitting with them. We tend to shrug our shoulders and wonder why these people aren't at work that day. Don't they have anything better to do? If someone perceives that they, or someone they are connected to in family, community or state has been dishonored, then somehow that honor has to be restored, or that person is less than a man and loses standing. This owner, as good as he is, is being further dishonored and therefore the response of the owner in order to restore his honor has to be even greater. But, instead, he sends a third servant and apparently thinking that since they've gotten away with their game so far, they keep it up, only this time, they wound the guy. The beating is even more severe. The first two servants are described as being sent away. The third one is described as being wounded and cast out. The insolence of the tenants is emboldened. They've gotten away with it so far, why not keep it up? Besides, they now look to be the one calling the shots.

And yet, the owner demonstrates a patience that is beyond anything we can relate to. He considers what his response should be. *"What shall I do?"* What is the best course of action? *"I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him."* Have you ever watched a movie or were reading a book when the hero was about to step into a trap? You want to yell, "NO! Don't do it!" This is his son. This is his beloved Son! It is his only Son, his only heir. We don't want to hear what is going to happen next, because we fear that we know. The owner thinks that perhaps sending his Son will cause them to realize that he is not going to give up his vineyard. Surely they would respect the Son! There is no other person the owner could send who is more important and more personal than his Son. But when they see the Son approaching their conversations confirm our fears. (v.14) *"This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours."* Does that make any sense? In what world does that happen, that if tenants murder the son of the owner that the tenants get the rights to the owner's property? No world! This is absolutely absurd. These guys have brain damage if they think that this is remotely reasonable. This time, they throw him out of the vineyard and then they kill him.

The offense of the personal insult, the injustice and the deep loss to the owner is hard to put into words. Matthew records this event as well. The people are enraged because when Jesus asks, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?" They answer that these tenants will get the death penalty. Here in Luke, Jesus affirms their response and says, "*He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.*"

If you are one of the leaders plotting in secret to get rid of Jesus and he just tells everyone what your plan is, wouldn't that freak you out, just a little bit? And, if he knows what your plan is and he tells everyone meaning, he knows way more than you think he does, then wouldn't it make sense that you listen to this warning about what is going to happen to the tenants? You would think. But sin is so delusional and pride is unbelievably stubborn and irrational.

Something happens right here that we need to see. The people are engaged with this account. They are angered by the injustice and they know that Jesus is telling this story for a reason. There is no doubt (v.19) that the scribes and chief priests weren't the only ones who figured out that this story was told in order to expose the leadership, but now, the consequences are about to become personal. Jesus just underscored the point that the vineyard, the nation, is in danger of being destroyed and being given to someone else. Who are the tenants? Obviously, the chief priests and scribes. But they fear the people and their fear of the people keeps them from doing what they want to do. So, at this moment it is the people who have the power. The people are protecting Jesus, so far. But something happens and by Friday morning, the people change their tune and they throw their support behind the Sanhedrin and call for the death of Christ and in so doing they condemn themselves with their own words. When the people change sides, they become the tenants.

Notice the detail in v.15. The Son is thrown out of the vineyard and then killed. That is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was crucified outside of the city. Like the unclean lepers he was removed from the city. Hebrews 13.12 says, "*So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.*" This text in Hebrews underscores the point that by casting the Son out of the vineyard and then killing him, they were seeking to shame, humiliate, and disrespect him as much as they could before killing him. It wasn't just about getting rid of Christ, it was about shaming him so much in public that no one would dare want to be associated with him ever again.

So, yes, Jesus told this parable to the people knowing that the leaders would hear it, but he also tells it to the people because they need to hear it. They are going to be faced with a very important decision in a few days. Humanly speaking the fate of Jesus will rest in their hands. Pilate did agree to the demands of the leaders to crucify Christ until the crowd demanded it. How you view and treat Jesus is how you view and treat God. Therefore, the consequences of rejecting Jesus are massive.

3. **The consequences of rejection** (16)

Who were the servants who came before the Son? These were the prophets whom the nation rejected and, in some cases, killed. What happened to the nation after rejecting the ministry of Isaiah and Jeremiah and trying to send them away? They lost their land. They went into exile. What are they going to do to Jesus? They are going to send him out of the camp. They are going to send him into "exile." And in so doing, they end up losing the Temple and the land and it is given over to someone else, just like Jesus said. The tenants were destroyed. The land was given to others.

The judgment is real. The tenants faced both consequences on earth and worse, eternal judgment for their rejection of Christ. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the rejection of Christ because Christ is the only means by which our sin can be forgiven. And the loss was real. The land was given to others and at this very hour there is ongoing fighting over the land because it was taken by others for about 1900 years. But losing the land here, is a picture of being exiled from the eternal kingdom of Christ. There is no greater loss than the loss that comes from rejecting Christ. I cannot say this strong enough.

Going into a final exam unprepared is foolish and will have consequences. Going into trial before a judge without preparation is foolish and will have consequences. Going into a game, a competition without preparation is foolish and will have consequences. Presuming to give a speech, teach a lesson, make a presentation, perform a musical piece without preparation will have consequences, many of them embarrassingly so. Failing to take your diet seriously, your health seriously, your finances seriously is all foolish and will have consequences. But there is no greater loss, no greater consequence that will ever come than from rejecting Christ. Sadly, most people will. However,

4. **Rejection does not win.** (17-18)

This is the third time that Luke appeals to Psalm 118. The Cornerstone is a foundation stone that bears the weight of two intersecting walls. Without it, the building falls in. In constructing the building, the masons discarded this stone as being worthless only to discover that what they rejected ended up being the most important stone in the building. This is the text that helped name our church. Jesus is the Cornerstone. He is the one that the world looked at and rejected. They discarded him as not being what they wanted only to discover that he actually holds everything together. But this stone has a dual purpose. It will hold up those who stand on him, and crush and break those who try to stand over him.

Never mistake the patience of God for the apathy of God. God is amazingly patient, but he is fully aware, informed and will respond. If you are an unbeliever, and you still have a measure of concern in your soul about spiritual matters, you need to act on that and come to faith in Christ. These tenants did not start out with murdering the Son. They started out with a much more minor offense, but their sin took them into a hole from which they could not recover. Do not presume that you can trust Christ tomorrow. There may come a time when you stop caring about God at all and when that happens, there is no limit to what you are capable of doing.

If you are a believer, and you witness the tremendous amount of injustice in this world, it is so easy to want to give up or give in. Does God care about the evil in this world? Does God care about sin and how people flaunt their wicked deeds? Will evil actually win?

Kathryn was a doctor who left her practice in order to be home to raise her children. However, when the local hospitals were overrun with COVID back in 2020, she returned to help, but her children were afraid that she would get sick and die. In the midst of it, her son said, *“Why would God let this happen? I’m not sure God is even real.”*

¹Kathryn helped him work through this with God’s Word and he was doing better with it. One night before she tucked him into bed, and just before she was going to leave for a night shift, she snuggled with him on the couch to continue reading Tolkein’s *The Return of the King* in the *Lord of the Ring* series. The armies of the evil Lord Sauron had laid siege to Minas Tirith, and there seemed to be no hope for rescue. Gloom and despair had descended upon the castle city and all that was left was to be killed by the invaders. Just when all hope was gone in the city, the riders of Rohan swept over the hills and in that moment, the entire story changed. With their arrival, the very air changes around them (as only Tolkein can put it) “for morning came, morning and a wind from the sea; and darkness was removed.” Kathryn said, “As I read, my son’s eyes misted with tears. He asked, “Can you read those beautiful words again?” She did. And she talked about how we have assurance of the morning too. There are days when it appears that the tenants are getting away with murder. But the plans of the evil ones are known and rejection will not win. Dawn will come. And with the morning a wind from the sea, and darkness will be gone. The Cornerstone will not be moved. Jesus will make all things new.

¹ From Kathryn Butler, TGC article, June 1, 2026 *How Middle-Earth Pointed My Kids to Heaven: Six Gospel Themes in ‘The Hobbit’ and ‘The Lord of the Rings’*